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DPhil Thesis

**God's Non-Capricious No: Karl Barth's "Purified Infralapsarianism" in
Development 1920-1953**

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Abstract (Shorter)

Title: God's Non-Capricious No: Karl Barth's "Purified Infralapsarianism" in Development 1920-1953

This dissertation comprises three parts, setting forth the thesis that Karl Barth's mature doctrine of election, though avowedly supralapsarian, is in fact basically the opposite. I trace the development of Barth's lapsarian thinking from its inception in 1920 (*Romans II*) to its maturation in 1936-42 (*Gottes Gnadenwahl* to *CD II/2*), and further developments up to 1953 (*CD IV/1*). The thesis of my dissertation comprises two aspects, one concerning *what* lapsarian position, Christological and predestinarian, underlies the Christocentric doctrine of election Barth developed in 1936-42, and the other concerning *how* he came to develop this lapsarian view. Part I examines the lapsarian position of Barth's mature doctrine of election set forth in *CD II/2* against the background of the Lapsarian Controversy in seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy, arguing that he has misunderstood some seventeenth-century terms and that his position is in fact basically in line with infralapsarianism in that for him both election and the incarnation presuppose humankind's fallenness. Part II traces the development of Barth's lapsarian position from its inception in 1920 to its Christological reorientation in 1936-42. In a nutshell, my thesis in Part II is that Christology and predestination started out as two loosely related doctrines in Barth's theology, but as predestination, which was inconsistently supralapsarian during the first phase of the development, was drawn closer to Christology, which carried infralapsarian tendencies at first and became infralapsarian in the 1920s, Barth's doctrine of predestination became more and more infralapsarian, and then in 1936-42 the two doctrines merged and became inseparable, and he became basically infralapsarian in both Christology and predestination. Part III comprises two chapters exploring doctrinal implications and further developments of Barth's Christological-predestinarian infralapsarianism up to 1953 (*CD IV/1*). I argue that in developing what I suggest we call his "purified infralapsarianism" in a deeply historical-actualistic direction, the basically infralapsarian character of Barth's understanding of election in Christ becomes more radical in that he leaves no room for the possibility of *homo nondum lapsus* as the *obiectum praedestinationis*.

Abstract (Longer)

Title: God's Non-Capricious No: Karl Barth's "Purified Infralapsarianism" in Development 1920-1953

This dissertation comprises three parts, setting forth the thesis that Karl Barth's mature doctrine of election, though avowedly supralapsarian, is in fact basically the opposite. As a note of explanation, the Lapsarian Controversy arose in late sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy, and it is in this historical-theological context that Barth formulated his own lapsarian positions through successive stages of his development. Supralapsarianism (*supra-lapsum*: before the fall) is the position that in the eternal act of predestination, God has in mind unfallen humanity as the object of election and reprobation. By contrast, infralapsarianism (*infra-lapsum*: after the fall) states that in eternal predestination, the object of election and reprobation is God's eternal conception of fallen humanity.

When applied to Christology, supralapsarianism means that God *would have* become incarnate regardless of humanity's fall. Supralapsarian Christology acknowledges that the incarnation *de facto* takes care of the problem of sin, but claims that God had deeper motives behind the incarnation than confrontation with sin. In comparison, infralapsarian Christology contends that the primary purpose of the incarnation is to take care of the problem of sin. It does not deny that God *could have* become incarnate if humanity had not sinned, but refuses to claim knowledge of any reason why God *would have* done so.

In this dissertation I trace the development of Barth's lapsarian thinking from its inception in 1920 (*Römerbrief II*) to its maturation in 1936-42 (*Gottes Gnadenwahl* and *Church Dogmatics II/2*), and explore the doctrinal implications of what I suggest we call Barth's "purified infralapsarianism" in his later writings.

The aim of Part I is to re-examine the lapsarian position of Barth's mature doctrine of election (*Gottes Gnadenwahl* and *Church Dogmatics II/2*) against the background of the Lapsarian Controversy in seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy. Many have commented that Barth's lapsarian position plays a central role in his mature theology, but curiously the topic of Barth's lapsarian thinking has remained almost untapped in the secondary literature until recently in Edwin van Driel's book, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Meanwhile,

though the importance of Barth's critical reappropriation of Reformed orthodoxy through the works of Heinrich Heppe, Alexander Schweizer, and others during the Göttingen years has been well documented, only very recently have efforts been made specifically to sort out the precise relations between Barth and Reformed orthodoxy.

I will argue that van Driel, having defined supra- and infralapsarianism accurately, offers a reading of Barth that contradicts the mainstream interpretation. On the other hand, I will show that mainstream Barth scholars up to this day have yet to define supra- and infralapsarianism correctly in light of their origin in seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy, and if the mainstream scholarly consensus on Barth's view of Christ's vicarious reprobation is correct, then Barth's mature doctrine of election would in fact be basically infralapsarian.

In this line of argument I have in mind a specific purpose of bridging a gap in on-going dialogues between Evangelicals of confessional Reformed convictions and Barthians, two diverse groups with different loci of theological norms as well as some overlapping theological concerns and convictions. On one hand, Barthian scholars understand that for Barth, the object of election is not the neutral, but the sinful human, but most of them have not been sufficiently well-versed in Reformed orthodoxy to recognise that this is the basic definition of infralapsarianism. On the other hand, many confessional-Reformed Evangelical scholars have written on Barth, and yet they have not yet come to realise that Barth's doctrine of election is actually closer to infralapsarianism as defined in seventeenth-century Reformed-orthodoxy, with which they are familiar. In other words, most Reformed Evangelicals are well-versed in Reformed orthodoxy but do not know Barth well enough, and most Barthians know Barth well but are not sufficiently familiar with Reformed orthodoxy, and as a result both groups have yet to come to realise that Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election is in fact more in line with infra- rather than supralapsarianism. This dissertation aims to bridge this gap for the sake of better mutual understanding in future dialogues between Barthians and confessional-Reformed Evangelicals.

More importantly, when Barth identifies himself as a supralapsarian, he does so in the context of the Lapsarian Controversy of the seventeenth century. Understanding seventeenth-century Reformed-orthodox definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism would thus help us to place Barth in the context of the broader Reformed tradition with which he was deeply yet critically engaged.

Part II of this dissertation traces the development of Barth's lapsarian position from its inception in 1920 to its maturation in 1936-42. In a nutshell, my thesis in tracing the development of Barth's lapsarian thinking is that Christology and predestination started out as two loosely related doctrines in his theology, but as predestination, which was inconsistently supralapsarian during the first phase of the development, was drawn closer to Christology, which carried infralapsarian tendencies at first and became infralapsarian in the 1920s, Barth's doctrine of predestination became more and more infralapsarian, and then in 1936-42 the two doctrines merged and became inseparable, and Barth became basically infralapsarian in both Christology and predestination.

This development up to 1942 may be divided into four major phases:

(1) In *Romans II* (1920-21), Barth's Christology is moving in an infralapsarian direction while his doctrine of election leans toward supralapsarianism, though it already carries infralapsarian elements;

(2) In the Göttingen-Münster Period (1921-30), Barth's Christology becomes consistently infralapsarian, while his doctrine of election begins to move towards infralapsarianism;

(3) In the Bonn years (1930-35) during which *Anselm* and *CD I/1* were written (as well as most of *I/2*, published in 1938), Barth made no substantial revision to his theology (here I am in agreement with Bruce McCormack's insight against the 'von Balthasar thesis' regarding the centrality of *Anselm* in Barth's theological development), but with the *Anselm* book that gave Barth a more complex way of setting forth the concept of revelation, Christology and predestination, both of which were primarily formulated within the category of revelation, became more closely interwoven in *CD I/1*. Meanwhile, in *CD I/1* Barth became more attentive to the presupposition of human sin in the divine act of revelation, which motivated him to adopt a basically infralapsarian position in the Christocentric doctrine of election in the next phase of his development;

(4) In *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (1936) and *CD II/2* (1942), an already infralapsarian Christology from previous phases of Barth's development dictates the basically

infralapsarian character of his Christological revision of the doctrine of election in 1936-42.

This description of the successive phases of Barth's theological development, along with a discussion of doctrinal implications and further developments up to 1953 in Part III (Chapters 8-9), is the primary emphasis of this dissertation.

Part III explores further developments and doctrinal implications of what I suggest we call Barth's "purified infralapsarianism." I have two specific purposes here. First, I intend to show the relevance of Barth's lapsarian position in his theological thought overall: Let us say Barth is basically infralapsarian, so what? I shall try to show that a more accurate understanding of his lapsarian position would shed light on the way he formulates his other doctrines.

Second, I intend to demonstrate that the basically infralapsarian character of Barth's Christological doctrine of election has led to further developments after 1942 in such a way that he would retain his position in 1936-42 while saying new things that are sometimes surprising. Understanding what I suggest we call Barth's "purified infralapsarianism" would help us understand why Barth says those things.

Chapter 8 is on Barth's notion of nothingness (*das Nichtige*) set forth in *CD III/3* (1950). Here Barth shifts his focus to the reality of sin, evil, and death in historical actuality, and in discussing the paradoxical existence of nothingness he consistently presupposes a basically infralapsarian understanding of double predestination in Christ.

Chapter 9 is on *CD IV/1* (1953), a part-volume in which Barth sets forth a Christology that some have labelled as "historicised." I focus on "The Pride and Fall of Man" (§60), where Barth draws from his notion of nothingness in *CD III/3* but develops it in a more historical-actualistic direction, identifying fallen humanity with Adamic history. I argue that Barth's discussion of sin in terms of the *Geschichte* of the "pride and fall" of humankind consistently presupposes an infralapsarian Christology and continually refers to a basically infralapsarian understanding of election in Christ. Towards the end of Chapter 9, I engage with recent Trinity-election debates in Barth studies as they relate to debates on whether and how the Christology of *CD IV/1* should be understood as "historicised." I argue that on both sides of the debate, a coherent interpretation of Barth would demand a basically infralapsarian reading of his Christological doctrine of election.

In the Conclusion, I again set forth the question: "So what?" I use the Dutch

Neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper as an example. It has been well documented in the secondary literature that Kuyper's supralapsarianism goes hand in hand with his political theology, his notions of antithesis and sphere sovereignty, and his particular understanding of common grace. A comparison between Barth and Kuyper sheds light on the connections between what I suggest we call the former's "purified infralapsarianism" and his political theology, as well as his rejection of the traditional Reformed notion of common grace. This is to show that Barth's lapsarian thinking has very practical implications.

Finally, I conclude that Barth's own theological intention in developing a "purified" version of the lapsarian doctrine is clear: he wants to make sure that the electing God of whom his theology speaks is none other than Jesus Christ, the Word of God revealed, and that God's act of double predestination, including reprobation, is not out of the "caprice of a tyrant," but perfectly corresponds to the Being of the God who is always in the free act of love. In Jesus Christ God is immutably God, and Jesus Christ is the unchangeable *decretum absolutum Dei* in whom God's non-capricious No against sin eternally negates the nothingness that threatens God's covenant-partner, so that God's Yes to all in Christ is the final and definitive Word whereby all of history is determined in and by the history of Christ.

Abbreviations

ET: English Translation

Karl Barth's Works:

GA: *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe*, 45 Volumes. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1973-2008

Römerbrief II: *Der Römerbrief 1922*. Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1940.

Romans II: *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1922 Edition. Trans. Edwyn Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

Unterricht: *Unterricht in der Christliche Religion*, 3 Volumes. Eds. Hannelotte Reiffen (Vol. 1) and Hinrich Stoevesandt (Vol. 2-3). Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1985-2003.

GD: *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, Vol. 1. Ed. Hannelotte Reiffen. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

MD (Münster Dogmatics): *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf, 1. Band: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes, Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik, 1927*. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1982.

Anselm: *Fides quaerens intellectum: Anselms Beweis für die Existenz Gottes, 1931*. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1981.

Anselm (ET): *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme*. Trans. Ian Robertson. London: SCM, 1960.

Gottes Gnadenwahl: *Gottes Gnadenwahl*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1936.

KD: *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 12 Part-Volumes (I/1-IV/4). Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980.

CD: *The Church Dogmatics*, 12 Part-Volumes (I/1-IV/4). Eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975.

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Introduction

Narratio

When I was a student at Regent College, Vancouver, I participated in a seminar on the atonement led by prominent scholar of Puritan theology, J. I. Packer. One session was dedicated to the twentieth-century Swiss theologian Karl Barth. During that session, I suggested that in *CD II/2*, election presupposes the fall. To my assertion Professor Packer responded, “If you are right about Barth, then he would have to be an infralapsarian. I’m quite intrigued, because obviously he calls himself a supralapsarian.”

Professor Packer’s comment piqued my interest in Barth’s lapsarian position, and after Regent I continued on to Princeton Theological Seminary where I wrote a Master of Theology thesis on this subject under the supervision of one leading Barth scholar of our day, George Hunsinger. In my thesis I quoted Loraine Boettner’s famous formulation of the lapsarian question: “When the decrees of election and reprobation came into existence were men considered as fallen or as unfallen?”¹

In the margin next to this quote on the printed copy of my submitted thesis, Professor Hunsinger wrote: “Barth would say ‘fallen.’” However, Professor Hunsinger remained convinced that Barth is basically supralapsarian because of the definition he wrote on my submitted thesis: “Strictly, supralapsarians are those who hold that in pre-temporal election God chose to elect some and reject others in order to glorify himself and so created the world to carry out this plan.” I came to realise then that in the circle of Barth studies, supra- and infralapsarianism are defined quite differently than in the circle of Puritan studies (sure enough, definitions are somewhat varied in the field of Puritan studies, but there is at least a minimalist definition to which all in the field would agree).

¹ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (New Jersey: P&R, 1932), 126.

To further demonstrate the case, during my doctoral research, I had a conversation with my friend Mark Jones, brilliant young scholar in Puritan studies. I told him that the majority of mainstream Barth scholars believe that Barth sees the object of election as fallen. “That’s interesting—and they still call Barth a supralapsarian,” responded Jones, speaking in his characteristically calm and unwavering voice, raising his eyebrows as if putting a question mark at the end of the sentence. In fact, whenever I tell friends from Evangelical Reformed circles that Barth sees the object of election as fallen, their responses would almost always be something like: “Then why does Barth call himself a supralapsarian?” or “Doesn’t that make Barth an infralapsarian?”

When I raise these questions among friends from Barthian circles, they would usually respond, “No, Barth is a supralapsarian, because, unlike the infralapsarians, he doesn’t think of election as ‘a reaction to previous events in the history of God’s relations with us.’”² They might say with Barth: “Unlike the infralapsarian, the supralapsarian does not think of ‘God’s overruling of evil... as a *later and additional struggle* in which God is dealing with a *new and to some extent disruptive feature* in His original plan.”³

Yet, a confessional-Reformed Evangelical might reply by quoting Herman Bavinck: “So, ‘was the fall actually a *frustration of God’s plan*? But no Reformed believers, *even if they are infralapsarians*, can or may ever say such a thing.”⁴ She might add: “For supra- and infralapsarians alike, ‘God’s decision to be for us in Jesus is not a reaction to previous events in the history of God’s relations with us, but has a reality in its own right preceding the whole of that history.’”⁵

When I took up this understanding years ago and argued that Barth is an

² See Kathryn Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114.

³ *KD II/2*, 137; ET 128f. Emphases mine.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (ed. J. Bolt, trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 385.

⁵ Contra Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” 114.

infralapsarian by virtue of believing that the object of election is fallen, a then-doctoral-candidate at Princeton Seminary—who agreed with me that for Barth, election presupposes humanity’s fallenness—responded to me in a short email comprising just one German word: “*Nein!*” Evidently, Barth and Barthians define supra- and infralapsarianism quite differently from most confessional-Reformed Evangelicals, especially specialists in Puritan studies.

But why should this matter? Shall those who say “chips” say unto the others, “Thou shalt not say ‘fries’”? Certainly not—as far as deep-fried potatoes are concerned. However, the discrepancy between the two groups of scholars at large with regard to the definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism is in fact of a different nature. For one thing, it shows that Evangelical critics of Barth who are familiar with the Lapsarian Controversy have not understood his doctrine of election, which many consider to be the heart of his theology, accurately enough to recognise that he is actually not a supralapsarian according to the way they understand the word. Conversely, Barth and Barthians have not sufficiently understood Reformed-orthodox formulations of the doctrine of predestination to disagree with them with complete accuracy. Sorting out the terminology is unlikely to bring Barthians and Evangelicals to a complete doctrinal agreement, but I believe that it would at least be helpful for on-going dialogues between these two diverse groups of scholars who have different loci of theological norms as well as some overlapping theological concerns and convictions.

More importantly, when Barth identifies himself as a supralapsarian, he does so in the context of the Lapsarian Controversy of the seventeenth century. Understanding seventeenth-century Reformed-orthodox definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism would thus help us to place Barth in the context of the broader Reformed tradition with which he was deeply yet critically engaged. As John Webster, one of the most respected Barth

scholars of our day, puts it, Barth's engagement with historic Reformed theology was "deeply formative of the direction of his theological thinking."⁶

Professor Webster laments that "one of the graver weaknesses of some contemporary Christian theology is catechetical: it has simply not learned the traditions of Christianity deeply enough and lovingly enough to be able to move around within them, restate them or even disagree with them with much accuracy."⁷ Heeding Professor Webster's call to scholarly reappraisal of Barth's theological development in light of his critical reappropriation of historic Reformed theology, I believe that sorting out Barth's lapsarian position in the context of the broader Reformed tradition would be a worthwhile and fruitful endeavour in many ways: it not only helps us to gain more insight into Barth's theological development, but also it can lead to deeper and more accurate appreciation of the tradition so formative of his theological thinking.

I. The Theodicy Problem

Sociologist Peter Berger, in a chapter titled "The Problem of Theodicy," comments that theodicy, which "represents the attempt to make a pact with death," is "central for any religious effort at world-maintenance, and indeed also for any effort at the latter on the basis of a non-religious *Weltanschauung*,"⁸ because of the universality of experiences of sin, evil, and suffering, a kind of experience that Barth's version(s) of (neo-)Kantianism has sought to address since the 1910s. Berger argues that in the modern West, Christianity has been threatened by the "terror" of "chaos" and "insanity" to collapse because of difficulties in reconciling the doctrine of an almighty Father to these universal

⁶ John Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 80.

experiences.⁹ Berger, himself a Christian, warns that “if the Christian explanation of the world no longer holds, then the Christian legitimation of social order cannot be maintained very long either.”¹⁰

The first half of the twentieth century was a time when traditional Christian explanations of the world had been challenged by centuries of Enlightenment thinking, and Neo-Protestant world-explanations from the nineteenth century were struggling for survival amidst chaotic forces seemingly getting out of control, culminating in the two World Wars. This was a time when Western Europe saw an outpouring of diverse theological reflections from the likes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, and others.

It was also in such a time that the Swiss theologian Karl Barth came to develop his Christocentric doctrine of election as an attempt to proclaim the universal lordship of Jesus Christ, the gracious and sovereign God-with-us and God-for-us. Strictly speaking, though, Barth’s theology was not so much a response to the “crisis” of his time, but rather an endeavour to testify to Christ in defiance of the “crisis.” Thus Barth’s theology was not really guided or driven by theodicy, but rather a deep desire to point the Church, so that the Church may point the chaotic world, to her Lord and Saviour. Increasingly so in his career, Barth saw himself as a theologian *for* the Church and *of* the Church, the earthly community that God has elected and called to proclaim God’s Word: hence the title of his *magnum opus*, *The Church Dogmatics*.

II. Supra- and Infralapsarianism

As early as *Romans* II, Barth has seen in the seventeenth-century Reformed-orthodox debate between supra- and infralapsarians an important formulation of the theodicy

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 79.

problem. Yet, he increasingly came to feel that classical Reformed answers to the problem were inadequate for the task of theology, namely, to proclaim the Word of God as revealed in Christ, because of what he understood (and in many ways misunderstood) to be some of Reformed orthodoxy's basic assumptions.

As a note of explanation, supralapsarianism (*supra-lapsum*: before the fall) is the position that in divine predestination, God has in mind unfallen humanity as the object of election and reprobation (i.e., *obiectum praedestinationis* as *homo labilis, homo lapsandus, or homo nondum lapsus*). By contrast, infralapsarianism (*infra-lapsum*: after the fall) states that in divine predestination, God's conception of the object of election-reprobation is fallen humanity (i.e., *obiectum praedestinationis* as *homo lapsus*). Note that the infralapsarian *obiectum* is God's eternal conception of *homo lapsus*, but not humanity actually created and fallen in history.

When the Lapsarian Controversy had developed into maturity, both sides would generally agree: (1) God is not the author of sin; (2) humankind's fall occurred by an efficaciously permissive decree of God, and is therefore by no means a new or disruptive feature in God's original plan; and (3) election is unconditional, and is thus by no means a later or additional struggle whereby God responds to the actuality of sin.

In the current analysis, the problem over which supra- and infralapsarians of the seventeenth century debated is basically a classical Reformed formulation of the theodicy problem: given that God is absolutely good and sovereign, how was it that God decreed—even though permissively—humanity's fall, and how was it that the Creator decreed to predestine some of God's own creatures unto perdition?

The diverse answers that supra- and infralapsarians gave to this question will be discussed in Chapters 1-2. Suffice it now to note that for Barth—especially after having started to develop his Christocentric doctrine of election in 1936—there are fatal flaws to

this way of framing the lapsarian question. First, Reformed orthodoxy speaks of reprobation and the fall in terms of divine decrees, which for Barth does not sufficiently stress God's absolute non-willing of the negative element that assails God's covenant-partner. Second, according to Barth, Reformed orthodoxy tends to answer the lapsarian problem apart from Christ, as if the freely electing God were above and behind, thus detached from, the God self-revealed in Christ (though this has been one tendency in Reformed orthodoxy, this is not always the case—see Chapters 1-2). Third, Reformed orthodoxy tends to *explain* the cause and origin of evil in terms of divine sovereignty and purpose, but for Barth the reality of what he later came to call “nothingness” (*das Nichtige*) is absurd and unexplainable. As Barth sees it, nothingness is understood—and thus not understood—as such only in light of Christ's triumph over it from and to all eternity.

III. Barth's Misnomers

The first and shorter part of my twofold thesis is that Barth has misunderstood supra- and infralapsarianism as represented in Reformed orthodoxy, and despite his avowedly “purified supralapsarian” conviction, he is in fact basically infralapsarian in his mature doctrine of election.

But how is this important for a helpful interpretation of Barth? Many in the guild of Barth studies would be tempted to think that what is important is to understand what Barth means when he calls himself a supralapsarian, and whether his definitions are in accordance with seventeenth-century usage is insignificant. True enough, it is important to ask why Barth calls himself a supralapsarian—and I shall surely do that. However, as I have argued, recognising Barth's misnomers would help us to place him in the broader context of the Reformed tradition. This helps us not only to gain deeper insights into his critical interaction with the tradition, but also to compare him to other theologians of the

Reformed heritage in order to develop a more robust understanding of his theology. For instance, how does Barth's Christocentrism compare with the common-grace theology of the Dutch supralapsarian, Abraham Kuyper, and how might such comparison shed light on Barth's famous debate with Emil Brunner?

In any case, what I am arguing here is that to identify Barth as holding to a basically infralapsarian position according to traditional Reformed definitions is not to interpret him with pre-imposed categories, failing to appreciate his intention in calling himself a supralapsarian. Rather, correcting his misnomers is helpful for a deeper understanding of his theology within a broader historical context.

Barth's misunderstanding of supra- and infralapsarianism fundamentally lies in his misguided definitions of the terms *homo creabilis et labilis* and *homo creatus et lapsus* (see definitions above). Barth thinks that *homo creabilis et labilis* refers to God's eternal conception of the object of election as sinful and lost, while *homo creatus et lapsus* refers to humanity actually created and fallen. Here we see that Barth mistakes infralapsarianism for what he calls supralapsarianism, while what he labels as infralapsarianism is in fact closer to Arminianism. Barth does not recognise that for Reformed-orthodox supra- and infralapsarians alike, the *obiectum praedestinationis* is strictly within God's eternal plan that does not logically follow from (i.e., that is irrespective of) the actual events in the creaturely sphere. Reformed-orthodox supra- and infralapsarians alike believe that in pre-temporal predestination God issued forth election and reprobation for the ultimate purpose of God's glory, and so created the world to carry out this plan.

Part I of this dissertation sets these technical matters straight. Chapter 1 defines supra- and infralapsarianism in light of seventeenth-century Reformed-orthodox texts and recent secondary literature on the Lapsarian Controversy, while Chapter 2 discusses Barth's errors in defining supra- and infralapsarianism, showing that he is actually more

in line with infra- rather than supralapsarianism.

As a note of explanation, when I refer to Barth's doctrine as "infralapsarian," I mean it in a minimalist sense—perhaps it would be better to describe it as "*basically* infralapsarian." I recognise that Barth has rejected some fundamental assumptions shared among classical supra- and infralapsarians. I use the term "infralapsarian" only to refer to the position that the object of double predestination is *homo lapsus*, in contrast to the supralapsarian position that the object of double predestination is unfallen.

With regard to the *obiectum praedestinationis*, the description "basically" also serves to stress that Barth is not *simply* infralapsarian: according to his mature doctrine of election, Christ, whose human agency is without sin, is properly and directly the object of election. It is by *participation* and *imputation* that Christ took on the sin of all humankind as the only reprobate. Therefore, even though the human race elected *in* and *with* Christ is unquestionably fallen, the *obiectum praedestinationis* in Barth's doctrine of election is not *simpliciter* (simply) but *secundum quid* (in a certain sense) *homo lapsus*. In this way, Barth's doctrine of election is not *simply* but only *basically* infralapsarian.

IV. Christological Lapsarianism

The terms supra- and infralapsarianism have also been applied to Christology. Supralapsarian Christology states that God *would have* become incarnate regardless of humanity's fall (e.g. Duns Scotus), and infralapsarianism contends that God's primary purpose behind the incarnation is to save humankind from sin (e.g. Anselm). In other words, supralapsarian Christology contends that while the incarnation *de facto* takes care of the sin problem, "God had... other, deeper motives behind the incarnation than only the need for reconciliation."¹¹ By contrast, infralapsarian Christology, without denying that

¹¹ Edwin van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford

God *could have* become incarnate even if humanity had not fallen (i.e., without ruling out the possibility of incarnation regardless of sin), refuses to claim to know *that* or *why* God *would have* done so. According to infralapsarian Christology, then, “the divine will to become incarnate logically follows (*infra*, after) the divine will to allow sin (*lapsus*, fall),” while for supralapsarian Christology, “the divine will to become incarnate logically precedes (*supra* before) the divine will to allow sin.”¹² Note here that both supra- and infralapsarian Christology are concerned with the *logical order* of God’s decisions to become incarnate and to confront sin.

In what follows, when I describe the infralapsarian position as contending that the incarnation “*de jure*” presupposes humanity’s sin, I refer to the *jus* of the divine ordinance that God’s will to become incarnate is for the purpose of overcoming sin (as opposed to the supralapsarian understanding of the divine ordinance, according to which God’s decision to become incarnate is logically prior and thus without regard to God’s consideration of sin). This is not a *jus* outside of God to which God is subject. Rather, it is a *jus* constituted by and contingent upon God’s will. For both supra- and infralapsarian Christology, the divine ordinance concerning the logical relations between God’s decisions to become incarnate and to confront sin pertains to God’s *potentia ordinata* (God’s power as bound and limited by God’s own ordinances with reference to creaturely reality) rather than *absoluta* (the absolute omnipotence of God’s Being in Godself). When Barth speaks of the “necessity” for God to become incarnate in order to conquer sin (Barth is not shy to say that “God had to [become incarnate]”), he is also referring to the *hypothetical necessity* arising out of God’s *potentia ordinata*, rather than an *absolute necessity*.¹³

I will show that Barth’s Christology has been increasingly infralapsarian through the

University Press, 2008), 4.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ For example, *KD* I/1, 41; *ET* 37.

successive phases of his theological development. As his theology becomes increasingly Christocentric overall, his doctrine of election also becomes increasingly infralapsarian along with his Christology.

True enough, after 1936 Barth would speak of the incarnation as primarily an eternal event, taking place before the actual creation of the world, thus one may be tempted to identify his mature Christology as supralapsarian. However, whether a Christology is supra- or infralapsarian does not depend on the chronological order of the events concerned: traditionally the incarnation has usually been regarded as a temporal event, and both supra- and infralapsarian Christology would see the incarnation as chronologically occurring *post lapsum*. The point of contention is whether God's will to become incarnate logically precedes or follows (i.e., whether it is with or without regard to) God's will to overcome sin. In this regard, Barth's mature Christology is infralapsarian because the incarnation is the event in which humanity's sin is posited in order to occasion Christ's eternal triumph over it. Even though Barth is emphatic that Jesus Christ is at the beginning of all God's decisions, it should be noted that he identifies the "event in which... the Word became flesh" with that "in which... the Judge was Himself judged on the cross of Golgotha."¹⁴ Throughout his career, Barth has never claimed knowledge of an incarnation regardless of sin.

V. Barth's Theological Development

But who cares if Barth is supra- or infralapsarian in his Christology or doctrine of election? The second and main part of my twofold thesis is that Barth's struggles with the lapsarian problem (i.e., questions about the sovereign and holy God's dealings with humanity's sin) through the successive phases of his theology are in fact one important factor driving his

¹⁴ *KD* IV/1, 394; ET 358.

theological development.

To be sure, Barth would frame the lapsarian problem quite differently from Reformed orthodoxy, hence his use of the term “purified” to describe his own (predestinarian) lapsarian position. We shall see in Chapters 2, 6, and 7 what this adjective means. For now, suffice it to say that Barth would frame the lapsarian problem by asking: how is sin to be understood in light of Jesus Christ and of God’s sovereignty in the act of election? After the Christocentric reorientation of the doctrine of election in 1936-42, the problem is framed even more concretely: how is the reality of sin to be seen in light of God’s gracious election-in-Christ?

Part II of this dissertation (Chapters 3-7) traces the development of Barth’s Christological and predestinarian lapsarianism from its inception in 1920 to its Christological revision in 1936-42, and Part III (Chapters 8-9) explores doctrinal implications of what I suggest we call Barth’s “purified infralapsarianism,” and how these have led to a highly actualistic and “historicised” (as some have put it—I borrow this term with discretion) rendition of Christology and predestination in *CD IV/1* (1953).

In a nutshell, my thesis in tracing the development of Barth’s lapsarian thinking is that Christology and predestination started out as two loosely related doctrines in his theology, but as predestination, which was inconsistently supralapsarian during the first phase of the development, was drawn closer to Christology, which carried infralapsarian tendencies at first and became infralapsarian in the 1920s, Barth’s doctrine of predestination became more and more infralapsarian, and then in 1936-42 the two doctrines merged and became inseparable, and Barth became basically infralapsarian in both Christology and predestination.

This development up to 1942 may be divided into four major phases:

(1) In *Romans II* (1920-21), Barth's Christology is moving in an infralapsarian direction while his doctrine of election leans toward supralapsarianism, though it already carries infralapsarian elements;

(2) In the Göttingen-Münster Period (1921-30), Barth's Christology becomes basically infralapsarian, while his doctrine of election begins to move towards infralapsarianism;

(3) In the Bonn years (1930-35) during which *Anselm* and *CD I/1* were written (as well as most of *I/2*, published in 1938), Barth made no substantial revision to his theology (here I am in agreement with Bruce McCormack's insight against the 'von Balthasar thesis' regarding the centrality of *Anselm* in Barth's theological development), but with the *Anselm* book that gave Barth a more complex way of setting forth the concept of revelation, Christology and predestination, both of which were primarily formulated within the category of revelation, became more closely interwoven in *CD I/1*. Meanwhile, in *CD I/1* Barth became more attentive to the presupposition of human sin in the divine act of revelation in its actual form, which motivated him to adopt an infralapsarian position in the Christocentric doctrine of election in the next phase of his development;

(4) In *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (1936) and *CD II/2* (1942), an already infralapsarian Christology from previous phases of Barth's development dictates the basically infralapsarian character of his Christological revision of the doctrine of election in 1936-42.

This description of the successive phases of Barth's theological development, along with a discussion of doctrinal implications and further developments up to 1953 in Chapters 8-9, is the primary emphasis of my dissertation.

In these chapters I also show that Barth had adopted his mistaken definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism as early as 1920, and that the inadequate German historiography on Reformed orthodoxy by Heinrich Heppe and others that Barth encountered while at Göttingen did not help to clarify his confusion.

VI. "Purified Infralapsarianism"—So what?

Part III of this dissertation explores further developments and doctrinal implications of what I suggest we call Barth's "purified infralapsarianism." I have two specific purposes here. First, I intend to show the relevance of Barth's lapsarian position in his theological thought overall: Let us say Barth really is infralapsarian, so what? I shall try to show that a more precise understanding of his lapsarian position would shed light on the way he formulates his other doctrines.

Second, I intend to demonstrate that the basically infralapsarian character of Barth's Christological doctrine of election led to further developments after 1942 in such a way that he would retain his position from 1936-42 while saying new things that are sometimes surprising. Understanding what I suggest we call Barth's "purified infralapsarianism" would help us understand why Barth says those things.

Chapter 8 is on Barth's notion of nothingness (*das Nichtige*) set forth in *CD* III/3 (1950). Here Barth shifts his focus to the reality of sin, evil, and death in historical actuality, and in discussing the paradoxical existence of nothingness he consistently presupposes a basically infralapsarian understanding of double predestination in Christ.

Chapter 9 is on *CD* IV/1 (1953), a part-volume in which Barth sets forth a

Christology that some have labelled as “historicised.” I focus on “The Pride and Fall of Man” (§60), where Barth draws from his notion of nothingness in *CD* III/3 but develops it in a more historical-actualistic direction, identifying fallen humanity with Adamic history. I argue that Barth’s discussion of sin in terms of the *Geschichte* of the “pride and fall” of humankind consistently presupposes an infralapsarian Christology and continually refers to a basically infralapsarian understanding of election. Towards the end of Chapter 9, I engage with recent Trinity-election debates in Barth studies as they relate to debates on whether and how the Christology of *CD* IV/1 should be understood as “historicised.” I argue that on both sides of the debate, a coherent interpretation of Barth would demand a basically infralapsarian reading of his Christological doctrine of election.

VII. God’s Non-Capricious No: Election-in-Christ as Aufhebung

To appreciate the basically infralapsarian character of Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of election is to grasp his concern to understand God’s No as a non-capricious Word in Christ for the definite and definitive purpose of God’s gracious Yes. For Barth, reprobation is God’s eternal negation of humanity’s sin that negates God’s grace, and this negation of negation in Christ is for the purpose of election as the *Aufhebung* of reprobation.

As a note of explanation, *Aufhebung*, literally meaning “lifting up” and sometimes translated as “sublation” or “supersession,” is a Hegelian notion of dialectical progression in which the new abrogates or supersedes the old in form, but the rationality of the old is in one sense preserved in the new, which fulfils the purpose of the old. This is sometimes understood as the logic of “negation of negation”: sin negates God’s grace, but the vicarious reprobation Christ suffers, manifested in his death as the death of death, is the negation of negation, and the purpose of the two negatives is fulfilled as they are

aufgehoben in God's gracious election-in-Christ.

From 1936 (*Gottes Gnadenwahl*) onward, Barth would describe Christ as vicariously reprobated for the sin of all humankind, so that all humankind, partaking of Christ, may be elected *in* him, therefore *by* and *with* him as he is electing God and elected human. The vicarious reprobation Christ suffered, of which Christ is both the subject and the object, is for Barth God's eternal negation of humanity's sin, and this negation of negation is sublated in God's gracious election-in-Christ, which presupposes and in a sense preserves the historical rationality of divine reprobation on Golgotha. Barth's understanding of election as the Christocentric *Aufhebung* of fallen human history (the historical aspect of election-in-Christ is especially emphasised in *CD IV/1*) and divine reprobation is basically in line with infralapsarianism: double predestination deals with the element of sin, and the human race elected in and with Christ is *homo lapsus* (though, again, Christ as the proper *obiectum praedestinationis* who took on the sin of all humankind is without sin in himself).

For Barth, God's No is not the "caprice of a tyrant" arbitrarily deciding from all eternity to send the reprobate to hell forever (to set the record straight, I do not think Barth is entirely fair to historic Calvinism when he thinks of it in these terms). Rather, with what I suggest we call his "purified infralapsarianism," Barth portrays reprobation as a non-capricious No of God against the sin that assails God's covenant-partner, a non-capricious No in Christ negatively posited in order to be sublated for the sake of the Yes, which is God's gracious election of all humankind *in Christo*.

Part I

Chapter 1

Supra- and Infralapsarianism in the Seventeenth Century: Some Definitions

This chapter seeks to define supra- and infralapsarianism in accordance with seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy. One aim of my dissertation is to challenge the common misperception of Barth as a supralapsarian, an assumption that, to my knowledge, has not yet been explicitly questioned. True enough, Barth, in a detailed and insightful doctrinal-historical excursus on the Lapsarian Controversy of the seventeenth century in *CD II/2*, explicitly sides with supralapsarianism.¹ In fact, as early as *Romans II* (written 1920-21), Barth had already taken an avowedly supralapsarian position.²

However, recent research has shown that Barth's understanding of Reformed orthodoxy relies heavily on the somewhat inadequate works of nineteenth-century German historiographers.³ In particular, Ryan Glomsrud observes that Barth's "recovery" of seventeenth-century Reformed authors during his Göttingen years "was synonymous with his discovery of Heppel and a coterie of nineteenth-century historiographers of the tradition."⁴ It was not "an entirely *ad fontes* event" in that "Barth encountered Reformed orthodoxy almost exclusively in the texts of the nineteenth-century historiographers... and not in the primary sources themselves."⁵

Although in his later years Barth had acquired and studied primary texts from Turretin, Mastricht, Voetius, Polanus, and others, his collection and knowledge of

¹ *KD II/2*, 136ff; ET 127ff.

² *Römerbrief II*, 163; ET 172.

³ See Ryan Glomsrud, *Karl Barth between pietism and orthodoxy: a post-enlightenment ressourcement of classical Protestantism* (D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 2009).

⁴ Ryan Glomsrud, "Karl Barth as Historical Theologian," in D. Gibson and D. Strange, eds., *Engaging with Barth* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 86ff. Cf. Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 335ff.

⁵ Glomsrud, "Karl Barth as Historical Theologian," 86ff.

Reformed-orthodox writers had hardly expanded beyond those mentioned in the secondary literatures of Heinrich Heppe and other nineteenth-century German historiographers. At least this is the case in Barth's excursus on the Lapsarian Controversy in *CD II/2*, §33, where he explicitly states that his discussions are based on the reports of Heppe and Alexander Schweizer.⁶

Though by the time *CD II/2* was being composed Barth had begun to consult primary sources and was even able to discern some of Heppe's misrepresentations of primary texts,⁷ Barth's understanding of Reformed orthodoxy in general and of the Lapsarian Controversy in particular still depended heavily on nineteenth-century historiography. Comparing Barth's Lapsarian excursus to Heppe's *Dogmatik*, for instance, reveals that Barth's presentation of the Lapsarian Controversy is little more than just a selective summary of Heppe's quotations of primary sources along with a few passages from Schweizer.

Given such a case, Barth's analyses and even definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism might be called into question. For one thing, Barth's admitted reliance on Heppe should be a warning sign, as Richard Muller cautions that "Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*... overlooks [the] development of genuine prolegomena [in early Reformed orthodoxy] and presents from the outset a somewhat distorted presentation of Reformed system."⁸ Carl Trueman, too, warns that "Heppe's ordering of topics, arrangement of quotations, and running commentary on the whole served to make the result something of a synthesis of Reformed Orthodoxy and the views of Heppe himself."⁹

To be fair, as far as Heppe's presentation of the Lapsarian Controversy is concerned,

⁶ *KD II/2*, 136; ET 127.

⁷ E.g., *KD II/2*, 83f; ET 77f. Cf. Richard Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1986), 9.

⁸ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics I* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 150.

⁹ Carl Trueman, "Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology: Historical Prolegomena," in N. MacDonald and C. Trueman, eds., *Calvin, Barth and Reformed Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 17.

perhaps “inadequate” would be a more accurate description than “distorted,” since Heppe does little more than simply offer a mosaic of quotations from selected primary sources without translating the Latin into German. To demonstrate the case, in the sections on the Lapsarian Controversy in Heppe’s *Dogmatik* (VII.14-15; VIII.3-9), the author’s own explanations in German constitute less than one-tenth of the text, while the rest consists of direct quotations in Latin.¹⁰ Lacking in these sections are clear definitions of the plenitude of confusing seventeenth-century scholastic terms in the quotations, and in reading these sections, Barth’s fundamental mistake lies in his misunderstanding of the terms “*homo creabilis et labilis*” (creatable and lapsable humanity) and “*homo creatus et lapsus*” (created and fallen humanity), which are central to the definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism, as we shall see. That is, Heppe does not offer wrong definitions of the terms—he simply does not define these terms in detail. What Barth in turn does is to read his own mistaken definitions developed as early as *Romans* II (it is unclear how he got these definitions) into Heppe’s inadequate but not necessarily inaccurate reports—we shall see how Barth defines supra- and infralapsarianism in Chapter 2.

Additionally, Barth’s complete omission of seventeenth-century Puritans on the other side of the British Isles, including major theologians like Richard Sibbes, Samuel Rutherford, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and others, comes across as a striking instance of the inadequacy of nineteenth-century German historiography on Reformed orthodoxy, suggesting that Barth’s understanding of the Lapsarian Controversy lacks at least one crucial piece of the puzzle. Meanwhile, even in Barth’s reading of Heppe’s selection of primary texts, Barth omits some important passages that might have helped to change his misunderstandings of supra- and infralapsarianism (see Chapter 2).

In what follows, I shall try to offer more precise definitions of supra- and

¹⁰ Heinrich Heppe, *Die Dogmatik der Evangelisch-Reformierten Kirche* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2010), 108ff.

infralapsarianism in light of primary sources and recent secondary literature, definitions that are not my own, but in line with basic scholarly consensus in Puritan studies. On this basis I shall proceed to Chapter 2 to discuss Barth's questionable definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism, and contend that Barth is more in line with the basic position of infralapsarianism than with that of supralapsarianism.

Supra- and Infralapsarianism: Shared Assumptions

Divine Sovereignty and Permission of Sin

As aforementioned, Reformed-orthodox supra- and infralapsarians share the same basic understanding of divine predestination and humanity's fall, which is nicely summarised by Calvin's quotation of Augustine in explaining the origin of evil:

We make most sound confession... that God the Lord of all things, who made all things very good, foreknew that evil would arise out of this good, and also knew that it contributed more to His glory to bring good out of evil than not to allow evil at all; so He ordained the life of men and angels so that in it He might first show what freewill could do, and then what the gift of His grace and the judgment of His justice could do.¹¹

As if this Augustinian language does not sufficiently represent God's sovereignty, Calvin elsewhere stresses that humanity's sin is "no mere 'permission'" on God's part.¹² Insisting on the unity and simplicity of God's will, Calvin states that God "creates light and darkness, that he forms good and bad; that nothing evil happens that [God] himself has not done."¹³ Agreeing that evil is in a sense permitted by God, Calvin qualifies that God "does not unwillingly permit it, but willingly; nor would [God], being good, allow evil to be done, unless being also almighty he could make good even out of evil."¹⁴

By the late sixteenth century, Calvinists had generally come to agree that Adam fell

¹¹ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1961), 67.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battle (London: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.18.1.

¹³ *Ibid.* 1.18.3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

into sin by an “effectively permissive decree” of God: they generally agreed that in God’s eternal counsels the element of humankind’s fall is in one sense foreseen (in the Augustinian-Calvinist sense as summarised in the block quote above) and permitted by God, though this “foresight,” as it were, is strictly eternal, and is by no means God’s passive consideration of humankind’s actual action in history. For the Reformed-orthodox, divine “foresight” of historical events is by no means a cause, efficient or teleological, of any divine decree; rather, all events in the creaturely sphere occurred by the execution of God’s sovereign decrees alone, which are logically independent of (i.e., uncaused by) actual human actions.

On these shared assumptions, a supralapsarianism began to emerge, most notably advanced by Theodore Beza (1519-1605), where proponents thereof would assert that double predestination is irrespective of humanity’s sin, while agreeing with infralapsarians, who were the majority among Calvinists, that God who permitted the fall is by no means the author of sin. The English supralapsarian William Perkins (1558-1602), for example, denies that his position makes God culpable for humanity’s sin, contending that God “planted nothing in Adam, whereby he should fall into sin, but left him to his own liberty, not hindering his fall when it might.”¹⁵ At the Synod of Dort, a confessional consensus was established among the Reformed, where it was agreed that Adam’s fall occurred by an efficaciously permissive divine decree.¹⁶

However, how did God allow something so alien to God’s holiness to come into existence? In pursuing this question, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinists attempted to formulate answers with rigorous logic.

¹⁵ William Perkins, *A Treatise of the Manner and Order of Predestination, and of the Largeness of Gods Grace*, in *Works* 2, 619. Quoted in Mark Jones and Joel Beeke, “William Perkins on Predestination,” in *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 121.

¹⁶ See John Fesko, “Lapsarian Diversity at the Synod of Dort,” in Michael Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Oakville: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

Diversity of Opinions: Brief Taxonomy

In the last analysis it can be seen that the Lapsarian Controversy is essentially a theodicy inquiry: on the suppositions of God's holiness and sovereignty, how are divine reprobation and permission of sin to be understood? Supra- and infralapsarianism are two formulations of the logical relations between God's eternal decrees of double predestination, creation, and permission of the fall, aimed at taking into account the reality of sin and evil without compromising God's sovereignty and holiness.

Note that the terms supra- and infralapsarianism represent two general opinions within Reformed orthodoxy, but, as has long been known and as John Fesko's studies have recently shown with greater historical precision, there is diversity within each of the two camps, just as there are intermediate views that attempt to reconcile them.¹⁷ In his forthcoming book, Fesko lists the following taxonomies:

Turretin identifies three different opinions: those who ascend above the fall (*supra lapsum*), and hence are supralapsarians; those who descend below the fall (*infra lapsum*), and others who stop in the fall (*in lapsu*)... In his Conference with Junius, Arminius identifies three positions, two supras, man as to be created or man as created but unfallen, and one infra, man as created and fallen... Edward Leigh confirms Arminius's taxonomy and offers the same: ...man to be made..., man already made, but not fallen, and man made and fallen... Baxter also offers the same taxonomy... If these theologians are accurate, then according to the compiled taxonomies, there are at least two kinds of infras and two kinds of supras.¹⁸

My aim here is not to account for details of the diversity, but to arrive at general and thus inevitably minimalist definitions that accurately describe supra- and infralapsarianism respectively. I will show that what unifies the supralapsarians is the

¹⁷ John Fesko, *Diversity Within the Reformed Traditions: Supra- and Infralapsarianism in Calvin, Dort, and Westminster* (Jackson: Reformed Academic Press, 2001); "The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism: Calvin and the Divines" and "Lapsarian Diversity at the Synod of Dort" in Ligon Duncan, ed., *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century II* (Fearn: Mentor, 2004).

¹⁸ John Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton: Crossway, forthcoming), 105. See also Richard Muller, "Revising the Predestination Paradigm: An Alternative to Supralapsarianism, Infralapsarianism, and Hypothetical Universalism," *Mid-America Fall Lecture Series*, Fall 2008, Dyer, Indiana.

position that the object of election is unfallen, while the infralapsarians at one accord contend that the object of election is fallen.

Unity in Diversity: Eternality of the Decrees

The point of contention between supra- and infralapsarianism is whether humanity's sin is presupposed in double predestination (election and reprobation). Supra- and infralapsarians agree that humanity's actual fall in history was *eternally* decreed by God, thus Adam's sin was part of God's eternal plan rather than a surprise to God.

The various supralapsarian (*supra-lapsum*: above or before the fall) positions agree that God's eternal decree of humankind's fall presupposes election and reprobation. By contrast, the various infralapsarian (*infra-lapsum*: below or after the fall) positions at one accord contend that election and reprobation presuppose the divine decree of the fall.

Note that in referring to God's *eternal* decrees, all supra- and infralapsarians have in mind not only an Augustinian understanding of timelessness, but also a Boethian notion of successionlessness and simultaneity. Louis Berkhof, despite inadequacies in his reports, puts it well: "The divine decree is eternal in the sense that it lies entirely in eternity. The decree... partakes of the *simultaneousness* and the *successionlessness* of the eternal."¹⁹ Thus in both supra- and infralapsarianism, "the order in which the different elements... stand to each other may not be regarded as temporal, but only as logical. There is a real chronological order in the events as effectuated, but not in the decrees respecting them."²⁰

In fact, Heppé also notes (rather cursorily) that there is no "sequentiality" to the decrees in God's mental processions.²¹ Unfortunately, Barth has not picked up from his reading of Heppé this understanding of Reformed orthodoxy's view of the successionlessness and simultaneity of the divine decrees. (Barth's own understanding of

¹⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), 104. Emphases mine.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Heppé, *Dogmatik*, 108ff.

eternity involves a certain notion of succession—this would pertain to another discussion). As I shall show from Chapter 3 onwards, since *Romans II* Barth has misunderstood infralapsarianism as asserting that election-reprobation presupposes the actual execution of the decrees of creation and the fall, failing to recognise that supra- and infralapsarianism alike speak of the divine decrees as strictly eternal. It is unclear how Barth developed this misunderstanding, but evidently he held to it long before having read Heppé (see Chapters 3-4).

In any case, while Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* and Heppé's *Dogmatik* are somewhat inadequate in their accounts of the Lapsarian Controversy, their comments on the logical independence of the eternal decrees from the actual executions thereof accurately reflect the general opinions of Reformed-orthodox authors from the seventeenth century. This is evinced by a passage from Richard Sibbes's (1577-1635) preface to Paul Baynes's (1573-1617) 1604 book in which the latter contends for a rigorous supralapsarian position. In this passage Sibbes, in friendly spirit, lists three points of agreement among supra- and infralapsarians of his time:

...both [supra- and infralapsarians] agree in this: First, that there was an *eternal* separation of men in God's purpose. Secondly, that this first decree of severing man to his ends, is an act of sovereignty over his creature, and *altogether independent of anything in the creature*, as a cause of it...; *sin foreseen cannot be the cause*, because that was common to both [elect and reprobate], and therefore could be no cause of severing. Thirdly, all agree in this, that damnation is an act of divine justice, which supposeth demerit; and therefore the *execution* of God's decree is founded on sin...²²

Two points may be observed. First, according to Sibbes, supra- and infralapsarians of his time agree that double predestination is *eternal*. Second, for supra- and infralapsarians alike, the eternality of predestination implies that it is by no means caused by anything in the creaturely realm, nor is it dependent upon the actual execution of any

²² Richard Sibbes, "To the Reader," in Paul Baynes, *A Commentary Upon the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, 1618). Emphases mine.

of God's decrees, or even God's foresight thereof ('sin foreseen cannot be the cause').

Patrick Gillespie (1617-1675), Scottish Puritan who served as Principal of Glasgow University in 1653-1659 under Oliver Cromwell's auspices, also emphasises in his discourse on the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*, the Reformed notion of an eternal covenant between Father and Son with regard to the salvation of the elect):

This transaction having been from eternity, it was a concluded bargain before the creatures had a being... The Father and Son were not only free from all natural necessity and outward compulsion; but also from all hire, allurements or motives from any thing without their own will; there was nothing in man, *no not foreseen*, that could allure or move; far less hire the Father to give Christ, to engage him in this work [of redemption], nor Christ to engage his name in our bond...²³

Gillespie makes clear here that since the *pactum salutis*, which concerns God's eternal plan to redeem fallen creatures, is "from eternity," it is completely free and sovereign on God's part, independent of anything God foresaw in the creature. This shows that the Reformed orthodox, supra- and infralapsarians alike, draw a strict distinction between God's eternal decrees and the historical execution thereof.

Supra- and Infralapsarianism Defined

Obiectum Praedestinationis

Central to the Lapsarian Controversy is the question of the object of predestination (*obiectum praedestinationis*), the watershed dividing supra- and infralapsarians: "When the decrees of election and reprobation came into existence were men considered as fallen or as unfallen?"²⁴

While diverse arguments and schemes have been developed by both camps, what unifies the infralapsarians is their central thesis that the object of predestination (*obiectum*

²³ Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened* (London: Parkhurst, 1677), 59. I am indebted to Professor Fesko for pointing me to this work.

²⁴ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (New Jersey: P&R, 1932), 126.

praedestinationis) is *created and fallen* humanity (*homo creatus et lapsus*), whereas supralapsarians at one accord contend that the *obiectum praedestinationis* is *unfallen* humanity (this can be *homo creabilis et labilis, homo creatus sed nondum lapsus, homo creandus et lapsandus sed nondum lapsus, etc.*).

Note that these terms refer to God's eternal conception of the object of predestination, rather than humans in created actuality. Thus the Swiss-Italian Reformed-orthodox infralapsarian Francis Turretin (1623-1687): "[in the Lapsarian Controversy] it is not inquired whether the creation of man and the permission of the fall come under the decree of God (for it is acknowledged on both sides that this as well as that was determined by God). But the question is... whether God in the sign of reason [*in signo rationis*] is to be considered as having thought about the salvation and destruction of men before he thought of their creation and fall."²⁵ This makes clear that for supra- and infralapsarians alike, the logical relations between election/reprobation and creation/fall are strictly within God's eternal mental processions.

Contra the common Barthian understanding that infralapsarians see election as a divine response to the actuality of humankind's fall, Turretin makes clear in the heading of Section XI, Fourth Topic of his celebrated *Institutes*, under the rubric "The Cause of Election": "Is election made from the foresight of faith, or works; or from the grace of God alone? The former we deny; the latter we affirm."²⁶

It is true that Turretin occasionally uses the language of divine "foreseeing" in setting forth the infralapsarian view of God's decree of Adam's fall (in fact, this Augustinian language has been employed by supra- and infralapsarians alike to explain God's permission of sin), in a way that may cause readers unfamiliar with Reformed orthodoxy to confuse infralapsarianism with Arminian or Semi-Pelagian understandings

²⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* I, ed. James Dennison, Jr., trans. George Giger (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992), 342.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 355.

of divine foreknowledge as the ground of election. Yet, note that when Turretin speaks of divine foresight of the *obiectum praedestinationis*, he is careful to point out that “although the object of predestination is determined to be fallen humanity, it does not follow that predestination is actually made in time. Fallen humanity is understood as to his known and foreseen being, not as to his *real* being. Also the prescience of the fall and its permissive decree is no less eternal than the predestination itself.”²⁷ This shows that Turretin’s notion of *homo lapsus* as divine foresight, as it were, of sinful humanity does not place the *obiectum praedestinationis* in temporal actuality. Rather, the *homo lapsus* is strictly God’s eternal conception of the object of election-reprobation in God’s mind.

On that note, English Puritan Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) explains the Reformed-orthodox understanding of divine prescience, which is shared by supra- and infralapsarians:

God’s foreknowledge is not, simply considered, the cause of anything... [N]othing is because God knows it, but because God wills it, either positively or permissively; God knows *all things possible*; yet, because God knows them they are not brought into actual existence, but *remain still only as things possible*...; the will is the immediate principle, and the power the immediate cause.²⁸

From this Reformed-orthodox principle it follows that for supra- and infralapsarians alike, God’s prescience of humankind’s actual fall could not have been the cause or ground of election-reprobation.

If this is not clear enough, the infralapsarian John Edwards (1637-1716) makes it unmistakable that for infralapsarians, just as supralapsarians, “the decree of election is absolute in as much as ’tis founded wholly on God’s free will and pleasure, and... not on

²⁷ Ibid., 349. Translation revised. Giger’s translation is misleading, rendering “...it does not follow that predestination is made *only* in time.” Original: “...non sequitur Praedestinationem *demum* factam in tempore” (Turretino, *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae*, I.IV.IX.XXVI).

²⁸ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God I* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 448. Emphases mine.

any thing that was fore-seen in man.”²⁹ Strictly speaking, then, the infralapsarian *homo lapsus* does not even refer to God’s foresight of actually created and fallen humanity, but only to God’s eternal conception of human beings as sinful and lost.

Now, on Barth’s faulty understanding, which we shall discuss in detail next chapter, the infralapsarian *homo lapsus* refers to humanity actually created and fallen in history, while the supralapsarian *homo labilis* (lapsable human) refers to God’s eternal conception of humankind as “sinful and lost” prior to the divine work of creation.³⁰ However, as we have seen, Barth’s understanding of the supralapsarian *obiectum* actually fits the seventeenth-century definition of *homo lapsus*.

With regard to the supralapsarian *obiectum*, it is worth pointing out that there are variations in terminology and understanding. The supralapsarian Samuel Rutherford (1600[?]-1661), for instance, uses the future-passive participle to describe the *obiectum* as “*homo creandus [et lapsandus sed]... nondum creatus [et lapsus]*” (certain to be created/to fall, but not-yet created/fallen).³¹ In using this terminology, Rutherford shares with other supralapsarians the conviction that God eternally conceives of unfallen humanity as the *obiectum praedestinationis*.

On the supralapsarian view, election-reprobation logically precedes (i.e., is without regard to) the decrees of creation and the fall. That is (as most supralapsarians would have it), in God’s eternal plan, election-reprobation is both the final and efficient causes (purpose and basis) of the subsequent decrees. As Beza puts it, “Predestination... is nothing else than His will unto the fixed end of the destination of either salvation or destruction... and the subordinate means unto these two ends.”³² Most supralapsarians would agree with Beza in contending that God predestined some unto salvation and

²⁹ John Edwards, *Veritas Redux* (Andover: Gale, 2010), 71.

³⁰ *KD* II/2, 138; *ET* 129.

³¹ Guy Richards, “Samuel Rutherford’s supralapsarianism revealed,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59 (2006): 29.

³² Theodore Beza, *Tractationum theologicarum* 3 (Geneva, 1582), 402. Translation mine.

others unto destruction simply because God decided to do so.³³ On this view, double predestination is not a decree in which God conceives of humanity as sinful. God is sovereign and thus free to predestine humans for damnation even if God does not conceive of them as guilty of sin and deserving punishment.

Inadequacies of the Ordo Decretorum

The following logical order has often been simplistically attributed to infralapsarianism: “1. the decree to create the world and (all) men; 2. the decree that (all) men would fall; 3. the election of some fallen men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others); 4. the decree to redeem the elect by the cross work of Christ; 5. the decree to apply Christ’s redemptive benefits to the elect.”³⁴

By contrast, the following *ordo* is often used to describe supralapsarianism: “1. The election of some men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others); 2. The decree to create the world and both kinds of men; 3. The decree that all men would fall; 4. The decree to redeem the elect, who are now sinners, by the cross work of Christ; 5. The decree to apply Christ’s redemptive benefits to these elect sinners.”³⁵

To present supra- and infralapsarianism with these *ordines*, however, can be problematic. First, these are merely generalisations of the supra- and infralapsarian *ordines*, but there are variations to these orderings within both camps.³⁶ For instance, Heppe provides Beza’s schematic diagram of the *ordo*, which reveals that Heppe’s own five-step presentation would be quite an oversimplification if applied to Beza’s *ordo*.³⁷

Second, while the five-step generalisation would be an oversimplification in the case

³³ Beza, *Tractationum* 1 (Geneva, 1591), 173f.

³⁴ Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 480.

³⁵ Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 488. Cf. Boettner, 126; Heppe, 110; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* II, 382f.

³⁶ Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 488f.

³⁷ Heppe, *Dogmatik*, 109f.

of Beza, it is often an over-complication in other cases. Rutherford, for instance, never developed a rigorous *ordo*, but merely maintains that “God’s electing of us cannot be after the consideration of our creation and fall.”³⁸ Fesko comments: “While Rutherford’s treatment resonates with supralapsarianism..., an *ordo decretorum* [is not] stated.”³⁹

In the case of John Owen (1616-1683), a supralapsarian in his earlier years, there is only a subtle logical order between double predestination and the decree concerning the fall:

God hold[s] the lump of mankind in his own power, as the clay in the hand of the potter, determining to make some vessels unto honour..., and others to dishonour..., and to this end suffer[s] them all to fall into sin and the guilt of condemnation, whereby they became all liable to his wrath and curse; his purpose to save some of these doth not at all exempt or free them from the common condition of the rest, in respect of themselves and the truth of their estate, until some actual thing be accomplished for the bringing of them nigh unto himself: so that notwithstanding his eternal purpose, his wrath, in respect of the effects, abideth on them until that eternal purpose do make out itself in some distinguishing act of free grace.⁴⁰

It is only a little more than implicit here that Owen ascribes logical priority to the decree of election-reprobation over the decree to permit the fall. His main purpose in this treatise is to contend that Christ died only for the elect.

The first indication of Owen’s conversion to infralapsarianism came in 1653 in the publication of *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, where he takes up the task to “discourse and dispute on the vindicatory justice of God, and the necessity of its exercise, on the supposition of the existence of sin.”⁴¹ While the earlier, supralapsarian Owen asserts that the satisfaction of divine justice is predicated upon the double decree of election-reprobation, the infralapsarian Owen now contends that God’s will to punish

³⁸ Richards, “Rutherford’s Supralapsarianism,” 29.

³⁹ Fesko, “The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism,” 499.

⁴⁰ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *Works*, Vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Banner of Truth, 1991), 275.

⁴¹ Owen, *Works* 10, 486.

creatures is “on the supposition of the existence of sin.”⁴² Throughout the *Dissertation*, Owen’s concern is the satisfaction of God’s punitive justice, and his infralapsarian conviction that election-reprobation presupposes *homo lapsus* as the *obiectum* underlies his argumentation without being fully spelt out in the form of an *ordo*.⁴³

Another case is Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), a contemporary of Owen. Goodwin’s lapsarian position is quite complex. Michael Horton is of the opinion that Goodwin is an infralapsarian, but Carl Trueman, contrasting Goodwin with the infralapsarian Owen, argues that Goodwin is in fact a supralapsarian.⁴⁴ Goodwin’s formulation of the “covenant of redemption” (*pactum salutis*)—“the eternal transactions between the Father and the Son” in which “the Son promised to act as a surety for the elect and so ‘satisfy his Father for all the Wrong [...] done to him’”—is clearly “considered in the context of man as fallen.”⁴⁵ However, Mark Jones has shown that Goodwin takes a supralapsarian position when it comes to the doctrine of election.⁴⁶

Goodwin distinguishes between election and predestination in a nuanced way. Election is the end of God’s eternal decrees, while predestination is the means towards the end. Jones clarifies:

The end is either God’s glory, what Goodwin calls the ‘supreme end of all,’ or the ‘ultimate end,’ which refers to the glory God designed to bring the elect into... The latter end—the ‘ultimate end’—has in view the perfection of Christ’s elect. This is what Goodwin has in mind when he affirms that the decree regarding the end was not upon the consideration of the fall... However, the means to the ‘ultimate end’ considers man as fallen.⁴⁷

⁴² Ibid., 510. Emphasis mine.

⁴³ Ibid., 596ff.

⁴⁴ Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680)* (Oakville: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 128. Cf. Michael Horton, “Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Reformed Tradition, 1600-1680” (PhD Dissertation, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and Coventry University, 1995), 66; Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 138.

⁴⁵ Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth*, 128.

⁴⁶ Mark Jones, “Thomas Goodwin’s Christological Supralapsarianism,” in Jones and Beeke, *A Puritan Theology*, 149ff. Also see Thomas Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, IX.94 in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.* 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006). By “Christological Supralapsarianism,” Jones is contending that Goodwin’s Christological doctrine of election is supralapsarian, rather than describing a supralapsarian Christology.

⁴⁷ Jones, “Thomas Goodwin’s Christological Supralapsarianism,” 155.

In this way, Goodwin's supralapsarian doctrine of election, which views the object of election as unfallen but the object of predestination as fallen, is to be distinguished from what he calls "pure supralapsarianism," which "takes into the means to [the ultimate] end, the creation, and the permission of the fall, and calls them means to bring about that intention or decree to that ultimate end or glory specified."⁴⁸ Goodwin contends against "pure supralapsarianism" that the decrees of creation and permission of the fall are not directly means unto the supreme end of election. Rather, Christ's soteric works are God's means of bringing the elect unto the ultimate end of glory.

This is not to say that "pure supralapsarians" would be in fundamental disagreement with Goodwin. Beza, too, distinguishes between the ends and means of God's eternal decrees, and identifies the *obiectum praedestinationis* as *homo creabilis et labilis* only with regard to the ends of election-reprobation.⁴⁹ Though Beza would identify the decrees of creation and the fall as part of the means towards election, his emphasis is on Christ's soteric works as well. With regard to the decrees concerning salvation as the means unto election-reprobation in Beza's *ordo decretorum*, humanity is considered fallen, as these subordinate decrees are logically subsequent to the subordinate decrees of creation and the fall.⁵⁰

Another "pure supralapsarian" is Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644), whose supralapsarianism and condemnation of infralapsarianism had become a subject of controversy at the Synod of Dort. He distinguishes between election unto the ultimate end of eternal glory (*electio ad finem*) and election unto grace as the means to that end (*electio ad media*). Maccovius's notion of election unto grace is primarily concerned with Christ's soteric works, though he would see the decrees of creation and the fall as part of *electio ad media*. For Maccovius, the "object" of *electio ad media* is "fallen human beings."⁵¹ However,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Beza, *Tractationum* 3, 402.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 404f.

⁵¹ "Haec electio [ad media] pro objecto habet hominen lapsum." Thesis 5, Johannes Maccovius, *De*

in *electio ad finem*, God’s eternal decree concerns “humans before they have done anything good or bad.”⁵² Here we see that Maccovius’s supralapsarianism is primarily defined by the position that the *obiectum praedestinationis* is “*homines antequam quidquam fecissent boni vel mali*,” that is, unfallen humanity.

Much more can be said about Goodwin and Maccovius. My point here is that their lapsarian thinking, just as that of Rutherford and Owen, is primarily defined in terms of the object of election as fallen or unfallen, rather than a rigorous or expressly listed *ordo rerum decretarum*. While Beza holds to a rigorous *ordo*, what unifies him with other supralapsarians is not so much his *ordo*, which varies from one theologian to another, but his contention that the object of election-reprobation is unfallen humanity.

Yet another case is Turretin, whose arguments against supralapsarianism shed light on the definitions of the two lapsarian positions. Turretin advances four arguments against the supralapsarian thesis that “the decree of [double] predestination should be made to precede the decree of creation and the permission of the fall.”⁵³ First, if God decides to punish humans whom God considers non-guilty, then “the first act of God’s will towards some of his creatures [would be] made to be an act of hatred,” and since God’s will corresponds to God’s nature, this would render hatred essential to God’s being.⁵⁴ Second, the supralapsarian belief that God decided to create humans “for the purpose of illustrating his justice in their damnation” would “indicate that he is neither perfectly good nor perfectly wise and just.”⁵⁵ Third, if the object of election is “neither miserable nor guilty; yea, ...not even conceived of as yet existing,” then God’s mercy in

aeterna Dei electione (Franeker, 1618). See Willem Van Asselt, “On the Maccovius Affair,” in Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg, eds., *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 238.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Thesis 8: “Namque dum eadem agit de electione ad finem asserit Deum in aeterno decreto suo eligisse homines antequam quidquam fecissent boni vel mali.” Translation mine.

⁵³ Turretin, *Institutes* I, 418.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

election would be quite meaningless.⁵⁶ Lastly, the supralapsarian thesis that election-reprobation is the final cause of the decree of the fall is really another way of saying that God caused Adam to sin in order to reprobate some of God's creatures, which would render God a tyrant.⁵⁷

According to Turretin, the supra-infra debate hinges on one simple question: is the elect fallen or unfallen?⁵⁸ All four of Turretin's arguments are specifically targeted at the supralapsarian notion that the *obiectum praedestinationis* is unfallen humanity—"neither miserable nor guilty." Implicit in these arguments is Turretin's own infralapsarian position that in God's eternal counsels, God conceives of the object of predestination as fallen. While the *ordo* is not insignificant for Turretin, he sees the *obiectum* as the main contention between supra- and infralapsarians.

Conclusion

The cases presented in this chapter show that the watershed between supra- and infralapsarianism is whether or not God eternally conceives of the object of election-reprobation as fallen. This is not to say that the *ordo decretorum* is unimportant. As Fesko comments, "there are two basic considerations regarding lapsarianism: (1) the *ordo decretorum*... and (2) the object of predestination."⁵⁹ However, "the number and order of the decrees can vary from theologian to theologian; therefore the question ultimately hinges upon how a theologian understands the object of predestination."⁶⁰ In other words, the point of contention between supra- and infralapsarianism is primarily defined by the question, "Does God take into account man's sin in the divine decree of

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 341.

⁵⁹ Fesko, "Lapsarian Diversity at the Synod of Dort," 100.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

election?”⁶¹ Though there is diversity within both supra- and infralapsarianism, what defines supralapsarianism in general is the thesis that in election-reprobation God considers humanity as unfallen, while what defines infralapsarianism is the view that in eternal double predestination—before the actual creation of the world—God conceives of fallen humanity as the object of election-reprobation. These definitions will serve as the basis whereupon I proceed to discuss Barth’s lapsarian position in the following chapters.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Chapter 2

***Church Dogmatics* §33: Barth's Lapsarian Position Reassessed**

This chapter examines Barth's Lapsarian excursus in *CD* II/2, §33, to demonstrate that despite his avowed favour towards supralapsarianism, his doctrine of election is more in line with the basic position of infralapsarianism. I should point out from the outset that Barth's doctrine of election does not square nicely with either classical supra- or infralapsarianism. However, as far as the object of election is concerned, it would be fair to say that Barth is *basically*, though not *simply* infralapsarian: he identifies Christ, who took on humanity's sin but is without sin in himself, as the proper object of election; sinful humanity becomes the object of election only by *participatio Christi*.

Why Barth Avowedly Favours Supralapsarianism

It is important to clarify that my chief purpose is not to point out Barth's mistake, but to offer a helpful interpretation of his lapsarian thinking. To that end, it is not enough for me to simply suggest that Barth misunderstood the Lapsarian Controversy. One question requires consideration: Why does Barth call his doctrine of election developed in 1936-42 a "purified supralapsarianism"? What theological incentives lie behind his avowed favour for supralapsarianism? Here I offer a brief discussion, and I shall go into more detail in Chapter 7.

Before answering this question, bear in mind that Barth is critical of both classical supra- and infralapsarianism primarily because of their common assumption of a *decretum Dei absolutum* (absolute divine decree) whereby humankind is inflexibly divided into elect and reprobate from and to eternity. As Barth sees it, this classical Reformed formulation of double predestination posits an arbitrarily electing God above

and behind the God self-revealed in Christ, thus ascribing to God a “demonic aspect.”¹ Barth thinks that the lapsarian question (namely, whether double predestination presupposes humanity’s fall) is crucial to a sound theological discussion of sin, evil, and death in light of divine predestination. He wants to salvage supralapsarianism by bringing it into Christological light to eliminate that “demonic aspect” (as he sees it).

In a nutshell, Barth’s mature understanding of double predestination is that election is *in Christ*—it is *by* him and *with* him. Christ is the electing God—this is primary to Barth’s doctrine of election. Only as electing God does Christ become the object of election in whom all humankind, partaking of Christ, is elected. Now, if Christ is the object of election, then the divine act of double predestination can only be understood in light of the Christ event. Christ’s death and resurrection reveal that reprobation and election do not stand in a balanced equilibrium, but rather Christ as elected human was reprobated in the stead of all humankind so that all humankind may be elected in him.

For Barth, reprobation is God’s No against the nothingness that negates God and God’s covenant-partner in Christ, and election, in which reprobation as negation of negation is sublated (*aufgehoben*), is God’s Yes for all humankind in Christ, who is at once the subject and object of God’s No and Yes. By electing to become human, the electing God who remains without sin in the whole person of Christ participates in the human state of corruption into which God’s No has concluded all humanity, so that all humanity may stand under God’s gracious Yes.

With this rendition of double predestination, Barth calls his own doctrine a “*purified* supralapsarianism.” Again, he is critical of both classical supra- and infralapsarianism, while he finds strengths in both. He thinks that classical supralapsarianism is more prone to render God the author of evil, while infralapsarianism tends to compromise God’s

¹ *KD* II/2, 154; ET 142.

sovereignty. By the same token, the strength of infralapsarianism, according to Barth, is that it successfully avoids ascribing the origin of sin to God, and one advantage of supralapsarianism is that it consistently upholds God's sovereignty. Because of these strengths and weaknesses, as Barth perceives them, at one point he comes close to ambivalence in his Lapsarian excursus.²

However, moving beyond these strengths and weaknesses, Barth identifies what he sees as one definitive feature of supralapsarianism, and he deems it crucial for a right understanding of election-in-Christ: according to Barth, at the heart of supralapsarianism is the teleological priority of election-reprobation over all other divine decrees, such that “to this proper divine will and decree of God everything else that God wills is subordinate, as an interrelated means to its accomplishment.”³

As we saw earlier, Barth replaces the classical Reformed understanding of double predestination with an understanding of election-in-Christ as *Aufhebung* of sin and reprobation. This logic of *Aufhebung* involves a one-directional teleology: God's purpose for rejecting humanity's sin in Christ is—to use a phrase from *CD IV/1*—“served by [the] evil instrument [of sin],” and this divine purpose is the election of all in Christ.⁴ For Barth, election-in-Christ stands at the top of the teleological order in all God's acts, thus he asserts that “with no material alteration” he has “developed [supralapsarianism] in a Christological direction.”⁵

According to Barth, the God of his “purified Supralapsarianism is not the God who in holy self-seeking is so preoccupied with Himself and the revelation of His own glory... He is the God who loves man. He is the God who in love makes man a

² Ibid., 150; ET 139

³ Ibid., 137; ET 128.

⁴ *KD IV/1*, 441; ET 399.

⁵ *KD II/2*, 154; ET 143.

companion.”⁶ In other words, against classical supralapsarianism (as he sees it) Barth stresses that election-in-Christ is the overflowing of the free love that God’s Being-in-act is. However, like classical supralapsarians, Barth thinks that all God’s acts and decisions in relation to the creature are subordinate to God’s purpose in election-in-Christ.

As we shall see, however, this teleological subordination of all God’s decrees to double predestination has also been adopted by some infralapsarians. Therefore, although Barth is indeed closer to supralapsarianism in this respect, his position and infralapsarianism are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, as already suggested in Chapter 1, his definitions of *homo lapsus* (fallen humanity) and *homo labilis* (lapsable humanity) do not conform to seventeenth-century Reformed-orthodox terminology, and his own understanding of the *obiectum praedestinationis* (object of predestination) is actually in line with the fundamental thesis of infra- rather than supralapsarianism.

Barth’s Misinterpretations of Supra- and Infralapsarianism

As we saw from Chapter 1, infralapsarianism does not portray predestination as having taken place temporally after the fall, or as God’s response to an actual human decision made prior to God’s decree of double predestination: this is a common misunderstanding to which Barth is partly responsible for having given rise. Robert Letham corrects this misunderstanding, which he finds in John T. McNeill’s misinterpretation of Calvin as favouring supralapsarianism:

...McNeill... misunderstands Calvin’s comment in his *Institutes* 2, 12, 5 when he claims that Calvin favours the supralapsarian view of the decrees of God... Calvin points out that the decree of election was before the creation of the world, not subsequent to the fall of Adam. Both infralapsarian and supralapsarian would agree to that. The point at issue between them is not whether the decree of election precedes the fall but whether the decree of election precedes the decree concerning the fall.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 153; ET 142.

⁷ Robert Letham, “Theodore Beza: A Reassessment,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987): 28.

That is, the fact that Calvin sees the decree of election as having been made before the actual events of creation and fall does not make him a supralapsarian. Like the way McNeill misunderstands the lapsarian positions and describes Calvin as favouring supralapsarianism, many Barth scholars think of Barth as “supralapsarian” in the sense that “God’s decision to be for us in Jesus is not a reaction to previous events in the history of God’s relations with us, but has a reality in its own right preceding the whole of that history.”⁸ Note that according to seventeenth-century Reformed-orthodox definitions, this description fits both supra- and infralapsarianism, and does not make Barth a supralapsarian.

Obiectum praedestinationis: *Barth’s Definitions*

Now, we shall look into how the Swiss theologian himself defines supra- and infralapsarianism. Barth’s Lapsarian excursus in *CD* §33 looks promising at first glance, as he rightly identifies the “point at issue” as “the *obiectum praedestinationis*.”⁹ His statement of the lapsarian question also seems to be at one accord with Reformed-orthodox definitions: “is the one elected or rejected *homo creabilis et labilis*, or is he *homo creatus et lapsus*?”¹⁰ Barth defines the former as “man as not yet created but still to be created..., not yet fallen but still to fall by divine permission and human action,” and the latter as “man as already created and already fallen in virtue of this divine permission and human action.”¹¹

So far so good—but an inadequacy in these definitions is immediately apparent: Barth has not clarified that the predicates *creabilis/labilis* and *creatus/lapsus* refer to God’s conception of human individuals in God’s eternal plan, rather than humans in

⁸ Kathryn Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114.

⁹ *KD* II/2, 136; ET 127.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

created actuality. His definition of *homo lapsus* as humanity “fallen in virtue of... human action” reflects his misunderstanding that this term refers to humanity that has *actually* committed the act of sin in time—this will become clearer anon.

In fact, Barth has not recognised that both lapsarian positions speak of God’s decrees as strictly eternal, hence his critique that infralapsarians “do not take into account the deity of the eternal God, and the possibility that with Him the last could actually be the first.”¹²

This is a misinterpretation of Reformed orthodoxy that probably resulted from Barth’s misreading of Heppé and Turretin. Some supralapsarians have argued that in God’s eternal intention double predestination must logically precede the decrees of creation and the fall, because, as Heppé and Turretin rightly report, “what is last in occurrence is first in intention.”¹³ However, Barth wrongly infers from Heppé and Turretin that infralapsarians reject “the possibility that with [God] the last could actually be the first.” Note that such generalisation is fallacious in the first place—not all supra- and infralapsarians have appealed to the intention-occurrence argument. More importantly, Barth has not given an example of an infralapsarian who denies that with God “the last could actually be the first.” The truth is that some infralapsarians have critiqued the view of some supralapsarians that with God “the last in execution was *always* the first in intention,” but this is not to deny that “the last could be the first” (i.e., not denying the pre-temporal simultaneity of the decrees).¹⁴

Barth’s misunderstanding leads him to think that infralapsarians fail to take into account the eternity of God’s decrees. Thus Barth mistakenly thinks that the

¹² Ibid., 146; ET 135f.

¹³ Heinrich Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Wakeman, 2010), 157. Theodore Beza is most well known for having advanced this argument, which is adopted by William Perkins. See Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 121. Cf. Turretin’s critique in *Institutes* I, 348.

¹⁴ This is Jonathan Edwards’s refutation of supralapsarianism. See John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* 2 (Sanford: Ligonier, 1992), 161.

supralapsarian *homo creabilis/labilis* refers to humanity whose creation and fall are not yet actualised in time, and that the infralapsarian *homo creatus/lapsus* designates humanity actually created and fallen. To be sure, Barth, quoting Bucanus from Heppé, does define supralapsarianism in terms of God's eternal will:

What is the decree of predestination? Whereby God, determining the purpose for which God would create humans, before God created them, has according to God's power and sheer good will decreed to extend God's own glory, that some of them should be vessels and examples of God's benevolence and mercy, but others vessels and matters [*vasa et ὑποκειμένα*] for God's wrath... And this decree is such as that it sets forth the causes of the execution, while by no means dependent thereupon.¹⁵

Of course, this definition is correct—it is cited from primary sources—but when taken out of context it lacks a clear emphasis on the strict distinction between God's eternal plan and the historical execution of that plan, a distinction crucial to a correct understanding of Reformed-orthodox lapsarianism. In fact, Barth commits the error of confusing God's eternal plan and its historical execution in his reading of the Lapsarian Controversy, thinking that infralapsarianism portrays God as having executed the decrees of creation and the fall before proceeding to issue forth election-reprobation. Thus Barth on infralapsarianism:

The permitting of evil was not thought of as a means which God willed and posited in execution of His election and rejecting, but rather as a means of which He *actually made use* in this activity... He *then made use of* the creation and the fall of man, *acting on* the man created by His will and fallen in accordance with it, according to the measure of this twofold predestination.¹⁶

This passage shows that on Barth's misunderstanding, infralapsarianism describes election-reprobation as *making use* of "the man created by His will and fallen in accordance with it" (i.e., humanity as actually created and fallen). That is, election and reprobation presuppose not only God's eternal decrees of creation and the fall, but also

¹⁵ *KD* II/2, 137; ET 128. The quote is originally in Latin. Translation mine.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149; ET 138. Emphases mine.

God's actual execution of these decrees. In this serious misinterpretation, Barth fails to recognise that for infralapsarians just as supralapsarians, all God's *eternal* decrees are issued *simultaneously*, and are thus independent of historical actuality.

This leads to Barth's misunderstanding of the term *homo labilis* as God's pre-temporal conception of humanity as created and fallen, but not yet existent in actual history: "What Supralapsarianism was trying to say was that in the beginning of all things, in the eternal purpose of God before the world and before history, there was the electing God and elected man, the merciful and just God, and over against that God from all eternity *homo labilis*, man *sinful and lost*."¹⁷ As shown in the last chapter, however, this description of God's pre-temporal conception of humanity as "sinful and lost" is really the definition of *homo lapsus* in Reformed orthodoxy.

Meanwhile, Barth defines *homo creatus et lapsus* as humanity actually created and fallen in history. On this misinterpretation, the infralapsarian thesis that God "made the choice from all eternity" to elect/reject *homo creatus et lapsus* is taken to mean that the *obiectum praedestinationis* is within the sphere of created actuality.¹⁸ Thus Barth comments that supralapsarianism differs from infralapsarianism in that supralapsarians do not present "God's overruling of evil... as a *later and additional struggle* in which God is dealing with a *new and to some extent disruptive feature* in His original plan."¹⁹

Barth thinks that the same cannot be said of infralapsarianism, according to which "predestination has to do with a being which has already been raised from non-being to being. It has to do with an already existent being, and with a specific form of the existence of this being."²⁰ Here Barth is paraphrasing passages found in Heppe and Turretin (*Institutes*, Fourth Topic, Section IX), but seems to have been misled by their

¹⁷ Ibid., 154; ET 143. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ Ibid., 141; ET 131.

¹⁹ Ibid., 137; ET 128f. Emphases mine.

²⁰ Ibid., 141; ET 130f.

statements, which can be ambiguous when taken out of context. For instance, Heppe quotes Leonard van Rijssen's (ca. 1636-1700) infralapsarian argument that "*non ens* cannot be the object of predestination, for predestination does not make its object, like creation, but supposes it. But *homo creabilis vel labilis* is *non ens*, because by creation he was brought from non-being into being."²¹ What is ambiguous about this passage when taken out of context, just as in a similar passage from Turretin as aforementioned, is that it has not clarified that *homo creabilis vel labilis* is non-being *in God's mind* alone, and *homo creatus et lapsus* is a concrete being also *in God's mind* alone rather than in created actuality.

That the *obiectum praedestinationis* exists in God's mind alone is made clear in a passage Heppe quotes from Swiss Reformed-orthodox infralapsarian Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620-1667) in the paragraph just preceding the quote above: "The object [of predestination] is the human race to be created and about to fall in Adam or, *considered in the mind of God predestinating*, as created, fallen and corrupted by original sin."²² That is, for infralapsarians, the *obiectum praedestinationis* is created and fallen only as "considered in the mind of God predestinating," but not in historical actuality.

Had Barth paid closer attention to Heppe, he might have changed the way he describes the infralapsarian thesis: "[God] made that choice [of election/reprobation] from all eternity, *but* with reference to man as already created and fallen."²³ The conjunction "but" here can be taken to imply that "man as already created and fallen" refers not to God's eternal conception of fallen humankind, but to God's predestining decision with reference to humans in historical actuality.

The following description of infralapsarianism shows that this is indeed Barth's misinterpretation: "before God could decide in mercy and justice, there must have been a

²¹ Heppe, *Dogmatics*, 159.

²² *Ibid.*, 158.

²³ *KD* II/2, 141; ET 131. Emphasis mine.

corresponding constitution of individuals and an *actualisation of their existence*.”²⁴

Therefore, Barth makes the mistake of thinking that infralapsarianism describes election-reprobation as, in Kathryn Tanner’s words, “a reaction to previous events in the history of God’s relations with us.”²⁵ Barth does not recognise that supra- and infralapsarians alike speak of God’s decrees as strictly *eternal* and independent of created actuality.

The Ordo Decretorum: Barth’s Misinterpretation

Another aspect of Barth’s misinterpretation is one shared among other nineteenth-century dogmatists, namely, that the *ordo decretorum* is primarily, if not exclusively, a chain of final (teleological) causes. With this misunderstanding, Herman Bavinck, whose *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* served as an important source of Barth’s understanding of Reformed orthodoxy during the latter’s first semester at the University of Göttingen,²⁶ critiques both supra- and infralapsarianism: “the counsel of God and the cosmic history that corresponds to it must not be pictured exclusively—as infra- and supralapsarianism did—as a single straight line describing relations only of before and after, cause and effect, means and end.”²⁷ On this misunderstanding Bavinck complains about infralapsarianism:

[If] in the divine consciousness the decree of reprobation did not occur until after the decree to permit sin, the question inevitably arises: ...why did God, by an act of efficacious permission, foreordain the fall? Infralapsarianism has no answer to this question other than God’s good pleasure... Reprobation cannot be explained as an act of divine justice, for the first sinful act at any rate was permitted by God’s sovereignty.²⁸

Barth critiques infralapsarianism on the same misunderstanding: “Unlike the

²⁴ Ibid., 145; ET 135. Emphases mine.

²⁵ Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” 114.

²⁶ Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 337.

²⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* II, 390ff.

²⁸ Ibid., 385.

Supralapsarian... the Infralapsarian does not think that he has any exact knowledge... of the *reasons* for the divine decree in respect of creation and the fall. On the contrary, he holds that the *reasons* for this decree are ultimately unknown and unknowable.”²⁹

This is another instance where Barth not only relies on Heppes’s inadequate report, but also misses some important passages in Heppes that might have helped to correct Barth’s misunderstanding. Heppes quotes the supralapsarians Amandus Polanus and Johann Alsted: “...the *causa efficiens primaria* [primary efficient cause] is God Himself, the *causa προηγουμαι* [antecedent cause] is God’s free will, i.e., the *decretum Dei absolutum* [absolute divine decree, referring to the decree that divides humanity into elects and reprobates]... Its *finis summus* [chief end] is the *Gloria Dei*, its *finis subordinatus* [subordinate end] is the *salus electorum* [salvation of the elect]. Its *effectus* [effect] are the creation of intelligent beings and the permission of sin.”³⁰ Here, the *ordo* is obviously not presented as merely a linear chain of teleological causes.

The seventeenth-century infralapsarian John Owen makes clear that although the “first spring or original [of the eternal counsels of God] was in the divine will and wisdom alone” such that “no reason can be given, no cause be assigned, of these counsels, but the will of God alone,” “the *design* of their accomplishment was laid in the person of the Son alone. As he was the essential wisdom of God, all things were at first created by him. But upon a prospect of the ruin of all by sin, God would in and by him—as he was fore-ordained to be incarnate—restore all things.”³¹ What Owen means is that when the infralapsarian *ordo* is understood as a chain of final causality, the origin of the decrees (i.e., God’s ultimate purpose) would be unknowable, but the way all the decrees are centred upon God’s works in Christ reveals that predestination is designed to manifest God’s self-giving glory in the incarnate Son.

²⁹ *KD* II/2, 138; ET 129. Emphases mine.

³⁰ Heppes, *Dogmatics*, 155.

³¹ John Owen, *The Person of Christ*, in *Works* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Banner of Truth, 1991), 62.

Had Barth understood that the *ordo decretorum* varies from one Reformed-orthodox theologian to another, and that in many cases it is not simply a linear teleological order, he might have reconsidered his comment that supralapsarians ascribe teleological priority to double predestination, and “to this proper divine will and decree of God everything else that God wills is subordinate, as an interrelated means to its accomplishment,”³² but “the same cannot be said of Infralapsarianism.”³³ Barth thinks that no unifying purpose can be found in the infralapsarian *ordo* except an arbitrary good pleasure of God prior to the decree of creation that stands at the top of a chain of means and ends. In light of our foregoing discussions, Barth’s opinion about the infralapsarian *ordo* is somewhat of an over-generalisation.

Recall that Barth’s primary incentive in adopting a “purified supralapsarianism” is that supralapsarianism, as he understands it, allows for a Christocentric re-interpretation in which election-in-Christ is the divine decree to which everything else that God wills is subordinate. In other words, Barth calls his doctrine of election “supralapsarian” because according to it, there is no other will of God above, behind, or aside from God’s will in Christ. However, as we have seen from Owen’s case, infralapsarianism does not exclude such a Christocentric rendition. On this view, Barth’s Christocentric incentive to describe election-in-Christ as the ground and purpose of all divine activity does not necessarily make him a supralapsarian, even though his position in this respect is closer to the majority of supralapsarians.

Reconsidering Edwin van Driel’s Supralapsarian Reading of Barth

Though Barth’s avowed “supralapsarianism” has received frequent mention in the secondary literature since his own time, a clear explanation or proper definition of the

³² Ibid., 128.

³³ Ibid., 143.

term has not been offered until recently by Edwin van Driel.³⁴ Most authors speak of Barth's "supralapsarianism" with his own misnomer. Tanner, for example, describes Barth as "supralapsarian" in the sense that "God's decision to be for us in Jesus is not a reaction to previous events in the history of God's relations with us, but has a reality in its own right preceding the whole of that history."³⁵ Note that this description applies to Reformed-orthodox supra- and infralapsarian alike.

In van Driel's book, clear and accurate definitions of the terms are offered. Yet, curiously, with his correct definitions, van Driel describes Barth as a supralapsarian. Van Driel spells out his interpretation of Barth's formulation of election-incarnation as *supra-lapsum*: "God's electing act is supralapsarian in the twofold sense of the word..., both predestinarian and Christological."³⁶ Van Driel gives accurate and precise definitions of supra- and infralapsarian Christology: "We can call such a Christology *infralapsarian*: the divine will to become incarnate logically follows (*infra*, after) the divine will to allow sin (*lapsus*, fall)... By contrast..., we can call such an understanding of the incarnation *supralapsarian*: the divine will to become incarnate logically precedes (*supra*, before) the divine will to allow sin."³⁷ To describe Barth as a supralapsarian in both the Christological and predestinarian senses implies that for Barth, although one purpose of election-incarnation is *de facto* "to take care of the problem of human sin," in electing to be *pro nobis* "God had motives to become incarnate that were not contingent upon sin: a desire to be with human beings, to fulfil their longing for God's presence, to be available to them in a way that is so central to human existence: embodiment."³⁸

Though van Driel's definitions of predestinarian and Christological supra- and

³⁴ Edwin van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁵ Tanner, "Creation and Providence," 114.

³⁶ Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

infralapsarianism are accurate, labelling Barth as a supralapsarian according to these definitions places van Driel at odds with mainstream scholarly understandings of Barth. First, as R. Scott Rodin observes, “to hold to such a distinction between incarnation and atonement, between the assuming of human essence and the assuming of sinful humanity, is to misread Barth’s intentions. Barth never sees God as envisaging a creation which would be fulfilled by incarnation alone.”³⁹ George Hunsinger also points out that “whether God would have become incarnate even if the world had not fallen into sin was... a question that... Barth... regarded... as speculative and unanswerable.”⁴⁰

Second, in contending for a supralapsarian reading of Barth, van Driel repeatedly appeals to Barth’s exegesis of John 1:1, which Barth takes to mean that the incarnate Word is at the beginning of all God’s works.⁴¹ Yet, Barth’s exegesis here says precious little to support van Driel’s supralapsarian interpretation. It is true, as Hunsinger observes, that Barth thinks “the incarnation resolves a plight [of creation] logically independent of sin.”⁴² However, according to Barth’s exegesis of John 1:14 (“the Word became flesh...”), which van Driel ignores, “the message of Christmas *already includes within itself* the message of Good Friday. For ‘all flesh is as grass.’ The election of the man Jesus means, then, that a wrath is kindled, a sentence pronounced and finally executed, a rejection actualised... From all eternity judgment has been foreseen.”⁴³ Clearly, for Barth, what stands “at the beginning” is not an election-incarnation independent of God’s consideration of humanity’s sin.

Sure enough, for Barth, while election-in-Christ presupposes humanity’s sin, the converse also holds true. Yet, Barth’s understanding that sin presupposes election-incarnation and vice versa does not make him both supralapsarian and

³⁹ R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 87.

⁴⁰ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 204.

⁴¹ Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 65ff. Cf. *KD II/2*, 101; ET 94.

⁴² Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 204.

⁴³ *KD II/2*, 131; ET 122.

infralapsarian, as it were, for the supralapsarian thesis, in both the predestinarian and Christological senses, entails that election-incarnation does *not* presuppose sin.

Third, van Driel asserts that for Barth, “the ontological and epistemic principles that govern divine revelation are not a result of sin, but given with the nature of Creator and creation. Incarnation, as the necessary means of divine self-disclosure, is therefore a supralapsarian event...”⁴⁴ In other words, van Driel thinks that according to Barth, divine self-revelation in election-incarnation is necessary even for unfallen humanity, if humanity is to participate in God’s self-knowledge and thus come to true knowledge of God. This contradicts Barth’s explicit position since *Romans* I (published 1919). As we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, in both his *Romans* I (1915-19) and II (1920-21) phases as well as the Göttingen-Münster period (1921-30), Barth states that the paradisiacal human was immediate to God and thus in need of no revelation in the form of the incarnation, and that revelation as a dialectic of divine self-veiling and unveiling is predicated upon the sin of humankind.⁴⁵ This is a position to which Barth would continue to hold in *CD* I/1, albeit with some modifications (see Chapter 5). Even in *CD* IV/1 (see Chapter 9), Barth would still state that it was “the disruption of the relationship between God and man which made this event [of the incarnation] necessary and which was overcome by this event.”⁴⁶

Thus, when van Driel defines the two lapsarian positions correctly and identifies Barth as supralapsarian, his interpretation of Barth stands at odds with the majority of mainstream Barth scholars. David Ford, for instance, states that “Barth... understands election through the events of the story. Election is to suffering at Golgotha, where Jesus substituted for men and revealed the divine wrath in his suffering... The other side of election is the overcoming of evil and death... Evil is there and so must have been

⁴⁴ Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 77.

⁴⁵ *Römerbrief* II, 254; ET 251. *Unterricht* I, 190; ET 155.

⁴⁶ *KD* IV/1, 395f; ET 359.

permitted by God, but its function is to occasion the cross.”⁴⁷ Rodin also describes Barth’s lapsarian thinking as such: “God did not positively will the Fall..., but in His eternal election of Jesus Christ as *homo labilis* [whereby Barth actually means *homo lapsus*], the Fall is fully assumed as the state of humanity.”⁴⁸ Bruce McCormack, too, comments on Barth’s covenant theology: “It must be emphasized that the covenant is with *sinful man*. Not the ‘neutral’ human who lives in a paradisiacal situation but the sinful human is the object of God’s electing grace.”⁴⁹ These authors might not have described Barth in terms of seventeenth-century definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism, but their statements clearly point out that for Barth, the *obiectum praedestinationis* is “sinful human” (*homo lapsus*).

In fact, in an earlier article wherein van Driel does not refer to lapsarianism explicitly, he already intimates a supralapsarian reading of Barth, asserting that in Barth’s theology, election is “followed by creation.”⁵⁰ Against McCormack’s so-called “revisionist” (a label that McCormack himself would reject)⁵¹ interpretation of Barth, which claims that election-incarnation constituted God’s Triune Being, van Driel offers a so-called “traditionalist” (namely, God is necessarily Triune, and election-incarnation logically follows the Trinity) reading of Barth with a supralapsarian *ordo*:

...we have..., on Barth’s side, as the starting point God’s Trinitarian nature, with the Trinitarian processions being natural and necessary...; followed by the decree of election, which is not part of God’s nature, but dependent on the divine will, and contingent, since God could have been God without being the God of election; followed by creation, also voluntary and contingent.⁵²

⁴⁷ David Ford, *Barth and God’s Story* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1985), 75.

⁴⁸ Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, 113.

⁴⁹ Bruce McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness,” in Bruce McCormack, ed., *Justification in Perspective: Historical Development and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 191. Italics original.

⁵⁰ Edwin van Driel, “Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 53.

⁵¹ See Bruce McCormack, “Election and the Trinity, Theses in Response to George Hunsinger,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010): 204.

⁵² Van Driel, “Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ,” 53.

After McCormack's rejoinder to van Driel,⁵³ Hunsinger published an article to challenge McCormack's view.⁵⁴ Although Hunsinger agrees with van Driel's understanding that Barth sees election as presupposing the Trinity, he disagrees with van Driel's assertion that Barth sees creation as presupposing election. Hunsinger states: "[The tri-personal God] would exist whether the world had been created or not; [election] presupposes the creation and fall of the world."⁵⁵ Here Hunsinger appears to be challenging van Driel's supralapsarian reading of Barth and describing Barth as basically an infralapsarian in the Reformed-orthodox sense of the word, though Hunsinger himself might not hold to seventeenth-century definitions of the term.

In fact, even in Barth's excursus on the Lapsarian Controversy where he develops what he calls a "purified supralapsarianism," he actually reveals himself to be basically infralapsarian: "It is God's will that *elected man* should repudiate what He repudiates... God does not will and affirm evil and the fall..., but for the sake of the fullness of His glory, for the sake of the completeness of His covenant with man..., He wills and affirms this man *as sinful man*..., as the one foreordained to utter the same No *and thus* to corroborate the divine Yes."⁵⁶ Here, the italics that I have added show that (1) Barth thinks of the *obiectum praedestinationis* as "sinful man," and (2) election proper (the "Yes") presupposes God's "No" to sin. In short, Barth's "purified supralapsarianism" is actually closer to infralapsarianism. Barth describes his lapsarianism as "purified" because, as we shall see in Chapter 7, he rejects the traditional lapsarian assumptions that humanity's sin and the occurrence of evil are decreed by God, and that double predestination is a *decretum absolutum* (absolute decree) whereby humanity is inflexibly

⁵³ Bruce McCormack, "Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. Van Driel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 62ff.

⁵⁴ George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 179ff.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵⁶ *KD* II/2, 152; ET 141. Emphases mine.

divided into elect and reprobate.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on Barth's Lapsarian excursus in *CD* §33. I have argued that Barth's misunderstandings of supra- and infralapsarianism lie in his erroneous definitions of the terms *homo labilis* and *homo lapsus*. Barth thinks that *homo labilis* refers to God's conception of sinful humanity in God's eternal plan before the actual creation of the world, while *homo lapsus* refers to humanity actually created and fallen in history. However, the fact is that for supra- and infralapsarians alike, the *obiectum praedestinationis* is strictly within God's eternal plan logically prior to actual human existence and activity. I have shown that what Barth calls "supralapsarianism" is in fact infralapsarianism, and that his own doctrine of election is actually closer to infralapsarian, basically agreeing with infralapsarian position that the *obiectum praedestinationis* is fallen humanity.

In this regard, Barth's doctrine of election developed from 1936-42 may be described as *basically* infralapsarian. It is not *simply* infralapsarian because its emphasis on the teleological priority of election-in-Christ is closer to supralapsarianism, though this emphasis is not excluded by infralapsarianism. Even with regard to the *obiectum praedestinationis*, Barth is not *simply* infralapsarian, because he identifies Christ, who is without sin in himself, as the proper object of election; sinful humanity becomes the object of election only by partaking of Christ.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I will show that Barth had already adopted the same erroneous definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism in *Romans II* and *The Göttingen Dogmatics*. What I have yet to show is how Barth's predestinarian and Christological lapsarianism evolved from *Romans II* (1920-21) to *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (1936). Additionally, I have

yet to give a fuller exposition of Barth's Christological doctrine of election set forth in *CD II/2*, and explain why in that particular Christological context he finds it important to "purify" and adopt a lapsarian position. I now proceed to Part II for these tasks.

Part II

Chapter 3

Römerbrief II (1920-21): Lapsarianism in the “Impossible Possibility” Dialectic

The aim of this chapter is to examine Barth’s lapsarian tendencies in Christology and predestination as set forth in *Romans II* (published 1922). I will show that in this phase of his development, Barth’s Christology is moving towards an infralapsarian understanding while his formulation of predestination may be described as inconsistently supralapsarian.

Historical Introduction

The reason for my choice to begin with *Romans II* is simple: this is the first major work in which Barth explicitly engages with the lapsarian problem and takes an avowedly supralapsarian position.¹ To be sure, at this point, Barth, writing in Safenwil during his final year (October 1920-October 1921) of parish ministry, was not yet acquainted with specific arguments set forth by various participants in the Lapsarian Controversy, nor was he yet seriously reflecting upon what he perceived as strengths and inadequacies in confessional Reformed theology. Whilst Barth would later attempt to find his own place in the Reformed tradition, wrestling with the theologies of Calvin, Zwingli, and the classical Reformed Confessions during his Göttingen-Münster phase (1921-30), the main struggle for Barth in his last Safenwil year was with over a century of Protestant theology dominated and challenged by Immanuel Kant.

(Neo-)Kantian Presuppositions

Bruce McCormack summarises the “fundamental problem being addressed by Barth

¹ *Römerbrief II*, 163; ET 172.

throughout the phase of *Romans II*”: “how can God make Himself known to human beings without ceasing—at any point in the process of Self-communication—to be the *Subject* of revelation?”² This central theological concern is in line with an earlier phase of Barth’s theological development in Safenwil (1915-18) during which *Romans I* (published 1919) was written, where “Barth everywhere presupposed: 1. The validity of Kant’s epistemology (where it touched upon knowledge of empirical reality), and 2. The success of Kant’s critique of metaphysics.”³

As a note of clarification, Barth’s appropriation of Kant has been a debated subject in the secondary literature. Neo-orthodox interpreters like T. F. Torrance tend to downplay Kant’s influence on Barth.⁴ Those who acknowledge Barth’s reliance on Kant have debated over whether Barth is closer to Marburg neo-Kantianism or classical Kantianism.⁵ As I see it, Clifford Anderson is right that while “Barth’s transcendental argument was more neo-Kantian than straightforwardly Kantian,” Barth’s appropriation of Kant is unique and not identical to any other version of Kantianism than his own.⁶

However, I disagree with Anderson’s claim that in *Romans II* Barth completely rejected the category of religious experience and that it was not until *CD I/1* that he “came... to see his interpretation of experience in the *Romans* commentary as flawed.”⁷ Anderson is not entirely accurate that in *Romans II* “there is no experience of sanctification.”⁸ Sure enough, “there is only experience of death.”⁹ Yet, death is experienced as grace since, as Barth puts it in *Romans II*, “I am veritably [*in der Tat*] dead

² Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 207.

³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴ T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), 99.

⁵ E.g., Johann Lohmann, *Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus* (Belin: de Gruyter, 1995).

⁶ Clifford Anderson, “A Theology of Experience? Karl Barth and the Transcendental Argument,” in B. McCormack and C. Anderson, eds., *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 94.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹ *Ibid.*

to sin.”¹⁰

John Webster has been instrumental in repudiating the popular view that *Romans II* leaves no room for theological ethics as a category of historical human action. Webster shows that in *Romans II*, “the imperative movement of grace into human history and activity” is the basis whereupon the impossibility of the “new human being and action” becomes possible in the here-and-now.¹¹ What Barth does in *Romans II* is not to deduce the possibility of the new life from veritable experiences, but rather transcendently to presuppose divine grace and activity in order to explicate the matter-of-fact that the new life, which is and remains impossible in the here-and-now, becomes veritably possible.

In *GD*, Barth would come to call his appropriation of this (neo-)Kantian transcendental argument a “construction *a posteriori*.”¹² While he does not use this term in *Romans II*, I will show that he employs a transcendental argument to interpret the veritability of the new life and the experience of death (KRISIS) as grace by presupposing the impossible possibility of Christ’s resurrection.

Kierkegaard

Unquestionably, in *Romans II* Barth remains well within Kant’s epistemological boundaries. As McCormack puts it, “that the knowledge of God given in revelation was a problem at all was, in Barth’s view, because of two factors: the limits of human knowing on the one side, and divine election on the other.”¹³

This basically (neo-)Kantian “problem” becomes deeply lapsarian when Barth adds the crucial element of human fallenness to the ontological and epistemological gulf between God and humanity. The “limits of human knowing” whereof McCormack speaks

¹⁰ *Römerbrief II*, 191; ET 196.

¹¹ John Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (London: Continuum, 1998), 29.

¹² *Unterricht I*, 185; ET 151.

¹³ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 207.

describes not only the (neo-)Kantian idea of the “bounds of bare reason.” It is more sharply a Kierkegaardian notion of an “infinite qualitative difference” between God and humanity, which involves a profound understanding of the noetic effects of sin.

In 1963 Barth recounts: “[Kierkegaard] only entered my thinking seriously, and more extensively, in 1919, at the critical turning-point between the first and second editions of my *Romans*... What we found particularly attractive, delightful and instructive was his inexorable criticism... We saw him using it to attack all speculation which wiped out the infinite qualitative difference between God and man.”¹⁴

For the Barth of *Romans II*, there had in fact been a prelapsarian state of humanity’s “life of immediacy [with God]” (“*das unmittelbare Leben*”),¹⁵ which he calls the “Origin” (“*Ursprung*”) in *Romans I*, a key term that he continues to use in *Romans II*.¹⁶ This is a position that Barth would continue to hold in *GD*, in which he says that humanity was once “immediate to God.”¹⁷ In *Romans II*, Barth posits an *Ursprung* from which humanity has fallen, and identifies human fallenness as the primary problem for humanity’s knowledge of God in a way akin to Kierkegaard’s view of the noetic effects of sin: sin makes revelation subjectively impossible on the human side.¹⁸

The dialectic of impossibility and possibility in *Romans II*, which relies heavily on Kierkegaard, is Barth’s way of describing how God’s election ultimately overcomes human sin for the sake of divine self-revelation. It is as such deeply lapsarian: it addresses the relations between predestination—in fact double predestination—and human fallenness. Yet, the matter is not so simple. Rather, the “impossible possibility” dialectic would be played out layer by layer through multiple impossibilities on the human side,

¹⁴ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1975), 116.

¹⁵ *Römerbrief II*, 254; ET 251. Note: ET renders “direct union with God.”

¹⁶ *Römerbrief I*, 45.

¹⁷ *Unterricht I*, 190 (“*unmittelbar zu Gott*”); ET 155.

¹⁸ For a discussion of Kierkegaard’s view of sin as obstacle for knowing God, see Joel Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope and Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 101ff.

each overcome—negated—by a divine act of *Aufhebung*.

In the rest of this chapter, I shall show how the “impossible possibility” dialectic undergirds and holds together Barth’s overall theological framework in *Romans II*. The basis of the “impossible possibility” dialectic in *Romans II* is the axiom, “Impossible with man; possible with God!”¹⁹ I shall show that with this central dialectic in *Romans II*, Barth develops a Christology moving in the direction of infralapsarianism, and a basically supralapsarian doctrine of election that carries certain infralapsarian elements.

The “Impossible Possibility” Dialectic as Central Theme of *Romans II*

Interestingly, the “impossible possibility” dialectic in *Romans II* has not received its due attention in the secondary literature. Aside from Webster who briefly pinpoints “the possibility of impossibility” as key to understanding “the imperative movement of grace into human history and activity” in *Romans II*, few have noted the centrality of this dialectic in the commentary.²⁰

In the chapter on *Romans II* in McCormack’s magnum opus, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, the author identifies several dialectical themes such as the Adam-Christ dialectic and the dialectic of veiling and unveiling that tie together Barth’s complex and mosaic commentary that might otherwise appear fragmentary.²¹ Though McCormack does not give particular attention to the “impossible possibility” dialectic in *Romans II*, his own exposition of the commentary continually refers to it.²²

It is little exaggeration on my part to say that the “impossible possibility” is the most dominating dialectic in *Romans II*. For instance, the Adam-Christ dialectic occupies centre stage only in Chapter 5 of *Romans II*, and receives no mention in the rest of the

¹⁹ *Römerbrief II*, 55; ET 75. See Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27.

²⁰ Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 29. Also see 27ff.

²¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 266ff.

²² *Ibid.*, 245ff.

commentary except a few instances in Chapters 6 and 7. The total occurrence of the name Adam in the whole commentary is 54 times, with 43 of those in Chapter 5. In comparison, the word “possibility” (*Möglichkeit*) in all its grammatical declensions appears 591 times in the German edition that comprises 567 pages, pervading virtually every chapter and almost every single section. This number does not include the adjectival form of the same word, which totals to 117 occurrences. Similarly, the adjective “impossible” appears 157 times in the German edition, and the noun “impossibility” 57 times.²³ In nearly all these occurrences, the words “impossible” and “possible” in various grammatical forms appear in the context of the “impossible possibility” dialectic. The synthesis of the two terms of the dialectic, the “impossible possibility” (*die unmögliche Möglichkeit*), appears 25 times in *Romans II*, in contrast to only once in the major dogmatic opus of the next phase of Barth’s development, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*.²⁴

The “impossible possibility” dialectic not only marks one chief distinction between *Romans II* and Barth’s major works in dogmatic cycles thereafter; that the “impossible possibility” was also a new way of thinking for Barth in *Romans II* is evident from the fact that in *Romans I* (578 pages) the word “possibility” occurs only 98 times—without any technical or special meaning—and the term “impossible possibility” is not used at all. This contrast between *Romans I* and *II* is indicative of two points. First, the two terms of the “impossible possibility” dialectic appear so frequently in *Romans II* not because of Barth’s habitual writing style in those years—randomly frequent usage of these two words would indeed make the style strange. Rather, in *Romans II*, these words really take on technical meanings and appear within the context of the dialectic. Second, whilst the “impossible possibility” dialectic is only latent in *Romans I*, it becomes the driving engine of Barth’s thought in *Romans II*. In a word, to appreciate the uniqueness of this

²³ These word counts are made possible by the search function on the Karl Barth Digital Library: <http://solomon.dkbl.alexanderstreet.com/>.

²⁴ *Unterricht II*, 400; ET 164.

commentary among the successive phases of Barth's theological development, it is important to understand the central significance of the "impossible possibility" dialectic in *Romans II*.

Grasping the centrality of the "impossible possibility" dialectic is also important for understanding Barth's treatment of the lapsarian problem in *Romans II*. For the Barth of *Romans II*, whether revelation as the event of faith that recognises Christ's resurrection through His death—an event impossible in this world because of its fallenness—becomes a possibility ultimately hinges upon God's decision in double predestination. To understand how Barth formulates his understanding of double predestination as God's act to overcome humankind's sin as well as the noetic and moral effects thereof, it is important to understand the role that the notion of sin plays in the overall framework of Barth's "impossible possibility" dialectic, as well as how each human impossibility is sublated by a divine act. Conversely, an understanding of Barth's predestinarian-lapsarian position in *Romans II* would shed light on its overall theological framework, predicated upon the "impossible possibility" dialectic.

Kierkegaard and the "Impossible Possibility"

Before proceeding to an exposition of *Romans II*, it is worth noting that Kierkegaard's discourses on the notion of "possibility" played a major role in Barth's thinking at this stage of his theological development.

McCormack believes that "there is no good reason to think that [Barth] read the *Philosophical Fragments* or *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*—at least not in this period before the publication of *Romans II*."²⁵ However, it seems to me hardly a coincidence that the aforementioned axiom of Barth's "impossible possibility" dialectic in

²⁵ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 236. McCormack's view has been challenged by Sean Turchin, *Examining the Primary Influence on Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans* (MARS Thesis, Liberty University, 2008), 5, as well as his Ph.D. thesis at Edinburgh University.

Romans II, “Impossible with man; possible with God,”²⁶ should resonate with what Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard’s *Sickness Unto Death* (1849), identifies as “the decisive thing” for “true hope and true despair”: “that for God all things are possible.”²⁷ Anti-Climacus writes: “the decisive affirmation comes only when a man is brought to the utmost extremity, so that humanly speaking no possibility exists. Then the question is whether he will believe that for God all things are possible—that is to say, whether he will believe.”²⁸

Just as in *Romans* II Barth speaks of religion as the “summit of human possibility” that can never reach God (see below),²⁹ Anti-Climacus states: “Sometimes the inventiveness of a human imagination suffices to procure possibility, but in the last resort, that is, when the point is to believe, the only help is this, *that for God all things are possible*.”³⁰ Similarly, “salvation is humanly speaking the most impossible thing of all; but for God all things are possible! This is the fight of faith, which fights madly for possibility.”³¹ As we shall see, Anti-Climacus’ formulations of faith and salvation in terms of human impossibility and divine possibility find deep echoes in *Romans* II.

In Kierkegaard’s writings, Anti-Climacus’ take on possibility is complementary to that of Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard’s other pseudonym, set forth in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). In the short section on possibility, Climacus comments on the paradox of the incarnation: “the historical is that the god, the eternal, has come about at a definite moment in time as a particular human being. The special feature of the historical in this case, that it is not something plainly historical but something that can have become historical only against its own nature, has ushered speculation into a

²⁶ *Römerbrief* II, 55; ET 75.

²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Radford: Wilder, 2008), 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹ *Römerbrief* II, 256; ET 252.

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 30. Emphasis mine.

³¹ *Ibid.*

delightful illusion.”³²

Though Barth’s Christology in *Romans* II consistently avoids the incarnation, his understanding of Christ’s resurrection as the locus of revelation that is non-historical and supra-historical certainly echoes Kierkegaard’s view here that the paradox of Christianity is “not something plainly historical but something that can have become historical only against its own nature.”

For Climacus, this conviction implies that the paradox of Christianity would appear “absurd” to human reason and perception.³³ Joel Rasmussen explains Kierkegaard’s use of the word “absurd”: “while the more colloquial meaning of ‘absurd’ as ‘foolish’ and ‘ridiculous’ is explicit as regards the perspective of the understanding..., the language of the larger interchange suggests that Climacus has orchestrated the entire exchange in such a way as to pun on ‘the absurd’ as the understanding’s unheeding deafness to the paradox.”³⁴

Asserting that the absolute paradox cannot be directly understood, Climacus proceeds to discuss the notion of possibility.³⁵ Unlike Anti-Climacus who talks about impossibilities in terms of human limitations and possibilities in terms of divine omnipotence (“for God all things are possible”), by “possibility” Climacus always refers to what humans can do within the limitations of human capabilities. Barth’s “impossible possibility” dialectic would pick up on the usage of both Climacus and Anti-Climacus. For instance, Barth would speak of philosophy and religion as human possibilities, and describe faith, justification, redemption, and revelation as human impossibilities made possible by God, for whom all things are possible.

³² Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, ed., trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 485.

³³ *Ibid.*, 488.

³⁴ Joel Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope and Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 93.

³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 488. Brackets original.

Using the term “possibility” to denote human capabilities, Climacus writes: “...*possibility as understanding* is precisely the understanding by which the step backwards is taken in which faith comes to an end.”³⁶ Climacus explains that “Christianity is the absolute paradox... precisely because it destroys a possibility (the analogy of paganism, an eternal god-becoming) as an illusion and turns it into actuality, and just this is the paradox...”³⁷

Paganism is a possibility of human imagination, in which “God can very well be fused with man.”³⁸ Yet, Climacus says that this possibility—which Barth would call the “supreme possibility” of humankind³⁹—is destroyed by the absolute paradox, namely, that the incarnation “should occur in actuality with an individual human being.”⁴⁰ In a word, for Climacus (a non-Christian!) as well as Barth, faith in the paradox of Christianity is not within the category of human possibility.

As we shall see, Kierkegaard’s discourses on “impossibility” and “possibility” are central to Barth’s dialectic in *Romans II*. For Barth, knowledge of God through Christ is humanly impossible, and it is only because all things are possible with God that faith becomes an “impossible possibility.”

Seven Impossible Possibilities

At the outset of an exposition of *Romans II* in light of the “impossible possibility” dialectic, it should be noted that whereas the later Barth, having almost completely abandoned this dialectic in the first two volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, would pick up the same rhetoric again to describe negative elements such as “nothingness” (*CD* §50), humanity’s repudiation of divine providence (*CD* §49), and the sin of unbelief (*CD* §60),

³⁶ Ibid. Emphases mine.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Römerbrief II*, 256; ET 252.

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 488.

in *Romans* II the “impossible possibility” always refers positively to God’s sovereign and gracious act that overcomes human impossibilities.

As mentioned earlier, this dialectic is built on the axiom, “Impossible with man; possible with God!”⁴¹ The “impossible” resides with humanity, but God’s act makes the impossible possible, therefore the dialectic is not a balanced paradox, but a process of *Aufhebung*: God’s grace ultimately breaks through and triumphs over human limitations. What is impossible on the human side, however, is not any human act: the acts of sin and false religion are straightforward, undialectical possibilities and actualities for humanity (contrast this to *CD* §60, where sin is described as “impossible possibility”—see Chapter 9). Rather, the “impossibilities” describe God and God’s act, which are, to be sure, not impossible in themselves, since all things are possible for God. To use the language that Barth would later adopt in Göttingen, divine revelation is an “objective possibility” that renders humanity inexcusable for not knowing God (see Chapter 4). Thus revelation is not objectively, but subjectively impossible for humanity because of the limitations of the human condition.

Seven human impossibilities found in *Romans* II may be ordered as follows:

1. Revelation: humanity’s knowledge of God
2. Revelation: humanity’s knowledge of itself as Adam
3. Revelation: humanity’s knowledge of the KRISIS
4. Redemption and Justification
5. The Resurrection of Christ
6. Faith in Christ
7. Election

⁴¹ *Römerbrief* II, 55; ET 75.

Except the first, all these impossibilities are linked as a series of God's acts, turning the previous impossibility into an impossible possibility. The first impossibility includes all the others. The main problem that Barth tackles in *Romans II* is: Given that God has revealed Godself to enable human knowledge of God, what is it that made this impossibility possible? The key to answering this question lies in the doctrine of election, as Robert Jenson rightly points out: "The doctrine of predestination is the heart of the *Commentary on Romans*, and the most succinct expression of its basic pattern."⁴²

First Impossibility: Revelation—humanity's knowledge of God

For Barth, that God has made Godself known is an unquestionable given, and the possibility and actuality of revelation is Barth's theological starting point. For instance, the Jews "were entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2), which, for Barth, means that God has made Godself known to the Jews, for whom "the unknown can as such become an *object* of knowledge."⁴³ (Keep in mind that Barth is no Marcionite!). To be sure, Barth's understanding of the possibility of revelation is not *uncritical*, as McCormack puts it.⁴⁴ That is, it does not take "its starting point in the (uncritical) assumption of the existence of an 'objectively real' empirical world which presents itself to the human knower to be known."⁴⁵ Barth, following (neo-)Kant(ianism), believes that God is unintuitable within the limits of human reason, and that it is impossible for human reason to make God an *object* of knowledge in this intuitable world without God's ceasing to be God.

To be sure, the subject-object dialectic does not occupy centre stage in Barth's

⁴² Robert Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future as Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 28.

⁴³ *Römerbrief II*, 58; ET 79. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 129f.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

writings until *GD* (see Chapter 4). In *Romans II*, what McCormack labels as the “critical” (referring to the Kantian critique of metaphysics) aspect of Barth’s thought is highlighted by the term “impossible”: divine revelation is subjectively impossible on the human side.

While the subject-object dialectic does not come to the forefront in *Romans II*, this is not to say that the notion of God’s becoming an object is completely foreign to the commentary. For instance, Barth, commenting on Romans 5:7-8, would say that “The glory of God (v. 2)... is not merely a new object; it requires a new subject. And this new subject—only by faith identical with me, a sinner!—is the new man, who with unquenchable certainty knows himself in Christ to be beloved.”⁴⁶ For Barth, the “new man” is “a new subject related to a new object”: through Christ’s resurrection God becomes the object of the faith of the “new man.”⁴⁷

What is still lacking in Barth’s subject-object dialectic in *Romans II* is the emphasis that even in becoming Object, God does not cease to be the Subject, the *I am that I am*, in the divine-human relation—this is to be found in *GD* (see Chapter 4). In *Romans II*, Barth does not mention this dialectic of God’s becoming Object without ceasing to be Subject. What Barth underscores instead is the impossibility for *fallen* human beings to intuit God as object, that is, the impossibility of the event of revelation wherein “faith is the predicate of which the new man is the subject.”⁴⁸

To be sure, for Barth, the possibility of divine revelation is, to borrow a term from *GD*, an “*a posteriori*” given (note the neo-Kantian thought form).⁴⁹ However, this is not an uncritical, straightforward possibility. Rather, it is “impossible possibility”—an impossibility made possible and yet remaining impossible in this world: “By their [the Jews’] recollection of the *impossible* they are themselves the [*a posteriori*] proof that God

⁴⁶ *Römerbrief II*, 139; ET 162.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 140; ET 163.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 125; ET 149.

⁴⁹ *Unterricht I*, 185; ET 151.

stands within the realm of *possibility*, not as *one possibility among others*, but—and this is precisely what is made clear in their case—as the *impossible possibility*.”⁵⁰

But what was it that made revelation impossible in the first place? For the Barth of *Romans II*, humans cannot know God not because they are human, but because they are sinners. Since the impossibility of revelation, the event central to which is God’s act of election, is predicated upon an understanding of the world and of human beings therein as *fallen*, the lapsarian problem (namely, whether predestination presupposes humanity’s sin) is highly pertinent to the overall theological framework of *Romans II*. As we shall see anon, in *Romans II* Barth’s treatment of eternal election carries supralapsarian tendencies, but on the temporal-actualistic level Barth sees election as presupposing humanity’s fallenness.

For now, simply note that for Barth, revelation is impossible because of humanity’s sin: “To us God is, and remains, unknown; we are, and remain, homeless in this world; sinners we are and sinners we remain.”⁵¹ Barth defines the notions of “humanity” and “history” in lapsarian rather than neutral terms: “The word ‘humanity’ means *unredeemed* men and women; the word ‘history’ implies limitation *and corruption*; the pronoun ‘I’ spells *judgment*.”⁵² Because the subject “I” is fallen and sinful, it cannot intuit God as object.

Barth follows Kant in stating that “the only world we can know is the world of time, of things, and of men.” Meanwhile, Barth distinguishes between “Nature, which is mere ‘world,’” and “Creation.”⁵³ The former comprises “what we are able to observe”; it denotes “visible history, which is only process.”⁵⁴ Creation, on the other hand, is “beyond

⁵⁰ *Römerbrief II*, 58; ET 79. Emphasis mine.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 65; ET 85.

⁵² *Ibid.* Emphases mine.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 254; ET 251.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

our observation.”⁵⁵ That “irrevocable... Moment of eternal creation” is posited in a pre-lapsarian state of humanity in which time and transience not yet plagued the human condition.⁵⁶

Barth posits a pre-temporal, non-historical, supra-historical, and yet *real* (not just metaphoric) state of Original humanity characterised by “purity and peace of that existence in which God and men were one and not two.”⁵⁷ God and humanity existed in a “unity of life,”⁵⁸ a “life of immediacy” (“*das unmittelbare Leben*”) with God.⁵⁹ In its “direct relationship with God,”⁶⁰ human knowledge of God was immediate because God was directly intuitable to humanity. This pre-lapsarian state of humanity is its “Origin” (*Ursprung*) that even today still “evokes in us a memory of our habitation with the Lord of heaven and earth.”⁶¹

However, humanity has fallen from this original state of immediacy with God. Here Barth posits the reality of an “original” fall that “lies behind time.”⁶² To be sure, he does not deny that there might have been a “historical Adam,” but for Barth, “what may have occurred to the historical Adam” is irrelevant.⁶³ The Adam that concerns us is non-historical and pre-temporal. “The Fall is not occasioned by the transgression of Adam; but the transgression was presumably its first manifest operation.”⁶⁴ It is through the non-historical, albeit real, Adam that “sin entered the world” (Rom. 5.12).⁶⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.; ET 250. Translation mine. ET omits “eternal.” Original: “Unwiderruflich vorbei ist nun der Augenblick der ewigen Schöpfung...”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.; ET 251, revised. ET renders “direct union with God.” Barth uses the word “*Unmittelbarkeit*” frequently in *Romans II*.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 159; ET 168.

⁶¹ Ibid., 73; ET 92.

⁶² Ibid., 159; ET 168.

⁶³ Ibid., 162; ET 171.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 163; ET 172.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 159; ET 168.

But “what is the world?”⁶⁶ Again, Barth distinguishes between “the world” and “Creation”: “The world is our whole existence, as it has been, and is, conditioned by sin. There has come into being a COSMOS which, because we no longer know God, is not Creation.”⁶⁷ This entrance of sin into the world is “the Fall which lies behind time.”⁶⁸ Again, “the sin which entered the world through Adam is... timeless and transcendental.”⁶⁹ By this manoeuvre Barth reacts against the historicism and psychologism of nineteenth-century Neo-Protestantism: “The entrance of sin into the world through Adam is in no strict sense an historical or psychological happening.”⁷⁰

For Barth, humanity’s fall is a real event even if it is ahistorical, and it has a real consequence beyond and effect upon history. The supra-temporal fall destroys humanity’s original immediacy to God: “In its non-concrete and non-historical aspect, sin is robbery, in the sense that it is the falling of men out of direct relationship with God, the rending asunder of the spiritual bond which unites God with the world and with men, the Creator with His Creation.”⁷¹ Thus death also enters the world, not just death in its physical manifestation, but death that “is the mark of that passing of eternity into time, which is, of course, not an occurrence in time, but a past happening in primal history.”⁷²

As a result of sin and death, “now everything is concrete and indirect.”⁷³ “Our direct union with God was destroyed.”⁷⁴ Human knowledge of God is now impossible, because objects of human knowledge can only be found within this fallen world that has passed from eternity into time, a world in which the eternal God cannot be found. In a word, divine self-revelation leading to humanity’s knowledge of God has now become

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 162; ET 171.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 159; ET 168

⁷² Ibid., 254; ET 250.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 253; ET 251.

impossible for the human subject.

The problem that Barth tries to solve at this point is not how humanity can attain to any knowledge of God—asking this wrong question was for Barth one chief reason for what he sees as the failure of nineteenth-century Neo-Protestant theology. For Barth, divine self-revelation is a given, and the question that he seeks to answer is: *given that* God has revealed Godself, how did the impossibility of human knowledge of God become “impossible possibility”? This question undergirds the following series of impossible possibilities, the last of which is election. As we shall see, since Barth’s notion of “impossible possibility” in *Romans II* is predicated upon an understanding of the world and humans as *fallen*, his treatment of double predestination inevitably has to deal with the lapsarian problem: Do election and reprobation presuppose humanity’s sin?

Second Impossibility: Revelation—humanity’s knowledge of itself as Adam

In inquiring about the possibility of divine revelation, Barth points to a Calvinistic dialectic: “Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God,” and “without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self.”⁷⁵ For Barth, the impossibility of human knowledge of God also implies that fallen humanity is unable to know itself as such, that is, as Adam. To be “in Adam” (see Rom. 5) is to be an “old, fallen, imprisoned creature.”⁷⁶ For a human person to come to faith in Christ’s resurrection—which, for the Barth of *Romans II*, is the definitive locus of divine self-revelation—it is necessary that she comes to the knowledge of Christ’s death, but no knowledge of Christ’s death can be attained without knowledge of humanity’s KRISIS, that is, the crisis of standing under God’s wrath and judgment as sinners.

Note that Barth’s use of the word “KRISIS” is not simply negative. Rather, the word

⁷⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.1-2.

⁷⁶ *Römerbrief II*, 155; ET 165.

denotes God's *negating* grace: by wrath and judgment, reprobation and punishment, God negates humanity's sin that negates God and Creation. Thus the KRISIS is the negation of negation, and it leads to election and resurrection as *Aufhebung* of the KRISIS. Thus human knowledge of this KRISIS presupposes the epistemic awakening to the fact that all sinners are "in Adam." For Barth, this epistemic awakening is impossible.

The reason is: "Adam has no existence on the plane of history and of psychological analysis."⁷⁷ As human knowledge is confined to the realm of space and time, knowledge of the true, non-historical Adam is impossible. Barth suggests that Adam is knowable to human reason only after he fell into transient space-time, whereas "what Adam was before he became mortal," which is "by definition non-historical," is inaccessible to human knowledge.⁷⁸ "Our historical knowledge is... bounded... by the death of Adam."⁷⁹ That is, the "non-temporal fall of all men from their union with God," though "manifested in that they imprison the truth in ungodliness and unrighteousness," is unintuitable.⁸⁰

Therefore Barth asks: "Whence have we the competence to understand what 'fallen—from God' means?"⁸¹ The answer, according to Barth, is Christ's resurrection, the definitive locus of revelation in *Romans II*. "The Adam who [fell from God] is not Adam in his historical unrelatedness, but Adam in his non-historical relation to Christ."⁸² The only way "we [could] form any conception of Adam's Fall" is to have "in mind the exaltation of Christ from death to Life."⁸³ The reason is that "the sin which entered the world through Adam is, like the righteousness manifested to the world in Christ, timeless and transcendental."⁸⁴ That is, Christ's resurrection is the only means whereby humanity

⁷⁷ Ibid., 162; ET 171.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 161; ET 170.

⁸³ Ibid., 162; ET 171.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

may gain knowledge of Adam's non-historical fall.

Thus, knowledge of Christ's resurrection takes priority over knowledge of humanity as Adam, even though the latter requires the former. This epistemological priority of Christ over Adam is not merely founded on noetic grounds. There is in fact no Adam apart from Christ: "Adam has no separate, positive existence... He exists only when he is dissolved, and he is affirmed only when in Christ he is brought to nought."⁸⁵ The first Adam who fell from God is "the type of the second Adam who is to come, as the shadow cast by His light. He exists as the 'Moment' which forms the background from which Christ advances to victory, the scene where the world and mankind are transformed from fall to righteousness, from death to life, and from old to new."⁸⁶ In a word, the impossibility of humanity's knowledge of itself as Adam is made possible by Christ's resurrection.

Third Impossibility: Revelation—humanity's knowledge of its KRISIS

Yet, faith in Christ's resurrection is no simple matter at all. First, the resurrection is itself timeless and non-historical, and as such it cannot be directly intuitable to fallen humans. In fact, not only is faith in Christ's resurrection impossible; the resurrection itself is impossible.⁸⁷ The impossible possibilities of faith and the resurrection will be discussed in more detail later.

There is another difficulty with faith in Christ's resurrection: knowledge of the resurrection is necessarily indirect, not only because it is unhistorical, but also because it is a process of *Aufhebung*. That is, Christ's resurrection is the result of "the negation of negation";⁸⁸ it is, in Luther's words, the "death of death."⁸⁹ Christ's death is grace,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 190; ET 195.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 333; ET 322.

“because its negation is positive.”⁹⁰ To understand the resurrection, then, is also to understand the negation that Christ’s death negates.

That first negation is the entrance of death into the world through sin: “through sin, death entered into the world—as KRISIS.”⁹¹ This “penetrating and ultimate KRISIS” is “an irresistible and all-embracing dissolution of the world of time and things and men,” “the supremacy of a negation by which all existence is rolled up.”⁹²

This KRISIS did not arise from the natural order of creation. Rather, it is God’s “wrath” and “judgement” as the “Lawgiver who as such is above His law.”⁹³ Yet, it is also God’s gracious intervention, lest the world fall completely away from God. Thus the KRISIS is “the sign of the wrath of God and the signal of His imminent salvation. In any case, death is the divine command—‘Stop’—and we cannot disobey it.”⁹⁴ In other words, salvation includes not only Christ’s death and resurrection, but also the first negation. Salvation is the entire process of *Aufhebung*, the negation of negation. Thus, knowledge of the resurrection necessarily involves knowledge of the human KRISIS.

The question is, “whence comes our recognition of [the KRISIS] and our ability to comprehend it?”⁹⁵ God is known as God, the unknown God, only “in light of ultimate and all-embracing KRISIS,” but “such realization and perception lie beyond the *possibility* of our knowledge, and are the becoming possible of that which is *impossible*.”⁹⁶

Here, again, Barth begins with an *a posteriori* given, namely, the possibility of human knowledge of the KRISIS. His questions, quoted above, are thus framed very carefully. He does not ask whether knowledge of the KRISIS is possible, but *how* this

⁸⁹ Ibid., 189; ET 194.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 160; ET 169.

⁹² Ibid., 72; ET 91.

⁹³ Ibid., 160; ET 169.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 72; ET 91. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Emphases mine.

impossibility became possible.

But why does Barth think that this knowledge is impossible in the first place? The reason goes hand in hand with the impossibility of humanity's knowledge of itself as Adam. Adam's fall is non-historical; it is this original fall, rather than the visible sins of human individuals, that determines the status of all humans. It is through Adam's non-historical sin that death came into the world. "Death is the reverse side of sin."⁹⁷ Physical death is only a manifestation of the death that entered the world through sin, the true death that robbed the creature of true life, "which is the relationship of men to God."⁹⁸ Of this true KRISIS humanity can know nothing, because it is beyond the bounds of human reason. Despite all the physical manifestations of sin and death that make God's wrath clear to all (Rom. 1:19-21), sinners fail to know God as the "Unknown."⁹⁹

This does not imply that religion is impossible. Rather, religion is the "summit of human possibility."¹⁰⁰ Yet, as if echoing Calvin's statement that "the manifestation of God is choked by human superstition and the error of the philosopher,"¹⁰¹ Barth says that religion as humanity's "supreme possibility" is also "our completest separation from the true invisible relationship [with God]."¹⁰² When Adam was "content with lesser possibilities," Eve reminded him of the greatest human possibility—religion.¹⁰³ Religion is "the desire to know good and evil, life and death, God and man."¹⁰⁴ Yet, the god of religion is not the Unknown. In religion god ceases to be God, because the god of religion is not impossible possibility, but direct object of human knowledge in history.

Here Barth turns sharply against Schleiermacher, stating that "religion is not at all to

⁹⁷ Ibid., 160; ET 169f.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 22ff; ET 45ff.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 256; ET 252.

¹⁰¹ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.12.

¹⁰² *Römerbrief* II, 256; ET 252.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

be ‘in tune with the infinite’ or to be at ‘peace with oneself.’”¹⁰⁵ Instead, echoing Kierkegaard, Barth says that religion cannot survive “the sickness unto death under which we stand.”¹⁰⁶

Religion at its best leads humans to confrontation with death, but not death in its true sense as KRISIS, for, as we have seen, death as KRISIS is at once God’s judgment and grace. The KRISIS of humanity is that it is under a “Double Predestination” and not just dereliction—here Barth is hinting at a supralapsarian tendency in his understanding of predestination (as we shall see later).¹⁰⁷ The human KRISIS is death as the first negation in God’s gracious *Aufhebung* of sin. The death that religion confronts, however, is “the ‘No’ in which the ‘Yes’ of God is hidden.”¹⁰⁸ Its claim of direct knowledge of good and evil is the deception of sin that such knowledge is life, but in reality it is death. Thus “religion is an abyss: it is terror.”¹⁰⁹

If even religion, which is humanity’s supreme possibility, cannot lead to knowledge of the KRISIS, then this knowledge is truly impossible. What, then, made this impossibility possible? Barth’s answer, again, is Christ’s resurrection. The resurrection must be understood in relation to the KRISIS, but at the same time the KRISIS can only be known in light of the resurrection. “In the Resurrection, the full seriousness and energy of the veritable negation, of our being buried, are displayed and ratified.”¹¹⁰

Only the resurrection reveals death—the death that entered the world through Adam’s sin as well as Christ’s death that put death to death—as grace. “Death is not grace, if human possibilities are multiplied by it through the coming into being of a whole series of negative things, such as, asceticism, ‘back to nature’, silent worship, mystical death,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.; ET 253.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 135; ET 148.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 358; ET 343.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 256; ET 253.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 190; ET 195.

Buddhist Nirvana, Bolshevism, Dadaism, and so forth.”¹¹¹ The failure of religion is that it multiplies human possibilities without ever arriving at the impossible possibility.

On the other hand, grace would not be grace, had it not involved the KRISIS: “Grace is not grace, if he that receives it is not under judgement.”¹¹² It is “in light of the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead” that “we are able to recognize” death as KRISIS, that is, as both God’s judgment and salvation.¹¹³ The impossibility of humanity’s knowledge of its KRISIS has become possible only through Christ’s resurrection.

Fourth Impossibility: Redemption and Justification

Put another way, knowledge of death as KRISIS is knowledge of the KRISIS as redemption. But how is redemption, which is “movement from Adam to Christ,”¹¹⁴ the “union of ‘here’ and ‘there,’”¹¹⁵ possible? That is, what made it possible for humanity to be in the Kingdom of God, which is not of this world? For Barth, the infinite qualitative difference between God and the world means that “this world, because it is our world, is the world into which sin found entrance,” and “in this world, on this earth, and under this heaven, there is no redemption, no direct life [*kein unmittelbares Leben,* that is, no immediate relationship with God].”¹¹⁶ In a word, as the world remains world, and God remains God, redemption is impossible.

Noteworthy here is the eschatological character of Barth’s soteriology in *Romans II*. For Barth, the impossibility of redemption in this world means that “redemption can only take place at the coming Day, when there shall be a new heaven and a new earth.”¹¹⁷ In the present world, however, redemption is not simply absent, though it is not directly

¹¹¹ Ibid., 189; ET 194.

¹¹² Ibid., 181; ET 187.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 135; ET 148.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 160; ET 169. Translation mine.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

present. To borrow a phrase made famous by Jürgen Moltmann, the future has broken in. Unlike Moltmann, however, Barth insists that God remains God and the world remains world. For this reason, redemption stands only as a *dialectical possibility* in the present: “By His death He declares the impossible possibility of our redemption, and shows Himself as the light from light uncreated, as the Herald of the Kingdom of God.”¹¹⁸

Yet, Christ’s death in itself is not redemption as such. Christ’s death is atonement “*by blood*” (Rom. 3:25).¹¹⁹ It is the negation of negation, but not yet the sublation. In and of itself it is neither timeless nor non-historical. Thus it can only declare redemption as a possibility, with the dialectical emphasis that this possibility remains impossible. As long as humanity remains in this world,

we are deprived of the possibility either of projecting a temporal thing into infinity or confining eternity within the sphere of time. Similarly, it is impossible for us to detach a fragment of our behaviour from its human context and to pronounce it to be justified before the judgment seat of God, just as it is impossible for us to detach one element from the righteousness of God and to regard it, in its detachment, as capable of being comfortably inserted within the structure of human behaviour as it is.¹²⁰

Thus, just as redemption is impossible possibility, the possibility of justification remains impossible. That is, justification has been opened up as a possibility in the present, but the locus of its reality is in the future beyond time. “The righteousness of God is a vast impossibility... We have nothing of which to boast, nothing past or future, nothing before or after the ‘Moment’—which is no moment in time—when the last trumpet shall sound and men stand naked before God, and when, in their nakedness, they shall be clothed upon with the righteousness of God.”¹²¹

Note that Barth’s understanding of justification in *Romans II* may be described as Protestant in the sense that it is guarded against any Roman Catholic notion of infused

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 87; ET 105.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 90; ET 108.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

righteousness, which the Reformers perceived as a confusion of divine and human essences. Of course, as John Webster points out, Barth would not “encounter [Roman Catholicism] with any real force until his move to Münster in the second half of the 1920s,” and in *Romans II* he only has a rough idea about Catholic doctrines.¹²² Even so, Barth understood himself to be distinctively Protestant, sharing with the Reformers the concern to safeguard the qualitative difference between God and humans—in a letter dating from the Göttingen-Münster period Barth calls this “the great Calvinist distance between heaven and earth.”¹²³

However, Barth’s description of justification and redemption in terms of the impossible-possibility dialectic during this phase of his development is very different from the Reformers’ notion of *simul justus et peccator*. Lacking in Barth’s theology at this stage is the concept of *participatio Christi*, which involves a profound two-nature Christology. Thus Barth cannot speak of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner as an accomplished reality. So eschatologically focused is Barth’s soteriology in *Romans II*, that he can only speak of redemption as the “*not yet*” but not the “*already*.”

In *Romans II*, the present reality of sin is nothing dialectical or perplexing to Barth; sin is not described here as an impossible possibility as it is in *CD III/3* and *IV/1* (see Chapters 8-9). The redeemed human, the “new man,” is an impossible possibility, with which “it always remains... a burning question whether we can and do venture to reckon,” but “there is no question at all but that the *possible possibility of sin* is excluded by it.”¹²⁴ That is, nothing is dialectical about sin *qua* sin.

For the new human, “continuance in sin” is indeed rendered impossible—“excluded”—by Christ’s resurrection, and this is not just a “parable.”¹²⁵ Yet,

¹²² John Webster, *Barth’s Earlier Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 49.

¹²³ Torrance, *Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology*, 49.

¹²⁴ *Römerbrief II*, 191; ET 196. Emphases mine.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 190; ET 195.

it is not a present reality either. The exclusion and impossibility of sin is strictly eschatological, because the resurrection is strictly non-historical. That believers continue to sin in this life is therefore not at all a paradox of *simul justus et peccator*: redemption and justification are not present realities but only paradoxical possibilities in the here-and-now. “Because the world is the world, and time is time, and men are men, so long as they remain what they are, my new life must exist ‘beyond’ them.”¹²⁶

As we shall see in Chapters 8-9, when Barth picks up the “impossible possibility” dialectic again in *CD III/3-IV/1*, his emphasis would shift to the other side, focusing on the “already” of God’s objective work in Christ eternally accomplished before the creation of the world. For now, suffice it to say that in *Romans II*, the impossible possibility of redemption and justification denotes the “not yet” of a heavily eschatological soteriology.

Because redemption and justification are impossible in the present, Christ’s death can only be a declaration of their possibility, but not the cause or proper revelation of this possibility. Once again, strictly speaking, only Christ’s resurrection is the cause and revelation of redemption and justification, because whereas Christ’s death is atonement of sin by blood in this world, Christ’s resurrection is timeless and non-historical. To “pass from atonement—*by blood*—to redemption” is to pass “from the cross to resurrection.”¹²⁷ Strictly speaking, not the cross but the resurrection is the in-breaking of the future. Yet, the future only stands as impossible possibility in this world, and God remains God who transcends this world.

As we shall see later, this strict dichotomy of the here-and-now and the futuristic there-and-then gives rise to double predestination on two levels, the eternal-eschatological and the present-actualistic. On the eternal-eschatological level, Barth tends to be supralapsarian in that he identifies the election of all humans as the purpose for which

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 90; ET 108.

God “shut up all in disobedience” (Rom. 11:32); on the present-actualistic level, Barth sees double predestination as presupposing humanity’s sin.

Fifth Impossibility: The Resurrection of Christ

From the foregoing discussions it has become clear that in *Romans II*, Christ’s resurrection is the decisive locus of God’s grace and revelation, rendering possible all human impossibilities. The problem, however, is that the resurrection is itself impossible in this world. Barth not only asserts that knowledge of the resurrection is impossible, but also names the resurrection as one of three great impossibilities along with knowledge of God and the “union of ‘here’ and ‘there’.”¹²⁸ So, how is it that the impossibility of the resurrection became possible?

Barth’s answer is both ontic and noetic. The ontic part of the answer is simple: “Impossible with man; possible with God!”¹²⁹ The noetic part of the answer has to do with Barth’s theological method in *Romans II*. Simply stated, the preliminary answer is that the resurrection just *has to be* possible, because without the possibility of the resurrection, the *a posteriori* given of the possibility of revelation cannot be explained, nor can the possibility of the new life, which is not simply absent in the here-and-now, but exists sharply as a dialectical possibility that observably “presses upon my *continuing in sin*” and “as the criticism of my temporal existence and thought and will.”¹³⁰

The new *ego* is not a figment of metaphysical imagination: “I am *veritably* [*in der Tat*] dead to sin.”¹³¹ Employing a (neo-)Kantian transcendental argument, Barth asserts that it is “because we have perceived this,” namely, the present impossible possibilities of grace, righteousness, and life, that “we are able to recognize—in the light of the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 135; ET 148.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 55; ET 75.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 190; ET 195.

¹³¹ Ibid., 191; ET 196. Emphasis mine.

Resurrection of Jesus from the dead—the power and meaning of the Coming Day: the Day of the New World and of the New Man.”¹³²

It is also in light of the impossible possibility of the resurrection that death is revealed as grace, the KRISIS as the power of the gospel, and the crucifixion as salvation: “...we encounter the power of the Resurrection: *Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father*: impossibility becomes possibility. In the Resurrection, the full seriousness and energy of the veritable negation, of our being buried, are displayed and ratified.”¹³³

The resurrection as such is revelation of the death of death and of the new life. The new life, again, is not just a parable:

My new life is the ‘ought’ and ‘can’, the ‘must’ and ‘will’, of my new EGO which has been created in Christ: it is the assurance of my *citizenship in heaven*...; it is the invisible point of observation and of relationship, the judgement exercised by my infinite upon my finite existence; it is the threatening and promising which is set beyond time, beyond all visibility, beyond all the finite and concrete events of my life.¹³⁴

In a word, Christ’s resurrection, though beyond space and time, ought to be a possibility because of the veritability of the new life.

It has to be emphasised, however, that this “ought to” must not be understood as the metaphysical conclusion of a logical *reductio ad absurdum*. How faith in Christ’s resurrection becomes a possibility will be explained in the next section. Suffice it to keep in mind here that Barth’s theological method is, as McCormack puts it, “strictly ‘anti-metaphysical’ at all points and in all phases of his development.”¹³⁵ That is, Barth refuses to deduce first principles from observable phenomena.¹³⁶ For *Romans II*, this would imply that the resurrection is not the result of deduction, but the starting point and

¹³² Ibid., 181; ET 187.

¹³³ Ibid., 190; ET 195.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 246.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

presupposition in light of which every other veritable impossible possibility can be understood.¹³⁷

Now, what is the event through which the resurrection becomes comprehensible to human reason? By what event does the impossibly possible new life become intuitable? In answering these questions, Barth remains consistently Kantian: this event of revelation has to be within the realm of objects intuitable to human senses; it has to have taken place on the plane of temporal history. Since the new life began when the old one was put to death, Barth argues that the truth of the resurrection is to be comprehended through the crucifixion, the negation of negation, the putting-to-death of death:

The truth that we ARE new men is... comprehensible to us only at its starting-point. And this starting-point means for us the end of the old man. This is the only aspect of the truth visible to us; only in the Cross of Christ can we comprehend the truth and meaning of His Resurrection.¹³⁸

To be sure, however, the crucifixion in and of itself cannot be revelational, because revelation *from* God has to be non-historical and non-temporal. Only Christ's resurrection is revelation as such. Meanwhile, revelation *to* humans has to be conveyed through some historical medium in order to be humanly intuitable. The crucifixion, according to Barth, is the divinely appointed medium through which the light of the resurrection shines. Barth compares resurrection and crucifixion to sun and sunlight: "Below in the valleys rise the mighty oaks" whose "topmost branches" block our sight of the sun itself, but "the light catches us in the early morning, and we see what none other can see: we see the sun of the coming day, and we cry out our welcome—'Come, Lord!'"¹³⁹

Yet, as discussed earlier, the crucifixion is negation. The cross in and of itself is but a sign of death, weakness, violence, injustice, and negativity. God is utterly hidden by the

¹³⁷ In this respect, Barth's methodology runs in the reverse direction of Paul Tillich's deduction of the "New Being." See Tillich, *Systematic Theology* II (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), 170.

¹³⁸ *Römerbrief* II, 137; ET 150.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

negativity of the cross. If the light of the resurrection is to shine forth by the cross and break through its veil, no eye can perceive it except eyes of faith: “only in the Cross of Christ can we comprehend the truth and meaning of His Resurrection. We can only BELIEVE in what is new, and, moreover, our capacity reaches no further than to believing that we do believe.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, the impossible noetic comprehension of the resurrection becomes a possibility through the crucifixion of Christ as perceived by faith.

Sixth Impossibility: Faith in Christ

Faith in Christ, however, is yet another impossibility. This is because Christ as Jesus of Nazareth who died on the cross is an improper medium of revelation. Barth writes:

Jesus stands among sinners as a sinner; He sets Himself wholly under the judgment under which the world is set; He takes His place where God can be present only in questioning about Him; He takes the form of a slave; He moves to the cross and to death; His greatest achievement is negative achievement... Nevertheless, precisely in this negation, He is the fulfilment of every possibility of human progress..., because there is no conceivable human possibility of which He did not rid Himself. Herein He is recognized as the Christ... In Him we behold the faithfulness of God in the depths of Hell.¹⁴¹

Note that in the Christology of *Roman II*, Chalcedonian formulae are still almost completely absent. In the passage above, for instance, Barth does not discuss whether “Jesus stands among sinners as a sinner” by imputation only, or if Jesus was ontologically “without sin,” as defined by Chalcedon. Rather, the driving force behind Barth’s Christology in *Romans II* is his critical-Kantian principle that disallows anything within history to be proper vehicles for revelation.

In (neo-)Kantian manner Barth insists that Jesus cannot be directly identical to revelation, and with Kierkegaardian overtones he comments that “the vision of the New Day remains an *indirect* vision; in Jesus revelation is a *paradox*, however objective and

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 78; ET 97.

universal it may be. That the promises of the faithfulness of God have been fulfilled in Jesus the Christ is not, and never will be, a self-evident truth, since in Him it appears in its *final hiddenness* and its most profound secrecy.”¹⁴²

However, it is for the purpose of self-revelation that God hides Godself in Christ. Echoing Luther’s *theologia crucis* Barth writes: “In Him [Jesus] He [God] conceals Himself utterly, in order that He may manifest Himself to faith only.”¹⁴³ It is true that the faithfulness of God is simply “not accessible to our perception.”¹⁴⁴ It cannot be known through occult powers or intellectual inquiry.

Yet, God’s faithfulness can be known by faith, and by faith alone. Again with reference to Kierkegaard, Barth defines faith as “always a leap into the darkness of the unknown, a flight into empty air,” because “the revelation which is in Jesus, because it is the revelation of the righteousness of God, must be the most complete veiling of His incomprehensibility.”¹⁴⁵ There are “no preliminaries necessary to faith”—faith admits no precondition or deduction—but rather “faith is its own initiation, its own presupposition.”¹⁴⁶ Thus “for all faith is both simple and difficult; for all alike it is a scandal...; to all it presents the same embarrassment and the same promise; for all it is a leap into the void. And it is possible for all, only because for all it is equally impossible.”¹⁴⁷

In short, faith in Christ is impossible because “Jesus of Nazareth, *Christ after the flesh*, is one amongst other possibilities of history; but He is THE possibility which possesses all the marks of impossibility.”¹⁴⁸ Yet, God “is intelligible only by faith,” and given that intelligibility of God has been made impossibly possible by revelation—this is

¹⁴² Ibid. Emphases mine.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 353; ET 369. Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 249f.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 79; ET 98.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 81; ET 99.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 85; ET 103.

Barth's theological starting point—how did the impossibility of faith become possibility?

Barth's answer is the "impossible possibility of the faithfulness of God."¹⁴⁹ Recall that whenever Barth uses the term "impossible possibility," it refers to an act of God. On the human side, all things are either undialectically possible (e.g. religion) or impossible (e.g. faith), but God's act creates "impossible possibility." The "impossible possibility of the faithfulness of God" is such that "in the paradox of faith the faithfulness of God is sufficient; for through it we stand on firm ground and move forward with assurance."¹⁵⁰ Therefore "the faithfulness of God is where faith is."¹⁵¹

God's faithfulness turns faith into an impossible possibility. Faith is God's work, which lies beyond and puts to death all human possibilities. Faith as impossible possibility—as God's work—corresponds to God's faithfulness (Cf. Rom. 1:17).¹⁵²

But how does God awaken faith in the sinful human subject, and how does this temporal act of God relate to God's eternal Being? This is where Barth's doctrine of election, along with his treatment of the lapsarian problem, in *Romans II* sets in.

Seventh Impossibility: Election

As suggested earlier, Barth's notion of "impossible possibility" is deeply eschatological. Revelation is impossible in this world because the eternal cannot be directly identified with anything temporal or historical—God is "wholly Other."¹⁵³ Though by God's sovereign and gracious act revelation has been made possible in the present, this possibility is impossible for the world, so long as the world remains world and God is God. Only in the eschaton where creation is no longer plagued by temporality and transience will revelation cease to be impossible. Before the end of time, the works of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 96; ET 113.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 97; ET 114.

¹⁵² Ibid., 18; ET 41.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 253; ET 250.

God in this world shall ever remain impossible possibilities.

From the perspective of the present world, then, election—defined in *Romans II* as God’s act of awakening faith in human subjects—also carries the mark of impossible possibility: “Men encounter the *possibility* of election only in the form of a *promise*.”¹⁵⁴ God’s “promise,” moreover, “is *comprehended* in everything that points to the Truth, that is to say, to miracle, to the Spirit, to *impossibility*...”¹⁵⁵ This means that for fallen humans as subjects of comprehension, election may be encountered only as impossible possibility.

Because the possibility of election retains the mark of impossibility in the present world, reprobation goes hand in hand with election. That is, the impossibility of election entails the possibility of reprobation, which Barth defines in *Romans II* as God’s act of withholding faith from human individuals and leaving them in unbelief. Note, however, that this “double predestination,” synonymous with the “impossible possibility” of election, only describes predestination as manifested in the present world.

Eschatologically speaking, the “possibility of rejection” has been “eternally overcome” in God.¹⁵⁶ Thus McCormack rightly observes that “Barth’s doctrine of election in this phase functioned on two distinct levels.”¹⁵⁷ In the eternal eschaton, reprobation is only tentative, posited only to be eternally overcome by election, which is universal in scope. On this level, reprobation is God’s act of subjecting humanity to the plight of time, and election is God’s negation of time through Christ’s resurrection whereby humanity is lifted up into eternity. As Robert Jenson puts it, “The relation between the two sides of double predestination... is but another form of the relation we have traced between time and eternity; for the meaning of time, as different from eternity,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 327; ET 344. Emphases mine.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 363; ET 348.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce McCormack, “So That He May Be Merciful to All: Karl Barth and the Problem of Universalism,” eds. B. McCormack and C. Anderson, *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 243.

is rejection, and the meaning of eternity for time is acceptance. In time we are all rejected; in eternity we are all chosen.”¹⁵⁸

As discussed earlier, Christ’s death has put to death all human possibilities and overcome the KRISIS that threatens all humanity, and in the non-historical and non-temporal event of the resurrection, the life of immediacy with God is freely given to all. Thus Barth says that in the eternal-eschatological sense, predestination “involves no equilibrium, but... it is the eternal victory of election over rejection, of love over hate, of life over death.”¹⁵⁹ As McCormack puts it, this is the “movement from a universal reprobation to a universal election, which took place in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁰

On the level of temporal history, however, election is defined as “something that takes place in the here and now of our lives in that God awakens faith in us.”¹⁶¹ Election as such takes place as impossible possibility, with the threat of reprobation and unbelief ever looming. God may elect or reject one individual at any moment in time. An individual’s faith or unbelief depends entirely upon God’s sovereign decision. In this sense, Matthias Gockel helpfully recognises “Barth’s emphasis [in *Romans II*] on divine predestination as the sole basis for human knowledge of God.”¹⁶² God has complete freedom in first revealing Godself to the Jews and withholding faith from the Gentiles, then blinding the Jews and electing the Gentiles (Rom. 9-11). Although predestination on the eternal-eschatological level is the victory of election over reprobation, “this victory is hidden from us in every moment of time.”¹⁶³ Therefore, in this temporal world, the possibility of reprobation always accompanies the impossible possibility of election, and

¹⁵⁸ Jenson, 28.

¹⁵⁹ *Römerbrief II*, 363; ET 347.

¹⁶⁰ McCormack, “So That He May Be Merciful to All,” 243.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 114.

¹⁶³ *Römerbrief II*, 363; ET 347

predestination is always twofold.

Note, however, that according to Barth, even this double predestination on the level of the present world must not be thought of as a *decretum absolutum* that divides the human race into two fixed masses for faith and unbelief. Against the Reformers, Barth contends that the “secret” of double predestination “concerns not this or that man, but all men. By it men are not divided, but united. In its presence they all stand on one line—for Jacob is always Esau also, and in the eternal ‘Moment’ of revelation Esau is also Jacob.”¹⁶⁴

In this sense, “the inevitable doctrine of eternal ‘Double Predestination’ is not the quantitative limitation of God’s action, but its qualitative definition.”¹⁶⁵ For Barth, double predestination does not mean that this person is an elect, or that person is a reprobate. Rather, it means that in every moment of every person’s life, God has the freedom to give and to take away. One who is elected this moment might be derelict at the very next moment. Thus Barth contends that faith is given to humans as impossible possibility, and as a corollary, “revelation can never be extended onto the plane of time, so as to be thought of as a concrete possession” (note the Kierkegaardian overtones).¹⁶⁶ Therefore “Christian assurance” is a notion that exists “only in the imagination of theologians” (Barth will continue to attack the notion of Christian assurance until 1936).¹⁶⁷

Thus understood, double predestination in *Romans II* is, on the level of temporal history, a dialectic between faith and unbelief that results from the impossible possibility of revelation in the present world. Because of humanity’s fall and God’s sovereign grace, “men are compelled to advance along a road which ends in ‘Double ‘Predestination.’”¹⁶⁸

This double predestination, however, is not a balanced equilibrium: “for God hath

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 362; ET 347.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 361; ET 346.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 334; ET 322.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 253; ET 250.

shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all” (Rom. 11:32)—for Barth this is the statement whereby “the final meaning of ‘Double Predestination’ seeks to make itself known.”¹⁶⁹ This understanding of double predestination is for Barth “the ‘key to the whole of the epistle to the Romans’” as well as the whole theology of Paul.¹⁷⁰ According to Romans 11:32, as Barth interprets it, double predestination is such that on the level of the eternal eschaton, the reprobation of “all” is posited only in order to be defeated by the election of “all” unto mercy; in the present world of temporality, double predestination is a description of the impossible possibility of revelation that results in an “actualistic” (the notion that God’s act sovereignly corresponds to creaturely activity—at this stage Barth is far from having developed the final version of his actualism with the central concept of God’s “Being-in-act”) dialectic of faith and unbelief in the lives of “all” human individuals.

The present impossible possibility of election, moreover, just like predestination on the eternal level, is not a balanced paradox: “Impossible with man; possible with God!”—and God’s grace is always sovereign over human limitations.¹⁷¹ Thus the Church shall continue to stand by faith—the miraculous work of God—to testify to God’s faithfulness in the election of all humans unto mercy.¹⁷²

Lapsarian Tendencies in Romans II

Inconsistently Supralapsarian Formulation of Predestination

In identifying Rom. 11:32 as the definitive statement for the doctrine of predestination, Barth’s formulation of election and reprobation in *Romans II* inevitably takes on a lapsarian character, for this passage states that “God hath shut up all unto

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 407; ET 421.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Quoted and translated by McCormack in “So That He May Be Merciful to All”, 242.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 55; ET 75.

¹⁷² Ibid., 363; ET 348.

disobedience.” That is, humanity’s fall is considered here in light of divine activity, and a doctrinal formulation of the relation or non-relation between predestination and the fall becomes necessary.

Barth confronts the lapsarian problem head-on, stating that humanity’s “active disposition” to “imprison the truth in ungodliness and unrighteousness” is “explained—and yet not explained—by the divine predestination of men to destruction which follows their divine election in Christ as the shadow follows the light.”¹⁷³ The dialectical phrase, “explained and yet not explained,” suggests that humanity’s fall is to be understood in light of double predestination, which is nevertheless beyond understanding. Thus double predestination is to be grasped by faith, and the higher understanding of faith, as it were, is an impossible possibility. Barth is thus suggesting here that the fall is to be understood by faith as having been predestined by God, and this decree of the fall, as it were, is preceded by and thus serves the purpose of election in Christ, “as the shadow follows the light.”

Note that in the passage above Barth is describing double predestination in the eternal-eschatological sense (as opposed to present-actualistic faith and unbelief—recall that Barth’s doctrine of predestination in *Romans II* comprises two levels of reality). His predestinarian thinking on this level is clearly supralapsarian: “election in Christ” precedes “the divine predestination of men to destruction,” and it is for the purpose of election that God predestined the fall.

Additionally, note that in *Romans II*, reprobation on the eternal-eschatological level is almost synonymous with the fall, which consists of sin and death. Sin rent asunder the bond of immediacy between God and humanity, and death is “the mark of that passing of eternity into time,” which, as “a past happening in primal history,” was God’s eternal

¹⁷³ Ibid., 163; ET 172.

reprobation of humankind.¹⁷⁴ Thus Barth equates eternal reprobation with the non-historical and non-temporal fall of Adam, which precedes any historical manifestation thereof. As a result, when Barth asserts that reprobation took place only for the purpose of being defeated by election,¹⁷⁵ he is essentially making the supralapsarian statement that in eternity God predestined the fall for the purpose of election.

In *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (1936) and *CD II/2* (1942), Barth would again contend that reprobation serves the purpose of election (see Chapters 6 and 7). However, by that time Barth would no longer equate reprobation with humanity's fall. Rather, Barth will define reprobation as God's eternal condemnation of humankind's sin in Christ, who is at once electing God and elected human. As elected human, Christ suffers divine reprobation vicariously for all humankind that is in Him, so that all humankind may be elected in and with Him. In this scheme, the object of double predestination would be *homo lapsus*, as we saw in Chapter 2. Therefore, although Barth seems to be saying the same thing in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* and *CD II/2* as what he said in *Romans II* when he asserts that reprobation serves the purpose of election, he has in fact changed his position to a basically infralapsarian one, even though he does not acknowledge it due to his misnomers.

Furthermore, in *Romans II*, when Barth speaks of election on the temporal-actualistic level as impossible possibility, the *obiectum praedestinationis* (object of predestination) is clearly *homo lapsus* (fallen humanity). That is, election on this level is defined as God's act of awakening faith in fallen sinners, and reprobation, which dialectically accompanies the present impossible possibility of election, as leaving sinners in the state of unbelief. As Gockel puts it, throughout *Romans II* "Barth correlates the concepts of predestination, election and reprobation to the duality of faith and unbelief... In correspondence to the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 254; ET 250.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 362f; ET 347.

Reformers' idea of justification by grace through faith, he maintains that a person's faith in Christ is characterized by his or her acceptance of God's opposition to the human predicament of sin and death...¹⁷⁶

Remember that the whole dialectic of "impossible possibility" is predicated upon humanity's fall from the *Ursprung*. Of course, this formulation does not make Barth an infralapsarian, because predestination in the temporal realm actualistically corresponds to its eternal and definitive reality, which, as shown above, is formulated in a supralapsarian way in *Romans II*. The historic debates between supra- and infralapsarians are concerned about predestination strictly in the eternal sense; the notion of a present-actualistic double predestination is foreign to Reformed orthodoxy. Therefore, Barth's formulation of double predestination on the present-actualistic level does not fit neatly into any lapsarian theory of historic Reformed theology, even in the minimalist sense. Even so, the pervasiveness of the dialectic of "impossible possibility" in *Romans II* suggests that infralapsarian patterns of thought are not foreign to Barth's theological reflections during this phase of his development. The fact that on one level of Barth's doctrine of predestination the *obiectum praedestinationis* is *homo peccator* means that Barth's predestinarian thinking in 1920-21 is not thoroughly supralapsarian, but carries a hint of infralapsarianism as well.

Romans II as Early Source of Barth's Lapsarian Misnomers

Despite this infralapsarian element, on the eternal-eschatological level Barth's formulation of double predestination in *Romans II* is unmistakably supralapsarian, and in fact Barth explicitly identifies himself as a supralapsarian in this commentary.¹⁷⁷ However, Barth's definition of supralapsarianism at this point in time is already misguided: "The Fall is not occasioned by the transgression of Adam; but the

¹⁷⁶ Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on Election*, 105f.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 163 ; ET 172.

transgression was presumably its first manifest operation. In this context the venerable Reformation doctrine of ‘Supralapsarianism’ becomes intelligible. According to it, predestination unto rejection precedes the ‘historical’ fall.”¹⁷⁸

Barth’s *description* of supralapsarianism here is not wrong, but he clearly fails to understand that this description applies to supra- and infralapsarianism alike. He fails to give a *definition* of the former that distinguishes it from the latter. It can be inferred from this misleading definition of supralapsarianism that Barth mistakenly thinks of infralapsarianism as claiming that eternal reprobation presupposes the *historical* fall. In reality, however, the infralapsarian thesis is that reprobation presupposes the eternal divine *decree* of the fall rather than the historical actuality thereof.

As I showed in the previous chapter, these mistaken definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism are exactly the ones Barth gives in the excursus at the end of *CD* §33. It is now clear that Barth already held to this misunderstanding as early as his Safenwil years. This means that before his encounter with the works of Heinrich Heppe and other nineteenth-century German historiographers during the Göttingen years, Barth already developed this particular misunderstanding on his own. He did not inherit the mistake from Heppe and others, though, as we saw in the previous chapters, the inadequacies of nineteenth-century German historiography on Reformed orthodoxy did not help to correct Barth’s mistakes.

Towards an Infralapsarian Christology

While Barth’s formulation of predestination in *Romans* II may be described as inconsistently supralapsarian, the Christology in this phase of his theological development leans towards infralapsarianism. Recall that a supralapsarian Christology is one in which

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

God would have become incarnate regardless of whether humanity had fallen into sin. By contrast, an infralapsarian Christology describes the incarnation as having been occasioned by humanity's sin and having taken place primarily for the purpose of saving humanity from fallenness.

It should be noted in the first instance that Barth's Christology in *Romans II* does not fit nicely into either category, because, as McCormack points out, "Barth was not really interested in *Romans II* in the incarnation."¹⁷⁹ However, the whole dialectical scheme of impossible possibilities that undergirds Barth's commentary indicates that Barth's Christology at this stage is moving in a strongly infralapsarian direction.

First, the language of "impossible possibility" is predicated upon and expresses the central notion that revelation in this world is impossible as long as God remains God and the world remains a domain of existence that has fallen into temporal transience. As we saw earlier, in the pre-lapsarian *Ursprung* humanity's communication with God was immediate. Mediation between God and humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus—which constitute the core of Barth's Christology in *Romans II*—became necessary only in the temporal world into which humanity has fallen. In this way, the notion of Christ as the *medium* for divine self-revelation presupposes humanity's fall, thus suggesting an infralapsarian Christology.

In fact, Barth's Christology in *Romans II* is expressed in an almost explicitly infralapsarian manner in a few instances. For example, Jesus as the incarnate Christ is described as "impossible possibility" (again, a dialectic presupposing humanity's fall): "Jesus of Nazareth, *Christ after the flesh*, is one amongst other possibilities of history; but He is THE possibility which possesses all the marks of impossibility."¹⁸⁰ Here, to say that Jesus was "one amongst other possibilities of history" is to say that he was truly human,

¹⁷⁹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 253.

¹⁸⁰ *Römerbrief II*, 85; ET 103.

truly belonging to this temporal world. Meanwhile, to say that he “possesses all the marks of impossibility” is to say that he, as a historical person, is “fraught with eternity.”¹⁸¹ The eternal cannot exist in this fallen world, thus all the marks of eternity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth are described as “marks of impossibility.” In this way, the “Christ after flesh” is described in almost infralapsarian terms as having entered into a fallen world and taken on the plight of human fallenness. In a passage that we discussed earlier, Barth explicitly states that “Jesus stands among sinners as a sinner; He sets Himself wholly under the judgement under which the world is set.”¹⁸²

Note, however, that here Barth is very careful not to identify Jesus of Nazareth as God eternal, though he does not explicitly deny this either. In *Romans II*, Barth has not yet developed an incarnational Christology. If Jesus of Nazareth really “occupies a position in time, in history, and in the presence of men,” then difficult problems would arise if he is to be identified as God eternal.¹⁸³ Barth could describe Jesus as “fraught with eternity,” even saying that “God was *in* Christ reconciling the world unto himself,”¹⁸⁴ but in *Romans II* Barth consistently avoids speaking of Jesus as truly and fully the eternal God. Barth would rather avoid the doctrine of the incarnation and focus on the death and resurrection of Christ as the locus of divine self-revelation.

Barth’s Christology in *Romans II* as such is not yet fully infralapsarian: the definitive infralapsarian phrase, “God became human for us and for our salvation,” does not apply here because in insisting upon the critical distance between God and the world, Barth consistently avoids the notion that God has become anything that is of this world. As we shall see, when Barth begins to adopt a basically Nicene-Chalcedonian view of Christ’s two natures during the Göttingen years, his understanding that mediation between God

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 87; ET 105.

¹⁸² Ibid., 78; ET 97.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 87; ET 105.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

and humanity presupposes the fall—which is already present in the impossible-possibility dialectic in *Romans* II—will determine the infralapsarian nature of his Christology. In 1920-21, however, Barth's Christology is best described as moving in an infralapsarian direction but not yet fully infralapsarian.

Chapter Summary

To sum up, four concluding remarks are in order. First, Barth's doctrine of predestination in *Romans* II may be described as inconsistently supralapsarian: it is supralapsarian on the eternal-eschatological level, but on the present-actualistic level it carries an element of infralapsarianism.

Second, Barth's Christology in *Romans* II is moving in an infralapsarian direction in that Christ's person and works are predicated upon humanity's fall, but it is not yet fully infralapsarian because Barth consistently tries to steer away from any discussion of the incarnation during this phase of his theological development.

Third, the mistaken definitions that Barth gives to supra- and infralapsarianism in *CD* II/2, as we saw in the previous chapter, are already found in *Romans* II, thus these misunderstandings are Barth's own rather than Heppe's, but it is safe to say that the inadequacies of nineteenth-century German historiography on Reformed orthodoxy did not help to clarify Barth's confusions.

Fourth, the dialectic of "impossible possibility" is predicated upon the fall of humanity. Although Barth would drop this rhetoric in his later works, he would retain a strong notion of humanity's fall and the consequent impossibility of God's direct presence in this world. This would be an important factor leading to Barth's theological development in the direction of Christological and predestinarian infralapsarianism in the 1920s and 1930s, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4

The Göttingen-Münster Period (1921-30): Christology and Predestination in the Subject-Object Dialectic

This chapter examines the lapsarian tendencies in Barth's Christology and doctrine of election during the Göttingen-Münster period (1921-30). The *Göttingen Dogmatics* (*GD*) marks Barth's first dogmatic treatment of incarnational Christology, which I will show to be infralapsarian. This chapter also aims to demonstrate that Barth's doctrine of election during this period has begun to lean towards infralapsarianism. Additionally, in *GD* Barth sets forth his first dogmatic treatment of the Lapsarian Controversy, declaring himself to be a supralapsarian. I will demonstrate how Barth's erroneous definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism in *Romans* II become more elaborate in *GD*.

Primary Sources and Historical Introduction

I begin with a brief introduction to the primary sources used in this chapter. For practical purposes I have chosen to focus mainly on *GD*, a published collection of Barth's lectures at the University of Göttingen from 1924-25. These lectures were published posthumously in 1985 as a three-volume collection in Barth's *Gesamtausgabe* under the title *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion* ("Instruction in the Christian Religion"), echoing Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.¹ The English translation of these lectures is divided into two volumes, the second of which is yet unpublished.

Dogmatics in Göttingen and Münster

GD represents the major corpus of Barth's theological writings during the

¹ *GA* II.17, 20, 38.

Göttingen-Münster period. Although he offered another cycle of courses at the University of Münster in 1926-27, the shape of his theology during the two dogmatic cycles remains essentially unchanged. Bruce McCormack points out that the Münster dogmatics “added little that was decisively new... And even on a material level, though there is certainly expansion and clarification at some important points, Michael Beintker is undoubtedly right in his suggestion that Barth had the Göttingen material constantly before him as he wrote this book.”²

The reason for my choice to focus on the Göttingen rather than Münster lectures is practical: only the first volume of the Münster dogmatics, originally planned as a three-volume project, has been published, under the title *Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (“Christian Dogmatics in Outline”).³ The published volume comprises the prolegomena alone, and only four sections are directly relevant to the study of this chapter: §14 “*Die objektive Möglichkeit der Offenbarung*” (“The Objective Possibility of Revelation”); §16 “*Die Geburt des Herrn*” (“The Birth of the Lord”); §17 “*Die subjektive Möglichkeit der Offenbarung*” (“The Subjective Possibility of Revelation”); and §19 “*Die Glaube und der Gehorsam*” (“Faith and Obedience”). The doctrine of predestination is not included in this volume. These sections, moreover, are mostly just rearrangements of what Barth has already set forth in *GD*. For these reasons, I will cite the Münster dogmatics only when it helps to better explain certain issues.

Barth’s Encounter with Reformed Orthodoxy

When Barth first arrived at Göttingen as Professor of Reformed Theology in 1921, the Lutheran faculty did not expect him to lecture in dogmatics. Rather, he began his

² Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 375. See Michael Beintker, “Unterricht in der christlichen Religion,” in Gerhard Sauter, ed. *Verkündigung und Forschung 2* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985), 46.

³ *GA* II.14.

teaching there by offering courses on the theologies of Calvin (1922),⁴ Zwingli (1922/1923),⁵ the Reformed Confessions (1923),⁶ Schleiermacher (1923/1924),⁷ etc. For the purpose of clarifying the historical relations between Barth and Reformed orthodoxy, I will refer to some of these published lectures in my discussions. It would require at least a separate chapter if I were to offer extensive expositions of these lectures, a project that I hope to take up in the future, as “the benefits of such a study,” in John Webster’s words, “would be considerable.”⁸

For now, suffice it to note that preparing for these lectures in historical theology gave Barth the opportunity to be acquainted with Reformed orthodoxy. In my first two chapters I have discussed his encounter with the works of Heinrich Heppe and other German historiographers of the Reformed tradition while at Göttingen. Relying on the historiography that was available to him, Barth gave his own expositions of Calvin, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Reformed Confessions.

One major insight that Barth retrieved from his study of the Reformed tradition was the economy of the Holy Spirit. This would become the foundation of one of his two major theological breakthroughs in the Göttingen-Münster period. The classical Reformed doctrine of the pneumatological *ordo salutis* provided Barth with a new way of thinking of the subjective possibility of revelation: God is *in* and *with* the believer by the Holy Spirit in the here-and-now when the believer as subject comes to know God who has become object. Although humans possess no organ capable of receiving revelation, God becomes this very organ in the person of the Holy Spirit so that revelation becomes subjectively possible for the believer.

This pneumatological emphasis of Barth’s theology in the Göttingen-Münster phase

⁴ *GA* II.23.

⁵ *GA* II.40.

⁶ *GA* II.30.

⁷ *GA* II.11.

⁸ John Webster, *Barth’s Earlier Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 2.

would give rise to an actualistic⁹ doctrine of election that focuses on the active faith and obedience of the believer in the concrete moments of the here-and-now. This may be contrasted with what some have called the “Christological objectivism” of Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of election in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (1936) and *CD II/2* (1942), where the objectively accomplished reality of eternal election-in-Christ becomes the definitive ground of Barth’s theology. The Göttingen-Münster period, then, represents a phase of Barth’s theological development that is most Trinitarian in terms of his treatment of the divine economy. As George Hunsinger notes, “It is one of the most surprising features of *The Göttingen Dogmatics* that Barth is much more explicitly Trinitarian than christocentric.”¹⁰

Barth’s other major discovery in his encounter with classical Reformed theology during the Göttingen years was the two-nature Christology of Nicene-Chalcedonian orthodoxy.¹¹ McCormack recounts: “In May 1924 Barth made a momentous discovery. During the course of his first lectures in dogmatics, he came upon the anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christological dogma of the ancient Church in a textbook of post-Reformation theology.”¹² The two-nature Christology of Chalcedon may be summed up in a phrase frequently used by the Nicene Fathers, “God became human without ceasing to be God.”¹³ This Chalcedonian logic, as we shall see, constitutes the core pattern of Barth’s thinking as well as the theological problem that he tries to tackle in *GD*.

In Chalcedonian Christology Barth saw one of Christianity’s definitive answers to Kant’s challenge, namely, the epistemological gulf between God and humanity, which

⁹ Barth has not yet developed the notion of God’s “Being-in-act” at this stage. Rather, his actualism in this phase describes God’s “revelation in act,” in which God is completely sovereign in his active relations to the recipients of revelation. See George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s *The Göttingen Dogmatics*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993): 374.

¹⁰ Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s *The Göttingen Dogmatics*,” 377.

¹¹ Paul Jones has questioned how helpful it is to label Barth’s Christology at this stage as “Chalcedonian.” See Paul Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2008). In Chapter 9 I shall discuss Jones’s viewpoint.

¹² McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 327.

¹³ Most famously, Cyril of Alexandria: see, for example, *Letters* 55:23.

gave rise to what T. F. Torrance calls a “fatal deistic disjunction between God and the world which does not allow for any real Word of God to cross the gulf between God and the creature or therefore to permit man in space and time any real knowledge of God as he is in himself.”¹⁴

Confronting this central theological problem, Barth found in the ancient Christological dogma a theological method that fit nicely with insights that he picked up from Kierkegaard, the thrust of which is that God entered into the veil of humanity and became “incognito” in order to reveal Godself, thus allowing an indirect, albeit true, subjective human knowledge of God.¹⁵ As we shall see, this has much to do with the infralapsarian character of Barth’s Christology at this stage of his development.

Subjective and Objective Possibilities of Revelation

We now turn to *GD*. A sharp contrast between *Romans II* (see Chapter 3) and *GD* is the complete absence of the rhetoric of “impossible possibility” in the latter. In fact, Barth now explicitly rejects the “impossible possibility” dialectic: since the “possibility” of knowledge of God in Christ by faith “can be a *reality* at any time by the Holy Spirit, we must not say that the conditional nature of revelation through Christ and the obedience of faith is the same as the unknowability of God, as the *impossibility* and unreality of a true and adequate and satisfactory knowledge of God.”¹⁶

Two key differences between *Romans II* and *GD* are apparent in this passage. First, divine self-revelation in Christ and human knowledge of God by faith are no longer described as “impossible possibilities,” but as “possibilities” that “*can* become a reality” in the here-and-now. To be sure, in *GD* Barth still rejects the historicism and

¹⁴ T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 2.

¹⁵ In this phase, Barth seems particularly interested in Kierkegaard’s *Training in Christianity* and *Fear and Trembling*. See, for example, *GD I*, 37, 143, 332f, 460, etc. Also dominant in this period of Barth’s theological development is the Kierkegaardian theme of subjectivity.

¹⁶ *Unterricht II*, 21; ET 333. Emphases mine.

psychologism of Neo-Protestantism, continuing to refer to the “psychological impossibility” of faith and “historical impossibility” of revelation as he did in *Romans II*.¹⁷ However, unlike *Romans II*, Barth now clearly acknowledges the present possibility of a true, adequate, and satisfactory human knowledge of God.

The reason for this difference lies in the second point to be noted in the passage above—the economy of the Holy Spirit. In *Romans II*, this notion is almost completely absent, even in the exegetical passages on Romans 8. For the Barth of *Romans II*, God cannot be present in this temporal world in any true sense. In *GD*, however, not only is the human Jesus described as truly and fully God—a statement that Barth consistently avoided in *Romans II*—but also God is said to be really present in the here-and-now by the Holy Spirit, so that on the subjective human side of the divine-human communication, God Godself becomes the receptive organ for revelation.

This pneumatological insight is Barth’s other definitive answer to Kant’s epistemological challenge. As Hunsinger summarises it: “because our participation in this drama ‘is a psychological impossibility, just as revelation is a historical impossibility’ (p. 197), only in the midst of this drama is our ability to receive revelation ‘a real ability’ (p. 346). In other words, we ‘have a share in revelation’ only ‘by the Holy Spirit, that is, by God himself, and not in any other way’ (p.451).”¹⁸

Because of these new emphases, the central theological problem in *GD* is framed differently than that of *Romans II*. In *Romans II*, the question is unilateral—it is only concerned about the possibility of revelation from God’s side downward: Given that human knowledge of God is impossibly possible, how was impossibility made possible? In *GD*, however, Barth sets forth his question in two directions: Given that humans *do* stand before God, (1) “How can God come to us without ceasing to be God...,” and (2)

¹⁷ *Unterricht I*, 243; ET 197.

¹⁸ Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s *The Göttingen Dogmatics*,” 375.

“how can we humans stand before God without ceasing to be human?”¹⁹

These two questions rely heavily, albeit critically, on Chalcedon and the Reformation. The starting point here, just as in *Romans II*, is that revelation is a given. The difference is that in *Romans II*, revelation is given as impossible possibility, but in *GD*, revelation is given as the reality of humanity’s standing before God—the Reformation rally cry of “*coram Deo*.” Additionally, these twofold questions are reminiscent of the patristic phrase, “God became human without ceasing to be God.” The emphasis in the second question, moreover, underscores the abiding distinction between God and humanity in Chalcedonian Christology.

The twofold questions above lead Barth to a very different way of working out the possibility of revelation than in *Romans II*. In *Romans II*, as we saw in Chapter 3, the dialectic was primarily between impossibility and possibility. In *GD*, however, the dialectic is between God as subject and as object, which gives rise to two kinds of possibilities for revelation—the objective and the subjective. The possibility for God to come to us without ceasing to be God, the subject of the *Deus dixit*, is the objective possibility of revelation; the possibility for humans to stand before God without ceasing to be human is the subjective possibility of humankind’s knowledge of God. Barth finds the answer to the objective side of the question in the doctrine of the incarnation, whereas he approaches the subjective side of the question with his newly discovered economic pneumatology.²⁰

While Barth no longer considers the possibility of revelation as remaining ever impossible in this world, his subject-object dialectic in *GD*, just as the now abandoned “impossible possibility” dialectic, is still predicated upon the notion of humanity’s fallenness—this will be important for my discussion of Barth’s lapsarian thinking. With

¹⁹ *Unterricht I*, 214; ET 174.

²⁰ *Unterricht II*, 21; ET 333.

reference to the I-Thou philosophy popular among Barth's contemporaries such as Friedrich Gogarten, Barth says that the original relationship between God and humanity was that of an *Ich-und-Du*—God is neither a “He” nor an “It” but an “I.”²¹ Barth stresses God's utter aseity: “I am who I am (Exod. 3:14)... This subject is not giving an objective definition of himself but positing himself again as subject.”²²

Here we see that Barth's axiom “God is God” now takes on biblical-exegetical character. Eberhard Busch rightly observes that in *GD*, “the statement ‘God is God’ is nothing but a paraphrase of the name of God in Exodus 3:14: ‘I am that I am.’”²³ On this basis Barth repeatedly uses the term “*actus purus*” in *GD* to describe God's act in the person of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Here is an instance where Barth is not ashamed to draw from theological insights with which he does not entirely agree—in this case Thomism. Thomists interpret Exodus 3:14 as a statement that God is pure actuality in which all potentialities are actualised. Of course, Barth's stance against natural theology means that his “actualism,” as it has often been called, is incompatible with the Thomist-Aristotelian notion of an Unmoved Mover—though this is not the place for me to delve deeper into this topic.²⁵

What is noteworthy is that Barth's understanding of the axiom “God is God” in light of Exodus 3:14 is an improvement upon the theology of *Romans II*, in which he asserted that as God is God and the world remains world, human knowledge of God in this world is ever impossible. Werner Ruschke helpfully explains the “the ground of dialectic” in

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13ff; ET 327ff. Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1970), 84. Also See Dieter Becker, *Karl Barth und Martin Buber, Denker in dialogischer Nachbarschaft? Zur Bedeutung Martin Bubers für die Anthropologie Karl Barths* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

²² *Ibid.*, 13; ET 327.

²³ Eberhard Busch, *Die Anfänge des Theologen Karl Barth in seinen Göttinger Jahren* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 28. Translation mine.

²⁴ E.g. *Unterricht I*, 155; ET 127.

²⁵ Amy Marga has suggested that during the Göttingen-Münster period Barth left room for the viability of *analogia entis*. See Amy Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue With Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster: Its Significance for His Doctrine of God* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

Romans II: “We know that God is the one whom we do not know, the one whom we cannot know, because God is God.”²⁶ In *Romans II*, “humanity has no possibility to draw near to God” or come to any knowledge of God because of God’s “absolute otherness” over against the world.²⁷ Recall from Chapter 3 that according to *Romans II*, the “world” is not God’s original creation, but a realm of existence that has fallen into temporality in which it is impossible that the transcendent God be revealed or known. Here Barth assumes a basically Kantian argument: the axiom “God is God” means that God cannot be known within the realm of intuitable objects. Thus in *Romans II*, God’s transcendence goes hand in hand with humanity’s supra-temporal fall and the impossibility of human knowledge of God.

This understanding of the axiom “God is God” would be improved upon in *GD* when Barth interprets it in light of the subject-object dialectic that he finds in Exodus 3:14. Busch is right that according to Barth’s subject-object dialectic in *GD*, “God’s hiddenness is not to be confused with God’s transcendence.”²⁸ The reason is that the paradisiacal human stands directly before the transcendent *Ich* without any veil—she is “immediate to God.”²⁹ God was transcendent over humankind even in the pre-lapsarian state, but the transcendent God was not hidden to the paradisiacal human. This was indeed what Barth would have also maintained in *Romans II*, but it would have been inconsistent with his argument there that God’s absolute otherness over against the world was due to the latter’s fall into temporality.

In *GD*, God’s transcendence is no longer associated with humanity’s fall. It is rather God’s hiddenness that resulted from the fall. For fallen humanity, direct knowledge of God is impossible. As we shall see, this basic position is important for understanding

²⁶ Werner Ruschke, *Entstehung und Ausführung der Diastaseologie in Karl Barths zweitem Römerbrief* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987), 14. Translation mine.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Busch, *Barth in seinen Göttingen Jahren*, 28. Translation mine.

²⁹ *Unterricht I*, 190 (“unmittelbar zu Gott”); ET 155.

Barth's lapsarian thinking at this stage.

Referring back to the twofold questions of the possibility of revelation, Barth comments: "When God truly reveals himself truly to us, this presupposes... (a) that God meets us and (b) that we stand before God. For our problem this means that God is an object of knowledge and we the subject. God becomes an object of knowledge by becoming man in Christ. We become the subject of knowledge by faith and obedience."³⁰ In this "twofold event" of revelation God enters into "the concealment of the subject-object relation."³¹ Concealment, or non-revelation, *is* God's self-revelation, and conversely, revelation *is* non-revelation. Barth repeatedly refers to this as a "dreadful equation": "*Offenbarung = Nicht-Offenbarung.*"³²

But is revelation as non-revelation really revelation? In the Münster dogmatics Barth gives a "critically realistic dialectical" (McCormack) answer: revelation is really revelation even and precisely in its being non-revelation. The critical realism of this dialectic of revelation and non-revelation is not philosophical or metaphysical, but rather a thinking-after (*Nach-denken*) of the matter-of-fact (*Tatsache*) of revelation:

The question of which form of philosophy one is intentionally or unintentionally devoted to is entirely irrelevant; epistemological conversion to some critical realism would be completely meaningless in light of the matter-of-fact—that God is a hidden God precisely because He is the self-revealing God, the God before whose deity we can neither flee from transcendence into immanence nor vice versa, the God who is never so far away since He is completely near us, and near us precisely in being far from us, the One who can never be an object because He is God. So, is revelation as such non-revelation?³³

Put differently, the revelation that "we see, hear, feel, touch, what we can inwardly or outwardly perceive—that something else, an opposite, a second thing, an object, an 'I'—is

³⁰ *Unterricht* II, 17 ; ET 330.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 17ff; ET 330ff.

³² *Unterricht* I, 166, etc.; ET 135, etc. ET does not use the equal sign. Original: "So wäre also gerade Offenbarung = Nicht-Offenbarung?" ET: "Is revelation, then, 'nonrevelation'?"

³³ *MD* 291-92. Translation mine. D. Paul La Montagne makes a minor mistake in commenting that the term "critical realism" was not readily available to Barth. See *Barth and Rationality: Critical Realism in Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 10.

it not this 'I' [the '*I am that I am*'?]"³⁴ Barth's answer is affirmative: "Yes, so it is, and it always remains so."³⁵ The fact that revelation *is* non-revelation means that the *Deus revelatus* and the *Deus absconditus* are one and the same God.³⁶

Revelation as such is an event in which God never ceases to be the *Ich*; the divine subject became a creaturely object without ceasing to be the divine subject. In the event of the *Deus dixit*, God remains ever the subject. In *GD* Barth explains: "God does not set aside or reverse his irremovable and irreversible I. He does not cease to be God in his revelation. But he conceals his I in a relation in which we can share in his self-knowledge, in which he can meet us, in which we can stand before him."³⁷

Note here that fallen humans cannot know God directly. This would mean that even when God has become an object, the human subject cannot know God through God's self-concealment. So how is revelation subjectively possible? Barth's answer is that only God knows Godself truly, and fallen humans come to know God only by participating in God's self-knowledge.

This notion of God's self-knowledge is deeply Trinitarian: it is the Holy Spirit's knowledge of God who objectifies Godself in the incarnate Son. Christologically, God becomes knowable as object when God "conceals his I in a human It or He"; pneumatologically, God as object becomes knowable to the human subject when God the Spirit "conceals himself in a human seeing, hearing, touching, and tasting of this objective reality."³⁸

Therefore, revelation, again, means concealment: God enters into the concealment of the subject-object relation in order to reveal Godself. With reference to Kierkegaard, Barth states that this concealment is the "medium" of revelation, "which under the

³⁴ Ibid., 292. Translation mine.

³⁵ Ibid. Translation mine.

³⁶ Ibid., 293. Translation mine.

³⁷ *Unterricht* I, 17; ET 330.

³⁸ Ibid.

condition of revelation we know in Christ by the obedience of faith, is only the veil, the incognito, in which the divine subjective, I am who I am, the living God, conceals himself and wills to be known.”³⁹ This means that human knowledge of God is necessarily “indirect.”⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Barth emphasises that human knowledge of God in the two-way event of revelation, albeit indirect, is true and adequate knowledge.⁴¹ This stands in sharp contrast to the one-sidedly eschatological theology of *Romans II*, where the possibility of human knowledge of God in this temporal world shall always remain impossible. In the Göttingen-Münster period, the reality of revelation and human knowledge of God is both an “already” (it is already true and adequate) and a “not yet” (it is not yet direct). This shift in Barth’s eschatological thinking is, again, reflected in his abandonment of the “impossible possibility” rhetoric in favour of the subject-object dialectic, which, as we shall see, is intimately related to his lapsarian thinking.

Objective Possibility: The Incarnation

Christology “a posteriori”

Despite these differences between *Romans II* and *GD*, some of Barth’s fundamental convictions remain unchanged. Among these is his insistence that the possibility of revelation is an *a posteriori* given: he does not ask whether revelation is possible, but *how* it has become possible. He states: “We can seriously raise and treat the problem of the possibility of revelation only when we know its reality. Fundamentally we can construct it only a posteriori. All reflection on how God *can* reveal himself is in truth only a ‘thinking after’ [Nach-Denken] of the fact that God *has* revealed himself.”⁴² The same position is

³⁹ *Unterricht II*, 21; ET 333.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20; ET 332.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21; ET 333.

⁴² *Unterricht I*, 185; ET 151.

reiterated in Münster. Discussing the “objective possibility of revelation,” Barth writes: “Precisely speaking, our construction is... not a construction *a priori*, but a construction *a posteriori*.”⁴³ This is so for revelation in general, and not just its objective possibility: “One can seriously pose and treat the problem of the possibility of revelation only by knowing its reality; as a basic principle one can only construct it *a posteriori*.”⁴⁴

For this reason, in adopting an enhypostatic-anhypostatic Christology, Barth is not seeking to deduce Christ’s two natures from intuitable phenomena or rational first principles. Rather, the incarnation is presupposed as an *a posteriori* given. As a concluding remark to his basically Chalcedonian⁴⁵ construal of Christ’s two natures, Barth writes:

What I have constructed... was obviously a construction *a posteriori*... I have not been talking hypothetically... but about the actually existent possibility of revelation, about Jesus Christ... I could not speak specifically about the condition without finally, as you have noted, adopting the terms of the Chalcedonian Definition, in which the church gave classical formulation, not to a deduction of Christ *a priori*, but to an account of the actual reality of Christ.⁴⁶

Christology in Chalcedonian Patterns

Barth’s Christology as such is explicitly Chalcedonian in its form. Note, however, that in *GD*, he is trying to find in Chalcedon a soteriological solution to a modern epistemological problem that was not Chalcedon’s central concern. The problem that he poses and treats is that of “the *Deus dixit* to which the Bible testifies as our first scientific dictum. In light of this testimony... we face the question of the objective possibility of this *Deus dixit*. We ask, then, how according to the biblical testimony God brings it about that

⁴³ *MD* 307. Translation mine.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 339. Translation mine.

⁴⁵ Some have protested against the use of this term to refer to Barth’s mature theology. Bruce McCormack and Paul Jones have done so with specific agendas of interpreting Barth’s Christology as “historicised.” Paul Nimmo offers helpful caution that the term “Chalcedonian” can carry misleading connotations. See Chapter 9 for more detail.

⁴⁶ *Unterricht* I, 173; ET 141.

he comes to us with his Word without ceasing to be God.”⁴⁷

Here we see that Barth is trying to treat the problem by appealing to the biblical witness. What he saw in Chalcedon was a sound summary of Scripture’s testimony to the *Deus dixit* in Christ. The incarnation to which Scripture attests is the very starting point of proving itself to be the only way whereby revelation becomes objectively possible:

...according to our proof (our a posteriori proof, even though the presupposition is assumed), revelation is not objectively possible except by God’s incarnation. Now God’s revelation in any case means God’s revelation in his concealment. It means the radical dedivinization of the world and nature and history, the complete divine incognito, God’s dealings with us exclusively by indirect communication.⁴⁸

Barth outlines four basic points to describe the incarnation in Chalcedonian patterns. First, “God will have to be wholly God in this concealment that makes him comprehensible.”⁴⁹ This is the Chalcedonian definition of Christ as fully and truly God. God in concealment cannot be any less or other than God-in-Godself, otherwise what is revealed through the concealment would not be God at all.

Second, “the human being through whom God conceals himself and makes himself comprehensible must be no less fully human.”⁵⁰ The reason, according to Barth, is that if God is not fully concealed in full humanity, if any part of God (were God divisible!) is revealed directly, the incomplete concealment would “again withdraw [God] from our perception. God must really meet man, and that means that he himself must be truly and totally human and nothing else.”⁵¹

Third, “the real deity and the real humanity must be so united that neither can be changed into the other or mixed with it... Otherwise it would no longer be God that meets

⁴⁷ Ibid., 176; ET 144.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 169; ET 138.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

us, or he would cease to meet us truly.”⁵² Here Barth is referring to the famous Chalcedonian adverbs describing Christ’s deity and humanity as having been united “unchangeably” and “unconfusedly.” These two adverbs underscore the Chalcedonian principle of the *abiding distinction* between Christ’s deity and humanity. Barth sets forth this principle while emphasising the other principle, the *inseparable union* of Christ’s two natures, as described by the other two Chalcedonian adverbs, “inseparably” and “indivisibly”: “The deity and humanity must be distinguished in such a way that we cannot *detach* the one from the other or consider the one *apart from* the other.”⁵³

Barth takes special note of the dialectical nature of the so-called “four fences of Chalcedon,” commenting that the union of Christ’s two natures is a “strictly dialectical union,” “a differentiation in union.”⁵⁴ For Barth, this ancient dialectic was key to solving the modern-critical problem of the objective possibility of revelation.

Fourth, Barth emphasises the Chalcedonian principle of the *uniqueness* of the incarnation: “By its very nature this union of deity and humanity cannot be general or multiple but only once and for all.”⁵⁵ If there could have been multiple God-humans, argues Barth, it would have meant that the incarnation could have taken place many times, and God could have separated Godself from the human to whom God is united many times. Not only would this violate the Chalcedonian principle of the inseparability of the union of Christ’s two natures, but also, more importantly, this would have meant that there is more than one revelation. However, it is axiomatic for Barth that “revelation is one” since God is one.⁵⁶ Thus there can only be one incarnation.

Barth’s argument for the singularity of the incarnation is modern. In the Chalcedonian tradition the uniqueness of the incarnation is described in terms of the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 170; ET 138f. Emphases mine.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; ET 139.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

enhypostatic-anhypostatic union, rather than the uniqueness of revelation. This is not to say that Barth fails to see the importance of the enhypostatic-anhypostatic union. In fact, this notion is of such central importance to him that he treats it separately under the topic of Christ's *assumptio* of human nature:

Early writers called the act of union an assumption. It is not, then, a changing or alteration of the divine nature of the Son, but with his divine mode of existence the Son takes a human mode of existence, uniting it... to his person, just as the divine mode of existence is eternally united to his person, yet without in any way altering his divine mode of existence.⁵⁷

This means that “the kenosis of the Son in the incarnation is not that he wholly or partially ceases to be the eternal Son of the Father (otherwise the incarnation would not be revelation) but that as the Son of God he is also made the Son of Man.”⁵⁸ This is an understanding of the kenosis that Barth would retain in his mature theology, on which McCormack rightly comments that the kenosis is “by addition and not by subtraction”: “Nothing proper to deity is ‘left behind’ when the ‘Son’ takes on the form of a servant.”⁵⁹ This view of the kenosis underscores the Nicene-Chalcedonian axiom that “God does not cease to be God in becoming human.”⁶⁰

Such an *assumptio* of human nature by the Logos would require that the person of the God-human is one divine person taking on human nature, not—in the words of Chalcedon—“as parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.” Nor is Christ a human hypostasis taking on divine nature—that would be the Nestorian heresy rejected by the Chalcedonian term “*Theotokos*.” Barth emphasises that Christ’s human nature “did not exist prior to its union

⁵⁷ Ibid., 192; ET 156.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bruce McCormack, “Karl Barth’s Christology as Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006), 248.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

with the Logos. It has no independent existence alongside or apart from him... It is *anhypostatos*.”⁶¹ This apophatic *anhypostatos* can also be expressed positively: “it is *enhypostatos*. It has personhood, subsistence, reality, only in its union with the Logos of God.”⁶²

For Barth, the central significance of the anhypostatic-enhypostatic union is again epistemological: it is the only way in which revelation is possible. “Those who want to see revelation in Jesus as a human individual” without recognising his person as that of the Logos, says Barth, are “necessarily groping in the void.”⁶³ This epistemological significance of the incarnation would continue to be Barth’s emphasis in his treatment of the *assumptio carnis* in the Münster dogmatics, which Barth begins by commenting that the *assumptio* and the kenosis have to be described in line with Chalcedon, “otherwise the incarnation would not be God’s revelation.”⁶⁴

From the foregoing discussions it is clear that Barth’s Christology at this stage takes on Chalcedonian patterns. However, it does not share Chalcedon’s central soteriological concern: according to Chalcedon the incarnation was “for us humans and for our salvation.”

In the Göttingen-Münster years, the central concern of Barth’s Christology is revelation rather than salvation. Barth explicitly states that his construction of two-nature Christology is not in a “soteriological setting.”⁶⁵ He admits that the setting of his Christological construction in *GD* not only differs from that of Chalcedon, but also it is “not in the same specifically soteriological setting as what Anselm did in Book II of his *Cur deus homo?*, and after him the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism in Questions

⁶¹ *Unterricht* I, 193; ET 157.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *MD*, 347. Translation mine.

⁶⁵ *Unterricht* I, 172; ET 140.

12-17.”⁶⁶ In this regard, during Göttingen-Münster period the *setting* of Barth’s Christology is different from both that of Chalcedon and Reformed orthodoxy, the latter of which owes a great debt to Anselm’s satisfaction theory. This is not to say that Barth’s Christology in this phase is non-soteriological. However, the primary theological problem he tackles is epistemological, even if the solution has to be soteriological.

Infralapsarian Christology

To say that Barth’s Christology in the Göttingen-Münster period is not explicitly or primarily soteriological, however, is not to say that it does not regard sin as the fundamental problem that the incarnation confronts. As Christopher Asprey observes, to take seriously the Christology of *GD* “would mean seeing the ‘two-natures’ Christology not in isolation, but as ingredient within soteriology, as the focal point of the reconciliation between God and humanity.”⁶⁷ Of course, the soteriology of *GD* is primarily concerned with how revelation overcomes human sin, rather than with salvation as usually understood in traditional Christian theology.

In any case, according to *GD*, sin is the very cause of the epistemological gulf between God and humans, and the purpose of the incarnation is precisely to take care of the problem of sin in history, thus “the incarnation is not an eternal relation.”⁶⁸ As McCormack puts it, “revelation in the form of incarnation was necessary, in Barth’s view, because of the Fall.”⁶⁹ McCormack even stresses that there was never “an independent, second ground of the necessity of the incarnation.”⁷⁰ Therefore, Barth’s Christology in the Göttingen-Münster phase is unmistakably infralapsarian.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Christopher Asprey, *Eschatological Presence in Karl Barth’s Göttingen Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 175.

⁶⁸ *Unterricht* I, 190; ET 155.

⁶⁹ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 360.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 361.

Recall that supralapsarian Christology maintains that God would have become incarnate regardless of humanity's fall. Barth explicitly states the very opposite:

Revelation, or, more precisely, incarnation... is the divine answer to the human question concerning the overcoming of the contradiction of human existence. To anticipate an expression from dogmatics proper, it takes place *because of the fall*, to reverse the fall... It is because of man and his contradiction that God must leave his self-resting deity for a second time after creation and come into action.⁷¹

Would the incarnation have been necessary for humanity to know God and be with God, had humankind not fallen? Barth's answer at this stage is unequivocally negative: "Man as God created him, paradisaical man, needed no divine revelation or incarnation... He stood before the revelation that was always and everywhere given to him directly. He was what the Romantics would have liked to have been, that is, *immediate to God*..."⁷²

In the Münster dogmatics Barth reiterates and explicates the very same position under the rubric of "The Birth of the Lord" (§16): "The human, as created by God, the paradisaical human, did not need the paradox of reconciliation... He would be what Romantic theology would have wanted to describe him to be by wrongly extracting him out of the situation of fallenness: he would be immediate to God... God was not a problem to him."⁷³

In short, for the Barth of Göttingen-Münster, incarnation presupposes the fall, thus his Christology during this period is unmistakably infralapsarian. Barth adds that in the eschaton wherein "the Son hands over the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28)," the incarnation "is no longer needed."⁷⁴ To be sure, the incarnation is once-and-for-all; the hypostatic union is inseparable. Therefore, "not that [Christ] ceases to be the incarnate Son any more than we cease to be men and women..., but in such a way that his humanity

⁷¹ *Unterricht I*, 190; ET 155.

⁷² *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

⁷³ *MD*, 345. Translation mine.

⁷⁴ *Unterricht I*, 192; ET 156.

is no longer needed and revelation ends as it began.”⁷⁵ In short, the incarnation is predicated upon humanity’s fallenness—and this is precisely the infralapsarian view.

From 1936 onwards, Barth would modify his eschatological Christology and assert that even in the eschaton, humanity’s union with God presupposes *participatio Christi*. This does not make his later Christology supralapsarian—I will explain why in Chapters 6 and 7. Suffice it now to say that Barth’s Christology in the Göttingen-Münster period is clearly infralapsarian.

Subjective Possibility: Pneumatology and Predestination

Calvin and Reformed Orthodoxy

Having established the objective possibility of revelation in the incarnation, Barth proceeds to consider the subjective possibility: how can fallen sinners see and hear God in the incognito of Christ? Once again we note that human fallenness is presupposed in Barth’s discussion of the subjective possibility of revelation—this will be important for our consideration of Barth’s predestinarian lapsarianism. Barth’s answer to this question is faith and obedience, and he appeals to Reformed pneumatology to describe faith-obedience as the Holy Spirit’s work.

Barth’s discourse on faith-obedience as the subjective possibility of revelation is indebted to his studies on Calvin. Though by 1911 Barth had already read Calvin’s 1559 *Institutes*, his encounter with Reformed orthodoxy in Göttingen gave him new insights on Calvin’s writings. In his lectures on Calvin’s theology delivered in the summer of 1922, Barth talks about the two-sidedness of the unity of revelation in Calvin’s thought. Barth says that according to Calvin, Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but a sinner can grasp the truth of Scripture only by “the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, the voice of

⁷⁵ Ibid.

truth that makes itself heard not merely in the Bible but also in the believing reader or hearer.”⁷⁶

What Barth picks up from Calvin in this line of thought is the “unity” of the “subjective and objective” sides of revelation.⁷⁷ For Barth, revelation is the act of the *one* God who enters into *one* subject-object concealment. Having commented on Calvin’s view of the unity of the objective and subjective aspects of inspiration, Barth continues: “The same may be said about the thinking of Calvin on the appropriation of revelation, on faith. More strongly than the other reformers Calvin stresses the purely other-sided basis and content of faith. Faith does not come from us, not even as the recognition of our need.”⁷⁸ Faith is the Holy Spirit’s work, as Book III of Calvin’s *Institutes* consistently stresses.

The notion of faith as the Holy Spirit’s work to effect the subjective possibility is a new insight that Barth retrieves from Calvin and Reformed orthodoxy. In *GD* §7 on “Faith and Obedience,” Barth writes in his introductory note: “As the miracle of faith and obedience, this knowledge and action are both effected by the Holy Spirit, whom no one and nothing can replace as the subjective possibility of revelation,” with a marginal note: “Heppe 381! 384-85.”⁷⁹ From these pages of Heppes’ *Dogmatik* Barth has learned the Reformed-orthodox doctrine of the “efficacious call” of the Holy Spirit in the so-called *ordo salutis* of economic pneumatology.⁸⁰ According to this doctrine, fallen humans are dead in their sins and transgressions, so totally depraved that they are utterly unable to perceive the call of Christ’s gospel. Thus the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner, inwardly calling her to accept the gospel by faith. This inward call of the Holy Spirit is said to be “efficacious,” because it is God’s grace that sovereignly overcomes the obstructions of sin,

⁷⁶ *Theologie Calvins*, 223; ET 167f.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Unterricht* I, 207; ET 168.

⁸⁰ Heppe, *Dogmatik*, 381ff.

a grace that Reformed orthodoxy describes as “irresistible.”

Actualistic Pneumatology

This understanding of the Holy Spirit’s economy leads to the important topic of Barth’s actualistic pneumatology in the Göttingen-Münster period, which determines the basic shape of his doctrine of election. Reappropriating the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, Barth begins his subsection on “The Subjective Possibility of Revelation” (*GD* §7.I) with the statement: “We must now discuss the subjective possibility of revelation, that is, human receptivity for it... What we have in view is the element in the concept which as attention or openness to it confronts directly our *constitutional inability* to grasp God’s incarnation.”⁸¹

This “element” is the work of the Holy Spirit *in nobis*, which ensures that “revelation is not a light that shines among the blind but real revelation.”⁸² For Barth, if revelation is not subjectively possible as it is objectively, then it is not revelation at all. The particular content of the Holy Spirit’s work effecting this subjective possibility is thus the believer’s “faith and obedience.”⁸³

The central theological problem here is: “How can we humans stand before God without ceasing to be human?”⁸⁴ Again, Barth’s *a posteriori* “presupposition” is that “revelation exists,” and that “we humans who cannot stand before God are the very ones who do stand before God.”⁸⁵

But how is it that humans could not stand before God in the first instance? Here Barth, as in *Romans* II, adopts a “critical philosophy”: the question of the subjective possibility of revelation “would be fine if we might be able to escape it with a little

⁸¹ *Unterricht* I, 207; ET 168.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 215; ET 174.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 215f; ET 174f.

conversion from critical philosophy to a more friendly philosophy... But we have made the presupposition that man stands before *God*, and precisely on the basis of the presupposition we must now say rather oddly that man cannot stand before God.”⁸⁶

In the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth’s critical philosophy takes on Calvinistic overtones: it “means... that we have no organ by which to receive God’s revelation... We have no quality, capacity, or possibility whereby to stand before God... We would no longer be human if any such could be ascribed to us.”⁸⁷ Of course, Barth is here referring to fallen humanity, not paradisiacal humanity. He is describing the subjective impossibility of revelation in a way akin to the Calvinist doctrine of total inability—this will be important for our consideration of his lapsarian tendency during the Göttingen-Münster period.

Stating that humans have no organ whereby to receive revelation, Barth explains: “For God himself is the content as well as the subject of revelation. What element in human self-consciousness can come into consideration as an organ by which to grasp this reality...?”⁸⁸

If humans are incapable of receiving revelation, the only way that revelation becomes subjectively possible is that “God does what we ourselves cannot do.”⁸⁹ Just as “God can step out of his deity, so we can step out of our humanity, although without surrendering but rather *activating* it; that we can step out of ourselves, out of our being and our awareness of being caught in the contradiction, and be with God and even in God, learning from God to know God in his revelation with eyes that God has opened.”⁹⁰ In this event, God posits “himself as the beginning, middle, and end of this human activity, granting us his good pleasure of his own free grace, that is, granting us meaning, truth,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 216; ET 175.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 215; ET 174.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 216; ET 175.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

power, and success, being himself the organ and way and movement in this human activity, so that it is no longer without an object but has God himself as its object.”⁹¹

Again, this event does not erase the believer’s humanity—Barth wants to ensure that he describes humans as standing before God *without ceasing to be human*. Therefore, this event is an “activation of our humanity which is from God and in God.”⁹² It is from God, because it is God’s work “in the third person, the Holy Spirit. *His* work is the activation of our humanity that is caught in contradiction to the extent that this work of his enables us to see and hear and receive and accept, that it makes us receptive to God, that it places us before God incarnate in Christ, that it sets us in fellowship with God.”⁹³

In other words, humans have no organ whereby to receive revelation, so Godself in the person of the Holy Spirit became this very organ. God is now not only the object of human knowledge, but also its subject: “God stands before them as an object but also because, for all their impotence, God is with them and indeed in them as the subject, so that God makes the connection, building the bridge that cannot be built.”⁹⁴

In this way, true human knowledge of God corresponds to God’s self-knowledge, because only God knows Godself truly. Human knowledge of God is true and adequate only insofar as it is the Holy Spirit’s knowledge of the Triune God, as the Holy Spirit is *with* and *in* the believer as the subject of this knowledge.

More concretely, the Holy Spirit’s work is to “create faith and obedience in us and thus place us before God.”⁹⁵ Just as in *Romans II*, Barth now describes faith and obedience as God’s work of creation and a miracle:

That is to say, as he [God] creates the world out of nothing, and as he makes a particle of human nature in the body of the virgin the dwelling of the Logos, so he makes a piece of

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 216f; ET 175f.

⁹³ Ibid., 218; ET 177.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 217; ET 176.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

broken humanity into human knowing and doing, with himself in his revelation as the object. As in creation and the incarnation, so here, too, we have a *miracle*, an event which has its only ontic and noetic basis in the freedom and majesty of God.⁹⁶

This last point about God's freedom and majesty in the event of faith and obedience points to an *actualistic* understanding of the Holy Spirit's work. Remember, Barth's *actualism* carries the implication that God is completely free and sovereign in God's active relations with everything that is not God. The actualism of Barth's later theology would be defined in terms of God's Being-in-act, but in the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth only speaks of a revelation-in-act. Even so, in this period Barth already describes revelation as God's free and pure act whereby God gives Godself to be known. The subjective possibility of revelation, in particular, can be understood as just the *enactment* or *activation* of God's self-disclosure in the subjective-human sphere.

Therefore, the actual human relation of faith and obedience to God "has to be a conversation, a drama, a struggle, in which there are dangers and turning points, surprises and discoveries, repulses and advances, victories and defeats, standings and fallings."⁹⁷ Humankind's relation of faith and obedience to God "must not set up anything constant or given, any natural necessity..."⁹⁸ Rather, "it must be a relation which, in order to remain true, must be renewed every moment both by God's work and word and in our own knowing and doing. Is not this unavoidable if God's free good pleasure on the one side, and faith and obedience as our own free acts on the other, are really the deciding factors?"⁹⁹

In this rhetorical question, Barth is invoking the actualistic principle of *correspondence*: "faith and obedience as our own free acts" are set up in correspondence to "God's free good pleasure." Recall that faith and obedience are truly human acts, but

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 222; ET 180.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

they are the act of the Holy Spirit *in nobis*, which is God's sovereign will *in actu*. This means that human faith and obedience are not given to believers to be in their constant possession. Rather, faith and obedience are the temporal enactment of God's free self-revelation in the believer's life, thus "each moment must be unique and nonrepeatable, for our other partner is God and he demands that we hazard our whole existence."¹⁰⁰ Barth's actualistic formulation of the Holy Spirit's work as such implies, then, in simple terms, that faith and obedience are a free gift of God that God can choose to give or withhold at any moment in time.

Double Predestination

Barth's actualistic pneumatology implies that the ultimate ground of a person's concrete situation of faith or unbelief is not ultimately her own choice—even though these are truly her own acts—but God's eternal decision. Human choices of faith and unbelief are "but the human and temporal shadow, manifestation, repetition, and outworking of a divine and eternal reality."¹⁰¹

A sinner has no choice between faith and unbelief apart from God, since unbelief is inherent to fallen humanity. This is because God's objective revelation is an act of self-concealment, and the sinner has no capacity to perceive the divine in the incognito of the incarnation. Thus faith, as we saw, is impossible without the Holy Spirit's work *in nobis*. This means that whether a person will come to faith depends entirely on God's sovereign decision and act.

Now, if a person can come to faith only by God's free decision through the Holy Spirit's work, this would imply that "the possibility of unbelief" can be understood "only in terms of a divine nonwilling, nonawakening, and noneffecting, a planned and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *Unterricht* II, 170; ET 443.

purposeful attitude of God, a specific holding back, a presence and activity that produces a vacuum on the human side.”¹⁰² Conversely, “If we could find a basis for unbelief in ourselves apart from God, at least in part, then we could find a total or partial basis... for a faith that God did not will or awaken or effect, or did not do so totally, but that is totally or partially the result of our own piety or inspiration or conflict. But this faith would not be faith, faith in revelation.”¹⁰³

Therefore, God’s decision has to be the total ground for human situations of faith and unbelief, and “the Holy Spirit, through whose power our weak faith and obedience become the subjective possibility of revelation, is the special thing in the election of grace.”¹⁰⁴ In the case of unbelief “we are passed by or rejected by God”; in the case of faith and obedience “we are elected or accepted by God.”¹⁰⁵ This “twofold possibility” is God’s act of double predestination.

The reality of double predestination as such is of course God’s *eternal* decision. However, Barth insists that this “eternal” decision must not be understood detachedly from concrete actualities perceptible to human beings. He criticises the classical Calvinist doctrine of a *decretum absolutum*, which teaches that God eternally chose a fixed group of people as vessels of mercy and reprobated all others as vessels of wrath, as speculatively metaphysical, calling it a “Trojan Horse” of pagan thought that would eventually ruin Reformed orthodoxy from within.¹⁰⁶ For Barth, the classical Reformed understanding of the *decretum absolutum* is “an illegitimate abstraction” that “anthropologizes or psychologizes a thought which strictly makes sense only as a concept of the knowledge of God.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Ibid., 181; ET 451f.

¹⁰³ Ibid.; ET 452.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 200; ET 466.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 167; ET 440.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 186; ET 455.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 185; ET 454.

Against historic Calvinism, Barth sets forth two theses that are similar to but different from his own position in *Romans II*. First, he insists that predestination must be understood *actualistically*: “Precisely as eternal predestination, predestination is the divine decree in action, the divine decreeing concerning us in which at every moment God is free in relation to us and goes forward with us from decision to decision.”¹⁰⁸ With this actualistic formulation, Barth rejects the traditional understanding of God’s decree as “eternal” in the sense of being rigidly fixed from all eternity. Rather, “God’s eternity means that ‘my time is in thy hands.’ It is not an ossified eternity but his living eternity, the eternity of his will, the eternity in which he is Lord.”¹⁰⁹

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Barth of *Romans II* also holds to an actualistic understanding of predestination. However, in *Romans II*, Barth does not conflate eternity with present actualities as he does in *GD*. In *Romans II*, predestination operates on two levels: on the present-actualistic level, double predestination is manifest through faith and unbelief; on the level of divine eternity, predestination moves from reprobation to election. In *GD*, however, Barth identifies divine eternity as eternity-in-actuality.

Such a view of eternity is indeed strange, as it seems to destroy the transcendence of this very concept and conflate it with temporal actualities. In 1936-42 Barth would give up this actualistic understanding of predestination in favour of an “election in Christ” to maintain the utterly objective reality of God’s eternal decision (see Chapters 6-7). In 1954, he would combine the two insights and develop a highly actualistic rendition of his notion of election-in-Christ (see Chapter 9). During the Göttingen-Münster period, however, Barth still defines God’s eternal will in terms of temporal actualities.

Does this mean that God’s eternal will is mutable? In *GD* Barth argues that if God’s immutability is truly God’s, then we cannot perceive it directly. God’s unchangeable will

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

must not be sought “in the comprehensibility of a fate which we can abstract from the givenness of a particular station on the way.”¹¹⁰ To claim knowledge of such a “fate”—the *decretum absolutum*—is to “isolate an event in time from the event in the divine eternity instead of relating it to it.”¹¹¹

For this reason Barth insists that we can only perceive God’s immutable will *in actu*, that is, in God’s actions in the concrete moments of time. “God is free not only to elect and reject different people but also to elect or reject a particular individual at different times. It is in the eternal act of predestinating, as comes out in the different situations of a person face-to-face with it, that this divine freedom triumphs.”¹¹²

Barth’s second thesis is that while predestination does not mean God’s “fixed will of election and rejection,” it must not be understood as “vacillation between the two” either, for “its point and goal are always election, not rejection, even in rejection.”¹¹³ Thus double predestination must be understood *teleologically*: election is irreversibly the purpose of reprobation. Barth again cites Rom. 11:32 as he did in *Romans II* to claim that “the way leads fundamentally from rejection to election, not vice versa. God has shut up all in disobedience in order to have mercy upon all.”¹¹⁴ Just as God’s self-concealment is not a goal in itself but serves the purpose of revelation, so “rejection does not take place for its own sake” but for the sake of election.¹¹⁵ “In his election the judged as such are also the elect.”¹¹⁶

With these two theses, Barth’s doctrine of predestination in *GD* operates from two perspectives, but not on two levels as in *Romans II*: according to *GD* “the elect might also perish (i.e. on their own side)..., but they cannot fall away on the side of the decree, of

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 192; ET 460.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 193; ET 461.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 192; ET 460.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 199; ET 465.

God.”¹¹⁷ Note that unlike *Romans II*, Barth no longer differentiates between God’s eternal will and actualistic work. Rather, the distinction is now between the will of the elect and the decree of God. In other words, Barth now understands God’s eternal decree actualistically such that the tension is no longer between God’s eternal decree and temporal act—the Barth of *GD* refuses to claim knowledge of an eternity above and behind the eternity-in-actuality humanly intuited in space and time—but between the decisive actuality of God’s eternally electing decree and the paradoxical will of God to permit sinners in their attempts to oppose this decree.

With his attention on this actual tension in the here-and-now, Barth no longer asserts in *GD* any explicitly universalist eschatology as he did in *Romans II*. Instead, he now focuses on “our actual situation,” in which “all are at every moment under the divine either-or and can be either elect or rejected. No one is hopeless, and no one is yet in port. All can and must seek the decision where from all eternity (but from God’s living eternity) it has been made for time, and will now be made in time one way or another according to *God’s* will.”¹¹⁸ Thus Barth rejects the notion of an absolute assurance of having been “plucked out of the mass of perdition” once and for all.¹¹⁹

There is, however, “a relative assurance of God, and therefore also of election and salvation, as surely as we know God in his revelation in Christ as the one whose will is to save and not to judge.”¹²⁰ With reference to Calvin, Barth states that “Christ is the mirror of election.”¹²¹ Christ reveals crucifixion, judgement, and condemnation to be the means for salvation and election. “In this *teleology* of *God* that is revealed in *Christ* (we must stress all three words) there is the source of our certainty of election and salvation. Thus again, not in ourselves, not in an abstract idea of God, but in God’s revelation, and there

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 200; ET 465f.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 207; ET 471.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 199; ET 465.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 207; ET 471.

¹²¹ Ibid.

most certainly, we too, as we look there, can and should be most certain.”¹²² This is a certainty found only in Christ—it is not the “absolute certainty” of what Barth considers (and, in my opinion, misunderstands) to be a speculatively constructed doctrine of *decretum absolutum*.

As to the question whether all humans will eschatologically pass from reprobation to election, Barth’s answer in *GD* is far more ambiguous than in *Romans II*. In *GD* he warns: “That election and not rejection is the goal of the ways of God is the most that we can and must say... The idea of apocatastasis, of the elimination of rejection, cannot derive from knowledge of this [electing, free, and majestic] God.”¹²³

Here Barth is refusing to speculate about predestination apart from what is objectively revealed in Christ. He insists that “we must stand by the *revelation in Christ* and thus start with what predestination is in the first instance, that is, election.”¹²⁴ For the Barth of *GD*, all that revelation in Christ allows him to say is that election is the goal of reprobation, but it says nothing about the elimination of reprobation. Thus in *GD*, universal election is only a possibility of which no one can be certain.

Recall that in *Romans II*, Barth sees the death and resurrection of Christ as the revelation of an eternal movement from universal reprobation to universal election. Accordingly, no universal election is to take place in time; double predestination in the temporal realm will always remain actualistic. Thus Barth’s doctrine of election in *Romans II* also differs from the doctrine of an *apocatastasis*. However, in contrast to *GD* wherein eternity is no longer detached from present actualities, the eternal-eschatological aspect of predestination as described in *Romans II* is truly universal in scope.

This difference between *Romans II* and *GD* has to do with a shift in the locus of revelation in Barth’s mind. According to *Romans II*, Christ’s resurrection alone is

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 211; ET 475

¹²⁴ Ibid., 210; ET 474. Emphasis mine.

revelation in the strictest sense, and this event manifests a supra-temporal, non-historical triumph of election over reprobation. In *GD*, however, incarnation is the event in which God enters into a veil in order to unveil Godself, and divine self-disclosure is never complete without the Holy Spirit's work on the subjective human side. On this view, theological reflection may never venture beyond what is revealed in the temporal veil. Thus Barth can no longer speak with certainty about an eternal predestination of God apart from what he perceives to have been given in the actuality of revelation. All that his view of revelation would allow him to say is that reprobation serves the purpose of election. Rom. 11:32 hints to a universalistic character in the teleology of predestination, but this is to be taken as nothing more than a mere hint.

Towards Infralapsarianism

Recall from Chapter 3 that in *Romans II* Barth is basically supralapsarian because the universal movement from reprobation to election on the eternal-eschatological level constitutes the purpose of the divine predestination of humanity unto fallenness. Such a statement is nowhere to be found in *GD*, because the epistemological confines of revelation-in-Christ would not allow Barth to venture this far. That is, the *actual* event of God's self-veiling and self-unveiling does not tell us whether God predestined the fall as a means to fulfil God's purpose in double predestination.

According to *GD*, what we know in the *actual* event of God's self-concealment and self-disclosure, of unbelief and faith, is that "our rebellion against God is a fact," thus those whom God rejects are already sinners.¹²⁵ Against the Catholic and Lutheran accusation that the Reformed doctrine of predestination renders God the "author of sin," Barth contends that "sin, which rules in the circumscribed area to which the reprobate are

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 191; ET 459.

banned, is not God's work, though it is certainly God's work that the reprobate are banned there and thus left to their own device."¹²⁶

Barth argues: "It is nothing but justice if God leaves people to themselves, for it is they who sin... The fact that God passes people by and therefore condemns them adds nothing new to sin, which is not of God... The only point is that sin is recognized and taken seriously [in God's act of reprobation]. Thus sin is the cause of ruin, not God."¹²⁷

In this line of thought, Barth is basically using the classical infralapsarian argument to counter the charge that Reformed doctrine portrays God as the author of sin. Recall that according to infralapsarianism, God eternally conceives of the object of predestination as fallen humanity (*homo lapsus*)—and here Barth is stating precisely the infralapsarian thesis by saying that those whom "God passes by" are "the hardened, for it is they who sin." This argument is an implicit denial of the supralapsarian thesis that God decreed the fall of humanity in order to issue forth election and reprobation.

It is worth noting how Barth's argument here echoes the infralapsarian position of the Canons of Dort. At the Synod of Dort, Johannes Maccovius was accused of rendering God the author of evil for holding to a strongly voluntaristic version of supralapsarianism. While the Synod finally found Maccovius not guilty of heterodoxy, the Canons of Dort make clear that in the decree of reprobation God is by no means the author of sin.¹²⁸ The argument that Dort offers is precisely the one that Barth makes here: reprobation is God's act whereby God passes over those whom God had already permitted to voluntarily fall into sin.

In fact, in his Göttingen lectures on the Reformed Confessions (1923), Barth already indicated that he agrees with Dort's rebuttal against "the idea that 'God is the author of

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ John Fesko, "Lapsarian Diversity at the Synod of Dort," in Michael Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversy: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 120ff.

sin’.”¹²⁹ He takes issues with the *decretum absolutum*, but agrees with Dort that “God’s *action* is election; God’s *nonaction* is merely *to leave* the rejected in the condition that is by rights that of all people—that is rejection... The rejected are simply the ‘nonelect’ (‘nonelecti’), ‘those who are passed by’ (‘praeteriti’). The idea that ‘God is the author of sin’ (‘deus autor peccati’) can in this way be successfully rebutted.”¹³⁰

What Barth did not realise was that these statements constituted precisely the infralapsarian position that Dort had set forth against the supralapsarian delegates, Gomarus and Maccovius.¹³¹ John Fesko’s recent study on the lapsarian debates at Dort shows that the Canons of Dort “specify that *homo creatus et lapsus* is the object of predestination,” and that Dort uses this “infralapsarian position” to define the “decree of reprobation” in order to ensure that it “by no means makes God the author of sin.”¹³²

Thus we see that in 1923 Barth had already adopted Dort’s infralapsarian thesis without realising that it was infralapsarian. We have also seen that Barth uses the same thesis in *GD* to argue that double predestination does not render God the author of sin.

This does not mean that Barth became basically infralapsarian in the Göttingen-Münster period. The reason is that this infralapsarian argument only applies to “eternal” predestination as manifested in present actualities, but says nothing about God’s eternal election and reprobation before the foundation of the world. In other words, Barth’s infralapsarian argument applies to predestination as a divine *economy* in the here-and-now, rather than a divine *will* in eternity. Supra- and infralapsarians in the seventeenth century would all agree that in terms of soteriological economy, the object of salvation is *homo peccator*. Since the Barth of Göttingen-Münster treats predestination as a soteriological economy, he may not be considered basically infralapsarian even if he has

¹²⁹ *Die Theologie der reformierten Bekenntnisschriften*, 333; ET 215.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Also see Fesko, “Lapsarian Diversity at Dort,” 114f.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 116.

made it emphatic that the *obiectum praedestinationis* is *homo peccator*.

In 1936, Barth would identify the incarnation with God's eternal predestination, and from then on Barth would no longer hesitate to speak with clarity about God's eternal acts in light of Christ. Yet, during the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth's doctrine of election has not yet merged with his Christology, and there is still a gap between what he thinks we may know in Christ and what he thinks we may not know about God-in-eternity. Put another way, in the Göttingen-Münster phase, Barth had only developed the notion of God's "revelation-in-act," but not yet God's eternal "Being-in-act," thus Barth would still hesitate to discuss God's eternal decisions in light of temporal actualities. This means that the infralapsarian thesis he adopted from Dort really applies to his actualistic pneumatology only (which describes God's sovereignty in awakening faith or abandoning people in unbelief), rather than a proper doctrine of election describing God's *eternal* decision and act.

In this sense, it would be appropriate to say that during the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth's doctrine of predestination is moving in an infralapsarian direction. It is even fair to say that the supralapsarian elements in *Romans* II are no longer present in *GD*, since Barth no longer posits an eternity above and behind the eternity-in-actuality intuited to human beings in the here-and-now. However, Barth would not become basically infralapsarian in his doctrine of election until he marries this doctrine with his Christology in 1936, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

Barth's Misinterpretation of the Lapsarian Controversy

The foregoing discussions alluded to the fact that during the Göttingen-Münster period Barth was already mistaken in his definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism. In the final subsection of *GD* §18, "The Election of Grace," he offers a historical-dogmatic

discussion of the Lapsarian Controversy for the first time in his career, and identifies himself as a supralapsarian.¹³³ As we shall see, however, his definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism in *GD* §18, just as in *Romans* II and *CD* §33, are compromised by technical mistakes.

Barth begins his treatment of the Lapsarian Controversy at the end of *GD* §18 by stating that “the issue here is the relation of predestination to the creation of the world and humanity and the fall of the human race. What is the first, primary, and original thing in the one will of God that we see in some way in all these acts?”¹³⁴

To define the point of contention between supra- and infralapsarians this way is, of course, not necessarily erroneous. However, this definition is inadequate, because Barth does not specify that supra- and infralapsarians are concerned about the logical relations between election-reprobation and God’s *eternal decrees* of creation and the fall. Rather, in introducing the contended issue he already makes it sound as if the Lapsarian Controversy were about predestination in relation to God’s *actual* work of creation and *actual* permission of humanity’s fall.

To be sure, he qualifies his statement above by clarifying that “what we have here is not, of course, a temporal *prius* but a logical and material *prius*.”¹³⁵ Still, Barth fails to stress that the supra-infra debate is about God’s *pre-temporal* decrees of creation and the fall, rather than the corresponding events in history.

Barth continues to explain the point of contention: “Are creation and the fall presupposed in predestination? Or is predestination the presupposition of creation and the fall? Is the object of predestination created and fallen humanity or humanity that may be created and may fall?”¹³⁶ Here Barth defines the supra-infra debate in terms of the

¹³³ *Unterricht*, 202f; ET 468.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

obiectum praedestinationis as either *homo creabilis et labilis* (creatable and lapsable human) or *creatus et lapsus* (created and fallen). Again, this is not wrong, but Barth still has not clarified that the object of predestination in both supra- and infralapsarianism is strictly God's eternal conception of human individuals in election-reprobation rather than actually created or uncreated, fallen or unfallen human beings in history.

Barth's error becomes obvious when he proceeds to define infralapsarianism: "God first created humanity to his own glory, and then, again to his glory, to bring to light the incapacity of the unfree will..., permitted it to fall into sin, and only then, once again to his glory, brought into force the decree of election or reprobation in relation to this fallen humanity."¹³⁷ This definition of infralapsarianism is clearly wrong: Barth is here defining *homo creatus et lapsus* as humanity *actually* created and fallen. According to this definition, God actually created humanity and allowed it to fall into sin before *bringing into force* the decrees of election and reprobation. But as we saw in Chapter 1, this is a position that any Reformed orthodox theologian, supra- and infralapsarian alike, would firmly reject.

Barth commits further errors in introducing the supralapsarian position. He begins by stating that unlike infralapsarianism, the supralapsarian view "relied constantly on Eph. 1:4...: 'he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.'" Contra this statement, recent scholarship has shown that at the Synod of Dort, Ephesians 1:4 was precisely one key passage that Polyander, Thysius, and Walaeus, three Dutch infralapsarian professors from Leiden, cited to refute Gomarus's supralapsarian argument from Romans 9:21.¹³⁸ The three professors argued: "For we are elect in Christ, so that we might be holy, Eph 1.4 and predestined to be adopted as sons, v. 5. Therefore we were outside of Christ

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Fesko, "Lapsarian Diversity at Dort," 113.

previously, unrighteous, and unsuitable of the adoption of sons.”¹³⁹ Instead of recognising Ephesians 1:4 as a passage often cited by infralapsarians to refute supralapsarianism, Barth asserts the very opposite.

Moving on, Barth comments that infralapsarians have had to turn Paul’s statement in Ephesians 1:4 “into the platitude that predestination did not *merely* arise in time with the fall but belongs to God’s eternal being.”¹⁴⁰ This comment is again misleading because of the adjective “merely.” For supra- and infralapsarians alike, predestination *never* arose in time but belongs *strictly* to God’s eternal will.

Barth goes on to define supralapsarianism:

The Supralapsarians claim that God created humanity immediately and originally with the destiny of manifesting his glory by manifesting mercy and righteousness. He thus created the human being as a rational creature in his own image, that is, as a being in which he might cause his own attributes to shine forth. The human was thus a creature that could fall, having a will of its own. Election and rejection are then the execution of this first and original decree, affecting created humanity.¹⁴¹

Here Barth commits a serious error: he first defines the supralapsarian *obiectum praedestinationis* as “a creature that could fall,” a “creature” that he describes in the passage above as actually having been created. Barth thinks that according to supralapsarianism, “election and rejection” are the “execution” of some “first and original decree” whereby God willed to manifest God’s glory in mercy and righteousness. However, in Reformed orthodoxy, election-reprobation *is* the very decree itself, not the execution. Moreover, Barth says here that election and rejection *affected created humanity*, which completely contradicts the supralapsarian thesis that the object of predestination is uncreated and unfallen (see Chapter 1).

Having given this erroneous doctrinal-historical introduction to supra- and

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ *Unterricht* II, 201; ET 467. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

infralapsarianism, Barth states: “I myself take the Supralapsarian position.”¹⁴² He explains: “As I see it, predestination is set at the *beginning* of God’s ways. The decision before and under which we are set by God’s Word in Christ is so decisive that we are not permitted to go back to an indecision, indefiniteness, or neutrality in God prior to this decision.”¹⁴³ Note that this explanation sets forth a conviction shared by supra- and infralapsarians, rather than the former alone.

Barth continues to explicate his conviction, which he thinks belongs to supra- rather than infralapsarianism: “From and to all eternity we are simply the objects of the mercy and righteousness of the divine will. How can God’s omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness be anything other alongside these? Predestination is the secret of creation *and* redemption *and* consummation.”¹⁴⁴ Yet, as we saw in Chapter 1, this description suits infra- just as well as supralapsarianism, because for the Reformed orthodox in general, predestination is strictly eternal, and God’s will in double predestination grounds all God’s actual works (distinct from eternal decrees) from creation to consummation.

Additionally, as noted earlier, in resorting to the Synod of Dort to argue that the freely predestining God is not the author of sin, Barth already subscribed himself to the infralapsarian conviction that the object of reprobation is sinful humanity, and that in God’s act of reprobation “sin is recognized and taken seriously.”¹⁴⁵ That is, in the Göttingen-Münster period Barth had already adopted the infralapsarian logic that divine reprobation was issued upon God’s consideration of human fallenness. Thus Barth was already leaning towards infralapsarianism, and he called himself a supralapsarian only on the basis of mistaken definitions.

¹⁴² Ibid. 202; ET 468.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 191; ET 459.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have shown that during the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth's Christology was already infralapsarian, for he describes the incarnation as *de jure* predicated upon humanity's fall and serving the purpose of overcoming humanity's sin. This is not to say that God *could not have* become incarnate if humanity had not fallen into sin, as if the predication of the incarnation upon sin were a higher *jus* to which God must subscribe. To say that the incarnation *de jure* presupposes sin is to say that in God's eternal plan, "the divine will to become incarnate logically follows... the divine will to allow sin."¹⁴⁶ This is the divine ordinance—*jus*—by which the incarnation *de jure* presupposes humanity's fall.

Both supra- and infralapsarian Christology agree that the incarnation *de facto* confronts sin. Supralapsarian Christology, however, contends that God *would have* become incarnate even if humanity had not fallen into sin, since "the divine will to become incarnate logically precedes... the divine will to allow sin," and "God had... other, deeper motives behind the incarnation than only the need for reconciliation."¹⁴⁷ By contrast, infralapsarian Christology contends that God has not revealed any purpose behind the incarnation other than dealing with sin. It does not deny that God *could have* become incarnate if humanity had not sinned, but refuses to claim to know *that* or *why* God *would have* done so, since by the divine ordinance revealed in Christ, as infralapsarian Christology sees it, the incarnation *de jure* presupposes sin.

I have demonstrated that in the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth denies that there is a ground of the necessity of the incarnation other than the divine purpose to overcome sin, which is in line with infralapsarian Christology. I have also demonstrated how Barth's actualistic pneumatology in this period caused him to lean towards predestinarian

¹⁴⁶ Edwin van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4f.

infralapsarianism, and how a shift in his view of the locus of revelation from resurrection to incarnation rid his doctrine of election of the supralapsarian element that characterised his thinking in *Romans II*. Finally, it has become clear in this chapter how Barth sets forth his erroneous understandings of supra- and infralapsarianism, initiated in *Romans II* (see Chapter 3) and fully explicated in *CD* §33 (see Chapters 2 and 7), during the Göttingen-Münster period. In the next chapter, we move on to the Bonn years, during which Barth's Christology and doctrine of election were brought closer together in his doctrine of the Word of God.

Chapter 5

The Bonn Years (1930-35): Human Talk and Divine Word—

New Developments?

In March 1930 Barth left Münster to join the theology faculty at Bonn. Barth scholars of an older generation paradigmatically described the Bonn years as the final methodological turning point in the Swiss theologian's development: according to this paradigm it was a watershed opus titled *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* written during the Bonn years that marked the beginning of Barth's "turn from dialectic to analogy." Scholars who subscribed to this older paradigm believed that *Anselm* provided Barth a new methodology that forced him to abandon *Die christliche Dogmatik* and begin anew his major dogmatic corpus under the title *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*.¹ This earlier view of the importance of Barth's theological development in Bonn has generally fallen out of favour since Bruce McCormack's paradigm-shifting opus, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, in which the author argues, among other theses, that with regard to methodology and material content there is no essential difference between Barth's theology during the Göttingen-Münster phase and the Bonn years.

This chapter examines the lapsarian position of Barth's Christology and doctrine of predestination during 1930-35 in light of McCormack's thesis. My aim is to show that during the Bonn years Barth still held to the same Christological and predestinarian lapsarianism that he had developed in Göttingen-Münster. Meanwhile, I shall argue that during the Bonn years Barth developed a more robust understanding of the Word of God as presupposing human fallenness, and this view of the Word of God paved the path to the

¹ This early paradigm is generally attributed to Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie* (Cologne: Jakob Hegner, 1951). ET: *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 89ff; 141ff.

basically infralapsarian Christological revision of the doctrine of election in 1936-42 (recall that infralapsarian Christology is the view that God's will to become incarnate presupposes the divine will to permit sin, while predestinarian infralapsarianism is the position that the object of double predestination is fallen humanity; the opposite position, namely, that God's will to become incarnate does not presuppose the fall, and the object of double predestination is unfallen humanity, would be supralapsarian).

This chapter focuses on *CD I/1* (1932), which, in my opinion, best represents among Barth's works produced during the Bonn years the lapsarian position of his Christology and doctrine of predestination in this phase of his development. Before proceeding to *CD I/1*, however, I will discuss the Anselm book. My thesis regarding *Anselm* is that it is generally unconcerned with the lapsarian question, since it is primarily a book on Anselm rather than one in which Barth sets forth his own theology, which, as we have seen, has been increasingly lapsarian in each successive phase of his development. As far as lapsarianism is concerned, *Anselm* is not a turning point in Barth's theological thinking.

Additionally, as some have spoken of "the Barth of *CD I/1* and 2" with reference to his doctrine of election, I will argue that *CD I/2* (completed 1937 and published 1938) is an opus in between two successive phases of Barth's development, carrying influences from both phases but not fitting nicely into either.²

Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum

McCormack's Thesis

I begin with a discussion of the role of *Anselm* in Barth's theological development. McCormack recounted in the 1990s: "for over forty years now, interpretation of Karl Barth's theological development has stood beneath the massive shadow cast by Hans Urs

² Suzanne McDonald, "Barth's 'Other' Doctrine of Election in the *Church Dogmatics*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007): 134ff.

von Balthasar's 1951 book, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*.³ Part of von Balthasar's thesis is that *Anselm* (1931) either constitutes a radical break from his previous theology, or at least it marks the beginning of a gradual "turn from dialectic to analogy" that saw its maturation in *CD II/1* (1938).⁴ Under von Balthasar's influence, scholars of an older generation such as Hans Frei and T. F. Torrance, while taking varying approaches to understanding Barth's theological development, generally ascribed to *Anselm* the status of a watershed between the dialectical and analogical phases of Barth's thought.⁵

Since the 1980s, attempts to challenge or correct the von Balthasar thesis began to emerge from scholars such as Eberhard Jüngel, Ingrid Spieckermann, Michael Beintker, and others.⁶ However, there is little dispute today that the decisive paradigm shift came with McCormack's 1995 book, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*. Part of McCormack's paradigm is the thesis that Barth's theology has always remained dialectical even after the so-called "turn to analogy," and that the *Anselm* book with its emphasis on the *analogia fidei* did not give rise to any essentially new methodology or theological material in Barth's thinking.⁷

McCormack's paradigm dominates much of recent scholarship, and there has been little attempt to challenge it. Among those who have expressed disagreement with McCormack is Stephen Wigley, who is of the opinion that McCormack has misunderstood von Balthasar. Yet, Wigley does not directly challenge McCormack's

³ Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4f, 422. Cf. Hans Frei, *The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909 to 1922* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1956), 194; T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931*, 133.

⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 5ff. See Eberhard Jüngel, "Von der Dialektik zur Analogie: Die Schule Kierkegaards und der Einspruch Petersons," in *Barth-Studien* (Zurich and Cologne: Benziger Verlag, 1982), 127ff; Ingrid Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985); Michael Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der 'dialektischen Theologie' Karl Barths* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1987).

⁷ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 14ff.

paradigm *per se*. His opinion is that “while McCormack may be right on Barth, he is wrong on von Balthasar on Barth.”⁸ Wigley argues: “McCormack maintains that Barth’s theology remained dialectical into the *Church Dogmatics*. But von Balthasar recognises this too.”⁹ That is, Wigley does not directly challenge McCormack’s view that there has never been a “turn from dialectic to analogy” in Barth’s career.

As I see it, there are good reasons to accept McCormack’s thesis regarding the role of *Anselm* in Barth’s theological development. Wigley, without directly opposing McCormack, suggests that McCormack’s view contradicts “Barth’s expressed opinion” from which von Balthasar takes his cue: “the real work that documents my conversion... from the residue of a philosophical or anthropological... grounding of Christian doctrine... is not the much-read tract against Emil Brunner but my 1931 book on Anselm of Canterbury’s proofs for the existence of God.”¹⁰ In so doing, however, Wigley has neglected McCormack’s argument that “missing from von Balthasar’s quotation is the larger context—which might have turned the interpretation in a very different direction from the one von Balthasar took.”¹¹

Furthermore, Wigley—and von Balthasar—have not accounted for Barth’s own comment in the preface to *CD I/1* that in this new prolegomenon he is simply re-expressing the materials from the *Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (prolegomenon to the Münster dogmatics), “saying the same thing, but in a very different way.”¹² That is, although in *CD I/1* Barth denounces the *analogia entis* while turning against so-called “dialectical theology,” the Anselm book never gave rise to essentially new materials in

⁸ Stephen Wigley, “The von Balthasar thesis: a re-examination of von Balthasar’s study of Barth in the light of Bruce McCormack,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 345.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 350.

¹⁰ Wigley, “The von Balthasar thesis,” 348. See Von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, 93; McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 1. Von Balthasar is quoting from Karl Barth, “Parergon,” *Evangelische Theologie* (1948): 272.

¹¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 1.

¹² *KD I/1*, Vorwort; ET xi.

Barth's theology that occasioned the composition of the *Church Dogmatics*. Rather, it simply gave him new ways of expressing his theology: "My new task was to rethink everything far more clearly, unambiguously and simply, in accordance with the church's belief, and yet far more freely, openly and comprehensively than I could ever have said it before."¹³

McCormack points out one further interpretative problem regarding *Anselm*: "This is a book on Anselm. It is not a book on Barth's theology—however true it may be at the end of the day that it tells us more about Barth than it does about the eleventh-century theologian."¹⁴ Therefore, "it is most likely that we should distinguish between Anselm (as Barth understands him) and Barth's own theological viewpoint at one decisive point."¹⁵

While McCormack applies this interpretative strategy to the "one decisive point" concerning "the relation (and distinction!) of the *ratio veritatis* and the *ratio fidei*, of the Word and the Creed,"¹⁶ I will focus on a different aspect, showing that although the predestinarian and Christological lapsarianism developed during the Göttingen-Münster period is recognisable as an underlying assumption in *Anselm*, Barth makes it far less explicit here than he would in *CD I/1*, where he sets forth his own theology.

Barth on Anselm: Brief Exposition

One primary contention in Barth's 1931 book on Anselm is that the methodology that the theologian of Canterbury assumes in the so-called "ontological proof" set forth in *Proslogion* 2-4 is an analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) that seeks to rationally demonstrate the existence of God, taking faith, which conforms to the Word, as its presuppositional starting-point. In other words, Barth contends that for Anselm, to "prove" is to "rationally

¹³ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from letters and autobiographical texts* (trans. John Bowden; Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1976), 210.

¹⁴ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 428.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 431.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

demonstrate” or “explicate.” The notion of “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*) as such, according to Barth’s interpretation of Anselm, runs contrary to any natural theology or analogy of being (*analogia entis*) that takes its starting-point in metaphysical first principles or empirical observations.

For Barth, it is necessary to first inquire about Anselm’s motivation in seeking understanding.¹⁷ Barth emphasises that for Anselm, understanding does not lead to faith. Rather, true understanding is the “understanding of faith” (*intellectus fidei*).¹⁸ This means that desire for understanding is inherent to faith: “What we are speaking of is a spontaneous desire of faith. Fundamentally, the *quaerere intellectum* is really immanent in *fides*.”¹⁹ Barth thus recognises an irreversible order in Anselm’s programme of *fides quaerens intellectum*:

Anselm wants ‘proof’ and ‘joy’ because he wants *intelligere* and he wants *intelligere* because he believes. Any reversal of this order of compulsion is excluded by Anselm’s conception of faith. That is to say, for Anselm, ‘to believe’ does not mean simply a striving of the human will towards God but a striving of the human will into God and so a participation (albeit in a manner limited by creatureliness) in God’s mode of Being and so a similar participation in God’s aseity, in matchless glory of his very Self, and therefore also in God’s utter absence of necessity.²⁰

Underlying this interpretation of Anselm is Barth’s own *actualism*.²¹ As we saw in the previous chapter, Barth borrows a term from medieval scholasticism, describing God as “pure act” (*actus purus*).²² God is perfect: God is Being whose potentiality is actuality, hence God’s utter absence of necessity. Such an understanding of God’s perfection is presupposed by faith; it is the starting point of *fides quaerens intellectum*. According to Barth’s interpretation of Anselm, the believer noetically participates in God’s perfection in an actualistic way, that is, with relations of actualistic distinctions and correspondences.

¹⁷ *Anselm*, 14; ET 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15; ET 17.

²¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 432.

²² *Unterricht I*, 155; ET 127.

Put more concretely, the understanding of faith conforms to God's self-revelation in such a way that the latter grounds the former, and it is by God's act that the former is actualised. Thus faith and the understanding to which it gives rise stand in a relation of analogy to divine revelation. The analogy is between human faith and divine act, not human being and divine Being, hence Barth's insistence on the *analogia fidei* and rejection of the *analogia entis*.

In light of this actualistic *analogia fidei* Barth interprets Anselm. For Barth, the term *ratio* (reason) is a "decisive concept" crucial to a correct understanding of Anselm. Barth distinguishes between an "ontic *ratio*" and a "noetic *ratio*" in Anselm.²³ The latter is "noetic" in the sense that it is the "knowing *ratio* of the human faculty of making concepts and judgments"; the "ontic" *ratio*, by contrast, is "peculiar to the object of faith."²⁴ The believer attains understanding when her noetic *ratio* conforms to the ontic *ratio* of God's truth.

Yet, this conformity is no simple matter. Barth identifies a further distinction in Anselm's notion of the ontic *ratio*. There is first the truth of God in itself, the *ratio veritatis*, which is "identical with the *ratio summae naturae*, that is with the divine Word consubstantial with the Father. It is the *ratio* of God."²⁵ The human intellect cannot directly comprehend the Word because of an ontological divide between God and creatures that makes God incomprehensible to creatures.²⁶ Any creaturely understanding of God must begin with faith.²⁷

Distinct from the *ratio veritatis* is thus the *ratio fidei*—the rationality of faith. The *ratio fidei* is a special kind of human reason that grasps the Word of God: it is the *Credo* of the Church. While for Anselm, the Bible is *ratio veritatis* in the stricter sense, Barth

²³ *Anselm*, 45; ET 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 57f; ET 57f.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

places the Bible on the same plane with the *Credo* as *ratio fidei*. Simply put, Barth's understanding of Anselm is such that the Word gives rise to the *Credo*, the *ratio fidei*, by God's active decision. The *ratio fidei* is not something that creatures may possess by their own powers; the believer possesses *ratio fidei* by God's act, thus the *ratio fidei* actualistically corresponds to the *ratio veritatis*. This actualism also implies that the *ratio veritatis* is strictly distinct from the *ratio fidei*.

Now, human intellect cannot directly comprehend the *ratio veritatis*, but understanding of the ontic *ratio* is possible when human reason seeks to explicate the *ratio fidei*, which corresponds to the *ratio veritatis*. Yet, once again, this event of understanding as noetic participation in God's mode of being would be subjectively impossible from the human side; it is made possible only when God becomes its author. As McCormack puts it, "the attainment of the *ratio intellectus* that is in conformity with the *ratio veritatis* hidden in the *ratio fidei* depends upon a divine decision, and therefore upon grace."²⁸ It is in this way that the noetic *ratio* actualistically corresponds to the ontic *ratio*.

Much more should be said if a full summary of *Anselm* is to be given, but for my purposes, the foregoing discussions should suffice. Three observations are now in order. First, in *Anselm* Barth has not yet developed the mature version of his actualism—the notion of God's Being-in-act. The actualism in *Anselm* remains the same as that in the Göttingen-Münster period: it is still the notion of a revelation-in-act. The first hint of the notion of God's Being-in-act, as I shall briefly show in my exposition of *CD I/1*, would not appear until *CD §9* where Barth begins to explicate the import of the doctrine of the Trinity for divine revelation. In this regard, *Anselm* stands in continuity with the Göttingen-Münster period and does not mark the beginning of a new phase in Barth's

²⁸ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 430.

actualism.

Second, the *analogia fidei* in *Anselm* is but a new way for Barth to express the same “critically realistic dialectical theology” (McCormack) that he has already set forth in the previous phases of his development. From the forgoing discussions it is clear that the actualistic correspondences and distinctions between the different *rationes* are essentially just a set of new terminology to describe the dialectic of God’s self-veiling and unveiling in the objective and subjective possibilities of revelation from the Göttingen-Münster period.

As we have seen, this dialectic is grounded upon Barth’s critical realism, the conviction that God is objectively real in and of Godself (as opposed to the claims of modern consciousness theology) and that human reason cannot attain to any immediate knowledge of God (following Kant’s critique of reason). This critical realism means that the dialectic of veiling and unveiling is necessary for any true human knowledge of God, and that this knowledge is necessarily indirect and mediated. This “neo-Kantian framework,” as Graham Ward observes, is also the ground of Barth’s *analogia fidei*:

Barth, following Kant, accepts that we cannot know ‘things in themselves’; we work with the mediated representations of these things and, on this basis, we live in the world ‘as if’ we had immediate awareness... Only the noetic operation of the Spirit of Christ, establishing *analogia fidei*..., can enable us to have some understanding of the world as it is. Only God sees things as they are. This theological position, as I pointed out, critiques notions of ‘presence’ and ‘identity’, for the world (and God’s unveiling of himself within the world) is always and only mediated to us.²⁹

All this is to say that Barth’s *analogia fidei* set forth in *Anselm* is simply another way of describing his “critically realistic dialectical theology.” It is not a new theological method, but one to which Barth has remained committed in all phases of his development.

²⁹ Graham Ward, “Barth, Modernity, and Postmodernity,” in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 285.

Lack of Lapsarianism in Anselm

The third observation constitutes my main contention for this section: there is no explicit lapsarianism in *Anselm*, either predestinarian or Christological. Barth interprets Anselm as saying that humanity's noetic participation in God is "limited by creatureliness," but it is unclear whether this means pre-lapsarian or post-lapsarian creatureliness.³⁰ To be sure, Anselm's Christology is unmistakably infralapsarian, and Barth acknowledges that in *Cur Deus Homo*, "sin as man's eternal guilt before God" is one of the "vital presuppositions" underlying "the necessity... of the Incarnation."³¹ However, Anselm, as understood by Barth, seems to suggest that revelation in the actualistic form of God's indirect speech is necessary for humankind to know God in the pre-lapsarian state (i.e., the necessity of revelation-in-act for human knowledge of God is not predicated upon the fall). As we saw, the noetic *ratio* cannot be directly identical to the ontic *ratio*, and the *ratio fidei* cannot be simply identical to the *ratio veritatis*, but is this because of human fallenness, or simply God's ontological transcendence over humanity regardless of humanity's sin?³² The fact is that quite unlike the Göttingen and Münster dogmatics—as well as *CD I/1* for that matter—the notion of sin is brought up only twice in the entire Anselm book.³³ This would have been uncharacteristic of Barth if his primary aim in *Anselm* were to set forth his own theology, but as McCormack puts it, "This is a book on Anselm. It is not a book on Barth's theology."³⁴

Of the two places where sin is mentioned in *Anselm*, however, Barth gives a slight hint of his own Christological infralapsarianism against the view that he sees in Anselm's *Proslogion* that seems to deem the lapsarian question irrelevant when it comes to the necessity of revelation-in-act for humanity's knowledge of God (when it comes to the

³⁰ *Anselm*, 15; ET 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 55; ET 55.

³² *Ibid.*, 57f; ET 57f.

³³ *Ibid.*, 55, 71; ET 55, 71.

³⁴ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 432.

question, *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm's Christology is of course infralapsarian—the incarnation took place for soteric purposes): “Perhaps Anselm did not know any other way of speaking of the Christian *Credo* except by addressing the sinner as one who had not sinned... on the basis of the great ‘as if’ which is really not an ‘as if’ at all, but which at all times has been the final and decisive means whereby the believer could speak to the unbeliever.”³⁵

Barth's comment on Anselm here implies that for Anselm (as Barth understands him), fallen and pre-lapsarian creatures alike are able to attain *intellectus fidei*. This would entail that the necessity of the Word-in-actu, the *analogia fidei*, the act of God whereby the understanding of faith in conformity to the *ratio veritatis* is actualised, is not predicated upon sin, but perhaps merely upon the ontological divide between Creator and creatures. Put more simply, Barth seems to be suggesting that for Anselm, the necessity of revelation-in-act for human knowledge of God does not presuppose human fallenness, as revelation in this form for Anselm (on Barth's interpretation) would be necessary even for creatures in the pre-lapsarian state if they were to attain *intellectus fidei*. In opposing this view, Barth is implying his own infralapsarian understanding of the twofold event of revelation (i.e., incarnation and election) that only upon the presupposition of humanity's fallenness is revelation in this form necessary for humans to attain to any true knowledge of God (see Chapter 4).

Aside from this slight hint of Barth's own infralapsarian Christology, *Anselm* is generally unconcerned about the noetic effects of sin in relation to the necessity of revelation for human knowledge of God. This, again, is because this is Barth's book on Anselm, rather than straightforwardly Barth's own theology.

On this point, one fallacy that von Balthasar commits is to read *CD I/1* into *Anselm*.

³⁵ *Anselm*, 71; ET 71.

With particular regard to the role of the doctrine of sin in *Anselm*, von Balthasar neglects the fact that mention of human fallenness is almost completely absent in the book. Thus von Balthasar comments that the “relevance” of Barth’s teaching (it is really Barth’s understanding of Anselm!) on the ontic and noetic *rationes* is that “the ontic *ratio* of things (for which truth is something inherent) has not been affected by sin, while the discovery of the truth (which occurs only on the noetic side) has been damaged. In other words, man could be blinded by sin, as it were, and no longer recognize God’s revelations of the eternal *ratio* in the ontic *ratio* of creation.”³⁶

Von Balthasar brings up this point in order to counter Barth with the Catholic understanding that “the spontaneity of human knowing belongs to its very nature, which has not been destroyed by sin.”³⁷ In any case, von Balthasar’s interpretation of *Anselm* errs partly in that he sees it as Barth’s own theology rather than an attempt to interpret Anselm. With regard to the necessity of God’s revelation-in-act for humanity’s knowledge of God, *Anselm* does not offer a full picture of Barth’s view, because lacking therein is the infralapsarian Christology whereby Barth’s theology in the Göttingen-Münster period and the Bonn years stand in continuity.

With regard to predestinarian lapsarianism, as far as I can see there is no trace of it at all in *Anselm*. In this regard, too, von Balthasar commits the error of confusing Barth with Anselm-according-to-Barth. Strangely, in discussing the significance of sin in *Anselm*, von Balthasar reads the infralapsarian Christology of *CD I/1* into it, but in discussing Barth’s view of faith and reason, von Balthasar reads Anselm’s supralapsarian view of revelation (“supralapsarian” in the sense that the necessity of revelation in its manifest form for humanity’s knowledge of God is not predicated upon humanity’s sin) into Barth.

³⁶ Von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, 159. Hans Boersma offers a concise and inspiring discussion of von Balthasar’s agreements and disagreements with Barth on the *analogia entis* in *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 131ff.

³⁷ Von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, 160.

Von Balthasar comments:

Let us first take up the case that so puzzled Anselm and Barth: the conundrum of the “possibility of denying the existence of God” [*Anselm* 186-87]. How can the fool say in his heart that there is no God, when he cannot really think such a thought?... Barth no longer answers the question as he did in the dialectical period, asserting that creaturely existence born in sin is itself a contradiction to itself... What, then, are we to say about the fool? ...The unbelief of the fool can consist in nothing other than the contradiction that the fool does not *will* to accept and believe his faith as true. He chooses not to believe what he already believes. This shall have important consequences for Barth’s doctrine on predestination, whose roots and power of synthesis lie here in this insight about faith.³⁸

What von Balthasar does here is to treat the “possibility of denying the existence of God” as the seed of Barth’s later notion of sin and unbelief as “impossible possibility” (*CD* III/3), a notion to which his mature Christocentric doctrine of predestination (*CD* II/2) gives rise (see Chapter 8).³⁹ In drawing this connection, von Balthasar fails to recognise one crucial difference between Barth and Anselm-according-to-Barth: the latter sees human nature as inherently capable of believing the Word, but the Barth of *CD* II/2 and III/3 insists that sinners have no inherent ability to participate in God apart from Christ. It is only because all humans are *a priori* elected in Christ and that nothingness has been eternally negated by Christ’s vicarious reprobation that sin and unbelief are described as impossible possibilities. In other words, as von Balthasar elsewhere puts it, for Barth, the human ability of “the discovery of truth... has been damaged [by sin],” and human beings have no innate ability to know God—this is a point that I have just discussed. Note here that von Balthasar contradicts himself, since, as we have just seen, he also says that for Barth, the human possibility of denying God’s existence is not a result of sin.

All this is to say that von Balthasar fails to recognise the incompatibility between Anselm’s supralapsarian view of revelation and the basically infralapsarian character of Barth’s mature doctrine of predestination. The self-contradiction in von Balthasar’s

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 146f.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

interpretation of *Anselm* would be easily resolved if we acknowledge that this book is Barth's attempt to understand and learn from Anselm rather than one in which Barth paints a full picture of his own theology. There is really no connection between "the possibility of denying the existence of God" in *Anselm* and the "impossible possibility" of sin and unbelief in Barth's later doctrine of election. Predestinarian lapsarianism (that is, the role of sin in the doctrine of predestination) is simply not an issue that Barth addresses in *Anselm*.

In sum, *Anselm* tells us precious little about Barth's lapsarian thinking, Christological or predestinarian. Bear in mind that as I have shown, lapsarianism plays an increasingly central role in the successive phases of Barth's theology. To treat *Anselm* as a key to understanding the shifts in the methods and contents of Barth's theology is thus to miss out a crucial aspect of his theological development.

Church Dogmatics I/1

As I have contended, *CD I/1* is the opus that best represents Barth's theology in 1930-35. In this section I will show that with regard to Christological and predestinarian lapsarianism, Barth's position during these years remains essentially the same as the Göttingen-Münster period, but because of the complexity of Barth's presentation of the matter in the framework of the *analogia fidei* in *CD I/1* and his new emphasis on the very concept of the Word of God itself (rather than the subjective-objective distinction), Christology and predestination now become much more closely interwoven.

Preface and Introduction

In the preface to *CD I/1* Barth makes it clear that there is no essential difference between this part-volume and the Münster prolegomena insofar as material contents are

concerned: on his own admission, he is “saying the same thing, but in a very different way.”⁴⁰ The difference, then, lies primarily in the way he presents his thought.

One difference between the Münster dogmatics (*Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*) and *CD I/1 (Kirchliche Dogmatik)* is suggested by the titles of the works, as Barth comments: “In substituting the word ‘Church’ for ‘Christian’ in the title, I have tried to set a good example of restraint in the lighthearted use of the great word ‘Christian’ against which I have protested.”⁴¹

This is where the influence of *Anselm* on Barth’s presentation of his theology becomes apparent. Barth has now come to think that to claim the word “Christian” for his own dogmatics could suggest a kind of unwarranted audacity in confusing the theologian’s understanding of faith (*intellectus fidei*) with the divine Word itself. In substituting “Church” for “Christian,” Barth is emphasising that “dogmatics is not a free science. It is bound to the sphere of the Church, where alone it is possible and meaningful.”⁴²

That is, in line with *Anselm*, Barth now stresses that theological reflection must conform to the Church’s Credo. This is of course nothing new: as we saw in Chapter 4, Barth was already drawing from Nicene-Chalcedonian orthodoxy and critically reliant upon confessional Reformed theology during the Göttingen-Münster period. He also insisted on being faithful to the biblical witness, which he considered to be in a genre with Church proclamation. Thus John Webster: “Like the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, the *Church Dogmatics* sees its task as critical examination of the church’s proclamation.”⁴³ The difference between Göttingen-Münster and *CD I/1*, then, is a matter of emphasis in presentation: Barth’s appeal to Church tradition and his biblical exegesis is much more

⁴⁰ *KD I/1*, Vorwort; ET xi.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; ET xii

⁴² *Ibid.*; ET xiii

⁴³ John Webster, *Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2004), 54.

explicit and extensive in *CD I/1* than in previous dogmatic cycles.

In light of *Anselm*, Barth now clearly spells out his conviction that the science of dogmatics is an “inquiry” (*Forschung*)—*quaerere*.⁴⁴ In the Introduction to *CD I/1* (§1-2) Barth asserts that dogmatic inquiry “presupposes that the true content of Christian talk about God can be known by man. It makes this assumption as in and with the Church it believes in Jesus Christ as the revealing and reconciling address of God to man.”⁴⁵

In one sense, to conform to the Church is to conform to Christ the Word: “Talk about God has true content when it conforms to the being of the Church, i.e., when it conforms to Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ This is because “Jesus Christ is the essence of the Church.”⁴⁷ Yet, Christ and the Church are not simply identical. Rather, Christ the Word “is the truth, not merely in Himself, but also for us as we know Him solely by faith in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁸ Here Barth distinguishes between Christ the Word, who is *ratio veritatis*, “truth in Himself,” and the *ratio fidei*, “truth... as we know Him... by faith in Jesus Christ.”

Theology as rational explication of the *ratio fidei* corresponds to the Word only by God’s act: “in the event of the divine action corresponding to the promise given to the Church, it is possible for it to be knowledge of the truth.”⁴⁹ Here Barth’s appeal to the actualistic notion of *analogia fidei* from *Anselm* is apparent: “The fulfilment of this knowledge, the *event* of human *action*, the appropriation *corresponding* to this address in which, through the stages of intuitive apprehension formulated comprehension, the revelation of the *analogia fidei* to resultant clarity in dogmatics..., is, of course, a second event compared with the divine *action* itself, *united* with it in faith, yet also in faith to be

⁴⁴ *KD I/1*, 10; ET 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12; ET 13

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11; ET 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

distinguished from it.”⁵⁰

While here Barth is obviously using the pattern of thought developed in *Anselm*, his actualistic description of the possibility of human knowledge of God is essentially the same as that found in *GD*: God’s action gives rise to human action that corresponds to it. That is, the act of faith corresponds to the act of revelation; faith is the subjective actualisation of revelation. Thus, just as in *GD*, Barth’s actualism in *CD I/1* still speaks of a “revelation-in-act” rather than God’s “Being-in-act.” The only place in *CD I/1* where Barth hints at the notion of God’s Being-in-act is §9, “The Triunity of God,” where Barth states that “to the unity of Father, Son and Spirit among themselves corresponds their unity *ad extra*. God’s essence and work are not twofold but one.”⁵¹ Yet, before having developed a Christocentric rendition of election in 1936, the Barth of *CD I/1* still describes election as revelation-in-act. That is, the human act of faith corresponds to the divine act of election in the event of the *Deus dixit*.

Recall from Chapter 4 that during the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth also spoke actualistically of the event of faith in terms of the event of election: God can elect a person for faith at any moment in time, and freely reject the same person in the next moment. In the Introduction to *CD I/1* we find this rendition of election still serving as the underlying principle of Barth’s *analogia fidei*:⁵²

Faith... is not a determination of human action which man can give to it at will or maintain at will once it is received. On the contrary, it is the gracious address of God to man, the free personal presence of Jesus Christ in his activity. Hence, if we say that dogmatics presupposes faith, or the determination of human action by hearing and as obedience to the being of the Church, we say that at every step and with every statement it presupposes the free grace of God which may at any time be given or refused as the object and meaning of this human action. It always rests with God and not with us whether our hearing is real hearing and our obedience real obedience, whether our dogmatics is blessed and sanctified as knowledge of the true Christian utterance or whether it is idle speculation.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid. Emphases mine.

⁵¹ Ibid., 391; ET 371.

⁵² See McDonald, “Barth’s ‘Other’ Doctrine of Election in the *Church Dogmatics*.”

⁵³ *KD I/1*, 17f; ET 18.

The question now is whether in *CD I/1* Barth still thinks of election, the event wherein the understanding of faith (*intellectus fidei*) conforms to God's truth (*ratio veritatis*) that manifests itself through the reason of faith (*ratio fidei*), as presupposing humanity's fallenness (i.e., whether it is supra- or infralapsarian).

Still Leaning Towards Predestinarian Infralapsarianism

That Barth's robust Doctrine of the Word of God in *CD I/1* is predicated upon a doctrine of election moving towards infralapsarianism (see Chapter 4) developed during the Göttingen-Münster period is immediately obvious from the very outset. In the very first paragraph of Chapter 1, *CD I/1*, Barth states that "talk about God" and "Church proclamation" are possible only on the basis of the event of election, the object of which is "one who is fallen, lost and condemned."⁵⁴

The central problem in Barth's new prolegomena is: how can theology as human talk be truly talk about God? Eberhard Jüngel explains: "[Barth] does not ask what it *means* to speak of God, but, rather, in what sense God *must* be spoken of in order that our speaking is about *God*."⁵⁵ Barth observes that "not all human talk is talk about God."⁵⁶ This fact reflects a contradiction in the present state of human existence. Barth takes as his starting-point that human talk "could be and should be" talk about God, as all realities and truths distinct from God "exist from Him and to Him," and thus "there is no genuinely profane speech. In the last resort there is only talk about God."⁵⁷ However, Barth observes that "this is not at all the case, that it is quite impossible to interpret human talk

⁵⁴ Ibid., 47; ET 47.

⁵⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 1.

⁵⁶ *KD I/1*, 47; ET 47.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

as such as talk about God.”⁵⁸

This contradiction is a result of human fallenness. Just as in *Romans II* and the Göttingen-Münster period, in *CD I/1* Barth still speaks of an “original estate” from which humanity has fallen: “Of this [original] man it might well be said that all his talk is talk about God. But we do not know ourselves as this man. We know ourselves only as the man to whom mercy is shown as one who is fallen, lost and condemned.”⁵⁹

We have noted in Chapter 4 that while in *Romans II* Barth speaks of revelation as “impossible possibility,” the Barth of Göttingen-Münster finds his dialectical starting point in both the impossibility of fallen humanity’s attainment unto any true knowledge of God and matter-of-fact (*Tatsache*) of true human knowledge of God. This is also the case for *CD I/1*, albeit with a new emphasis on the role of the Church: human talk about God in the Church does become God’s Word despite the inherent secularity (*Welthaftigkeit*: this word carries the connotation of being confined to the world) of all human talk.

From the very outset, Barth makes it clear that true theology (i.e., theology that really talks about God) is possible only on the basis of divine election. He reiterates the position that he developed in Göttingen:

[as] man in the kingdom of grace... we stand under the sign of a *decision* constantly taken between the secularity and the sanctification of our existence, between sin and grace, between a being as man which forgets God, which is absolutely neutral in relation to Him and therefore absolutely hostile, and one which in His revelation is *awakened by faith to being in the Church*, to the appropriation of His promise.⁶⁰

While the Barth of Göttingen-Münster did not stress the inseparable connection between true personal faith and the Credo of the Church as he does in *CD I/1*, every other element in the quote above is taken from the actualistic doctrine of election developed in *GD*. This actualism becomes more apparent at the end of the same paragraph: “The

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 47f; ET 47f. Emphases mine.

ongoing event of the final distinction [between secular and sanctified existence], the event in which God Himself acts, casts its shadow before in the event of this provisional distinction [between a believing and religious and an unbelieving and worldly attitude] in which man is at work.”⁶¹

While the doctrine of election undergirding *CD I/1* remains essentially the same as that of *GD*, Barth now introduces the new emphasis that election is not only God’s act of awakening faith in the human subject, but also that of gathering believers into the Church. This, again, reflects Barth’s conviction in *Anselm* that *intellectus fidei* must conform to the Credo of the Church, which in the first instance must conform to God’s Word. Thus Barth: “The event in which God acts consists wholly in the fact that men are visibly awakened, separated and gathered by God to being in the visible Church.”⁶²

This event of which Barth speaks is precisely divine election: “A visible distinction which arises within the secular sphere between religious and profane is now, not intrinsically but in this *event of divine election*, confirmed and maintained and therefore characterised as a genuine indication of the antithesis of judgment and grace in which, even though men do not act towards others, God Himself acts towards men.”⁶³

How this divine act of election is accomplished is explained in *CD I/1*, §12, “God the Holy Spirit.” Barth begins this paragraph with the problem of the subjective possibility of revelation: “We begin... with the New Testament witness: Jesus is Lord. But... we add the query: How do men come to say this?”⁶⁴ In other words, “How does this predicate, this faith, come to this subject, the subject man?”⁶⁵

To this question Barth gives the same answer as he did in *GD*: “This special element in revelation is undoubtedly identical with what the New Testament usually calls the Holy

⁶¹ Ibid., 48; ET 48.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 49; ET 48f. Emphases mine.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 470; ET 448.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Spirit as the subjective side in the event of revelation.”⁶⁶ Moreover, “the creature needs the Creator to be able to live. It thus needs the relation to Him. But it cannot create this relation. God creates it by His own presence in the creature and therefore as a relation of Himself to Himself. The Spirit of God is God in His freedom to be present to the creature, and therefore to create this relation, and therefore to be the life of the creature.”⁶⁷

But how is it that the creature came to need the Holy Spirit to create this relation to the Creator? Does not the creature, by virtue of being created, already exist in an intimate relation with its Creator? Barth’s answer is that this was indeed the case in the original state of human existence.⁶⁸ Fallen human beings, however, need the Holy Spirit to create in them this new relation of faith to the Creator. Barth takes as a basic theological principle the Reformed-orthodox conviction that *homo peccator non capax verbi divini*: sinful human is not capable of hearing God’s Word. For Barth, to ask how humans can come to faith in God is to ask, “How does *homo peccator* become *capax verbi divini*?”⁶⁹ Barth’s answer is divine election, the event wherein the Holy Spirit sovereignly creates faith in fallen sinners.

Although this doctrine of election does not occupy centre stage in *CD I/1*, the fact that Barth lays it down as a foundational concept at the very outset of Chapter 1 suggests that it undergirds the first half-volume of his *Doctrine of the Word of God*—I will show that this is indeed the case. For now, suffice it to note that the actualistic doctrine of election in *CD I/1*, which Barth had developed while in Göttingen, clearly leans towards infralapsarianism because its *obiectum praedestinationis* is “*homo peccator*.”⁷⁰ Without humanity’s sin, election would not have been necessary (for humankind’s knowledge of God) or even meaningful, since election is God’s act whereby sinners are “visibly

⁶⁶ Ibid., 472; ET 449.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 473; ET 450.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47; ET 47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 479; ET 456.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

awakened, separated and gathered by God to being in the visible Church.”⁷¹

In Chapter 4 I have already indicated the reason why I do not consider this doctrine of election as fully infralapsarian, but only “leaning towards infralapsarianism”: in Barth’s actualistic account of the doctrine, the *obiectum praedestinationis* is sinful humans in temporal history, rather than God’s eternal conception of fallen human individuals in double predestination prior to the work of creation. This doctrine of election leaning towards infralapsarianism, which Barth developed in Göttingen, underlies the Doctrine of the Word of God in *CD I/1*.

Doctrine of the Word of God: Infralapsarian Christology

As we saw in Chapter 4, in *GD* and *MD*, Barth’s infralapsarian Christology and the infralapsarian tendency in his doctrine of election are tied together by the conviction that the necessity of divine revelation-in-act for humanity’s knowledge of God presupposes human fallenness. Humanity in its original state of creation existed in immediate relationship with God and needed no revelation in the form of the incarnation. The necessity of revelation in both its objective-Christological and subjective-pneumatological aspects is predicated upon human fallenness.

The same goes for *CD I/1*, where Barth asserts that revelation *is* reconciliation.⁷² Revelation of the Word of God in its doubly indirect form is necessary because of human sinfulness, without which humanity in its original estate would have enjoyed immediate knowledge of God.⁷³ “To the image of God in man which was lost in Adam but restored in Christ there also belongs the fact that man can hear God’s Word. Only as the Word of God is really spoken in spite of his sin and to his sin, only in the grace with which God

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 48; ET 48.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 430; ET 409. See George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 149. Hunsinger comments that for Barth, revelation and reconciliation are inseparable realities that are both identical to the incarnation.

⁷³ *KD I/1*, 47; ET 47.

replies to sin, can this possibility revive.”⁷⁴ Note here that Barth’s entire discourse on the Word of God is predicated upon the supposition of humanity’s sin—this is what gives rise to the infralapsarian character of both predestination and Christology in *CD I/1*.

That this is so is apparent in Barth’s famous notion of the Word of God in its threefold form as preached, written, and revealed. God’s Word preached is the Church’s proclamation *qua* proclamation. Proclamation and the Church are not “simply and visibly there... as that which they want to be and should be..., as realities of revelation and faith.”⁷⁵ Proclamation and the Church are earthly media that are inherently secular because believers are sinners. Ecclesial proclamation in itself is not simply or visibly God’s Word. “The Word of God is the event itself in which proclamation becomes real proclamation.”⁷⁶ The event in which proclamation becomes God’s Word, then, is contingent upon God’s free and gracious decision.

Scripture, too, is not simply or visibly God’s written Word, as its historical form and medium are inherently secular. Scripture becomes God’s Word in the event of God’s free decision and action: “Recollection of God’s past revelation... is also an event, and is to be understood only as an event. In this event the Bible is God’s Word.”⁷⁷ “The Bible, then, becomes God’s Word in this event” in which “God’s action on man has become an event..., and the Bible has grasped at man.”⁷⁸

Just as Barth had asserted in *GD* (see Chapter 4), Scripture as revelation must be indirect because of its inherent secularity. That is, through Scripture—and proclamation for that matter—God unveils Godself only by veiling Godself in the “fallible human word.”⁷⁹ Thus we must not “equate [Scripture] directly with this other, with revelation

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 254; ET 241.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 89f; ET 88.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 95; ET 93.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 112; ET 109.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 118; ET 116.

itself.”⁸⁰

To be sure, Scripture and revelation are “indeed one,” but “their union is really an event.”⁸¹ Therefore, “in the statement that the Bible is God’s Word the little word ‘is’ refers to its being in this becoming. It does not become God’s Word because we accord it faith but in the fact that it becomes revelation to us.”⁸² In this sense the Word of God preached and written belong to “a single genus, Scripture as the commencement and present-day preaching as the continuation of one and the same event,”⁸³ even though God’s Word “in its writtenness as ‘Bible’... must be distinguished from and given precedence over the purely spiritual and oral life of ecclesial tradition.”⁸⁴

From the foregoing discussions we can see how the actualistic doctrine of election from the Göttingen-Münster cycle undergirds Barth’s understanding of God’s Word preached and written. We can also see how Barth places these discussions in the context of the *analogia fidei* developed in *Anselm*. The *ratio fidei* (Scripture and the Church’s Credo) conforms to the *ratio veritatis* (God’s Word itself) only by the event of God’s free decision and action, namely, election.

This event of election, moreover, presupposes the inherent secularity—which results from human fallenness—of proclamation and Scripture as God’s chosen media of revelation. Thus we find in Barth’s discussion of “the Word of God preached and written” an actualistic doctrine of election carrying infralapsarian overtones: the *obiectum praedestinationis* is sinful human.

Moving on, Barth sets forth his notion of “the Word of God revealed.” He begins by stressing that Scripture is God’s Word only in the form of “attestation.”⁸⁵ Scripture “is

⁸⁰ Ibid., 115; ET 112.

⁸¹ Ibid., 116; ET 113.

⁸² Ibid., 113; ET 110.

⁸³ Ibid., 104; ET 102.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 108; ET 106.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 114; ET 111.

not in itself and as such God's past revelation. As it is God's Word it bears witness to God's past revelation, and it is God's past revelation in the form of attestation... Witnessing means pointing in a specific direction beyond the self and on to another."⁸⁶ This "other" to which the biblical witness points is the Word of God revealed.

Unlike Scripture and proclamation, which are "derivatively and mediately" (*abgeleitet und mittelbar*) God's Word, revelation is "originally and immediately" (*ursprünglich und unmittelbar*) the *Deus dixit*.⁸⁷ Revelation is not the *Deus dixit* veiled by the *Paulus dixit*.⁸⁸ Rather, "revelation denotes the Word of God itself in the act of its being spoken in time."⁸⁹ More concretely, revelation *is* incarnation, the *Logos ensarkos*: "revelation in fact does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ nor from the reconciliation accomplished in Him. To say revelation is to say 'The Word became flesh.'"⁹⁰

Here, Barth's infralapsarian Christology begins to emerge. While in the last quote Barth equates revelation to Jesus Christ and his work of reconciliation, in §11, "God the Son," Barth states that "revelation *is* itself reconciliation."⁹¹ That is, revelation (which is identical to the incarnation) is an act whereby God overcomes the gulf of sin between Godself and fallen humanity. Revelation as such is God's Word spoken to sinners through the improper medium of this fallen world: "The place where God's Word is revealed is objectively and subjectively the cosmos in which sin reigns."⁹² Therefore, "the speech of God is and remains the mystery of God supremely in its secularity."⁹³

Not only is this so for Scripture and proclamation, which are in themselves fallible

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 120; ET 117.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 116; ET 113.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 121; ET 118.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 122; ET 119.

⁹¹ Ibid., 430; ET 409.

⁹² Ibid., 172; ET 166.

⁹³ Ibid., 171; ET 165.

human words, but also the Word of God revealed carries the attribute of a “twofold indirectness”: “The secularity of the Word of God does not imply only that it meets us in the garment of creaturely reality. Because this creaturely reality is that of fallen man and because the Word of God meets us in this reality, we have to say that its form is not that of a pure nature which as such stands in immediate contrast with the distorted nature of its environment.”⁹⁴

Barth’s notion of the secularity and twofold indirectness of the Word of God entails an infralapsarian Christology:

This secularity, this twofold indirectness, is in fact an authentic and inalienable attribute of the Word of God. Revelation means incarnation of the Word of God. But incarnation means entry into this secularity. We are in this world and are through and through secular. If God did not speak to us in secular form, He would not speak to us at all. To evade the secularity of His Word is to evade Christ.⁹⁵

In fact, the incarnation as doubly indirect revelation would have been unnecessary for humanity’s knowledge of God in its original state of immediacy with God, in which Adam could hear God’s Word directly and not indirectly. “To the image of God in man which was lost in Adam but restored in Christ there also belongs the fact that man can hear God’s Word. Only as the Word of God is really spoken in spite of his sin and to his sin, only in the grace with which God replies to sin, can this possibility revive.”⁹⁶

This understanding of the *Deus dixit* in spite of and to humanity’s sin leads to the central meaning of Barth’s *analogia fidei*: “Man acts as he believes, but the fact that he believes as he acts is God’s act. Man is the subject of faith. Man believes, not God. But the fact that man is this subject in faith is bracketed as a predicate of the subject of God, bracketed in the way that the Creator encloses the creature and the merciful God sinful

⁹⁴ Ibid., 172; ET 166.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 174; ET 168.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 254; ET 241.

man.”⁹⁷

It is true that in its original state humanity also needed to hear God’s Word in order to know God. This is because of the principle “*finitum non capax infiniti*.”⁹⁸ Yet, “the abrogation of this principle is not the real mystery of the revelation of the Son of God.”⁹⁹ That is, the abrogation of this pre-lapsarian principle of human inability to know the transcendent God was accomplished by God’s direct speech to Adam in Eden. This pre-lapsarian principle is not the one that the incarnation abrogates. Rather, “the real mystery” of the incarnation, the doubly indirect Word of God, is “the abrogation of the other and much more incisive principle: *homo peccator non capax verbi divini* [fallen humanity cannot hear God’s Word].”¹⁰⁰

It is clear here that Barth’s Christology is infralapsarian: God’s will to become incarnate presupposes God’s intention to confront humanity’s sin, without which God’s speech to humanity would have been direct, and the Word incarnate would not have been necessary for human knowledge of God.

CD I/2: Opus “zwischen den Zeiten”

Up to this point I have shown that *Anselm* and *CD I/1* stand in continuity with the Göttingen-Münster period as far as Barth’s Christological and predestinarian lapsarianism is concerned. One might wonder whether *CD I/2* belongs to the same phase of Barth’s development as *CD I/1* or the one that is to begin in 1936 with the composition of *Gottes Gnadenwahl*. In this section I briefly address this question, arguing that most of *CD I/2* was written prior to 1936, but before its completion in 1937 Barth had probably revised

⁹⁷ Ibid., 258; ET 245.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 427; ET 407.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 428; ET 407.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

the doctrine of election therein so that it does not contradict the one developed in 1936.¹⁰¹ In this respect, *CD I/1* is an opus “between the times.”

My opinion on this topic differs from that of Suzanne McDonald, who thinks that “in the Barth of *CD I/1* and 2 we continue to see the implications of his doctrine of election in *GD*.”¹⁰² McDonald believes that in *CD I/2*, Barth still holds to the doctrine of election that he developed in *GD*. She comments that “the same dynamics we have noted in *CD I/1* is likewise in evidence in *I/2*, where Barth gives his account of the outworking of God’s act of revelation in its objective form *for* us (§13, The Incarnation of the Word) and subjective fulfilment *in* us (§16, The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit).”¹⁰³ Yet, as I shall show, McDonald does not seem to recognise that in *CD I/2* Barth no longer associates the doctrine of election with pneumatology. To be sure, in §16 Barth speaks of election in connection with the Holy Spirit’s work, but this is the election of Israel and the Church, election in the special sense that Barth would later treat in *CD II/2* (§34, “The Election of the Community”), rather than the actualistic rendition of “eternal” predestination found in *GD*.

Of course, there is no question that §13 and §16 constitute an expansion of the subjective and objective possibilities of revelation that Barth sets forth in *GD*. Aside from the fact that Barth no longer associates election with pneumatology, the slight difference between *GD* and *CD I/2* is a new emphasis on God’s freedom in the latter. Thus Barth reframes his question of the subjective and objective possibilities of revelation:

...a better way of putting the questions is to ask, (1) how far God in His revelation is free for us, i.e., free to reveal Himself to us, free to be our God without at the same time ceasing to be God the Lord; and (2) how far God in His revelation is also free in us, i.e., free to deal with us as His own, who belong to Him and obey Him, although we are but men, and sinful

¹⁰¹ Paul Jones paints a different picture of *CD I/2* in relation to *II/1-II/2*. See Paul Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London: Continuum, 2008), 62ff. I dialogue with Jones in Chapter 9.

¹⁰² McDonald, “Barth’s ‘Other’ Doctrine of Election,” 141.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

men at that.¹⁰⁴

Barth's answer to this twofold question is: "God is not prevented either by His own deity or by our humanity and sinfulness from being our God and having intercourse with us as with His own. On the contrary, He is free for us and in us. That is the central content of the doctrine of Christ and of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁵ With regard to God's freedom in the objective aspect of revelation, Barth explicitly states that "God was able and *had to* reveal Himself to us in this familiar form [of the incarnation]."¹⁰⁶ In contending that God *had to* reveal Godself through the incarnation, Barth appeals to the medieval-scholastic and Reformed-orthodox distinction between the *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta Dei*:

When we say that He had to act otherwise [in the form of the incarnation in order to reveal Godself], we honour the actual will of God visible in the event of His revelation, as the source and inner concept of all necessity. We are thus repeating what was previously told us [by God's self-revelation]. By such repetition we shall and must acknowledge the necessity of His actual manifest will, His *potentia ordinata*.¹⁰⁷

In ascribing to God's *potentia ordinata* the necessity of the incarnation for God to reveal Godself to fallen humanity, Barth's Christological infralapsarianism is clear: in God's actually revealed ordinance, God's will to become incarnate presupposes God's intention to confront sin. (Supralapsarian Christology contends that God's *potentia ordinata* makes the incarnation necessary regardless of sin). God has revealed no other ground of the necessity of the incarnation than God's will to reveal Godself to *sinner*s.

The following statements from *CD I/2* show that Barth's Christology indeed remains

¹⁰⁴ *KD I/2*, 2; ET 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 41; ET 37. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* *Potentia absoluta* is the notion that "the omnipotence of God [is] limited only by the law of noncontradiction... God can effect all possibility, constrained only by his own nature." By contrast, *potentia ordinata* is the idea of "a limited and bounded power [of God] that guarantees the stability and consistency of the orders of nature and of grace." See Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 231f.

infralapsarian: “Jesus Christ... 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. And in being what we are He is God’s Word”; “Flesh is the concrete form of human nature marked by Adam’s fall... The Word is not only the eternal Word of God but ‘flesh’ as well... In this way, and only in this way, is He God’s revelation to us. He would not be revelation if He were not man. And He would not be man if He were not ‘flesh’ in this definite sense.”¹⁰⁸

While Barth’s Christology in *CD I/2* remains basically the same as that of *GD* with some new nuances, his actualistic doctrine of election is nowhere to be found in the entire half-volume of 1938. In particular, in *CD I/2* Barth no longer associates “eternal” election with the actualistic work of the Holy Spirit. The only place in §16 where Barth explicitly discusses election is in the middle of an excursus.¹⁰⁹ There Barth talks about election only in the special sense of Israel’s being chosen as a “sign” to signify the objective reality of the incarnation:

Let us think of a sign which is the most visible and in a certain sense includes all the rest, the sign of the election of the people of Israel. It is not identical with objective revelation, the incarnation. Yet in an extremely comprehensive way it obviously corresponds to it. It belongs to objective revelation, to the extent that that revelation does not remain objective...¹¹⁰

What Barth says here is quite different from his actualistic doctrine of election in *GD*. As we saw in Chapter 4, in *GD* human faith and obedience as the Holy Spirit’s act *in nobis* corresponds to “God’s free good pleasure”; election is God’s sovereign will *in actu*.¹¹¹ The relation of correspondence becomes quite different in *CD I/2*, where, as we saw in the block quote above, the election of the community of faith (i.e., of Israel) is

¹⁰⁸ *KD I/2*, 165; ET 151.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 246; ET 225.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Unterricht I*, 222; ET 180.

described as “corresponding” to the objective reality of Jesus Christ.

This line of thought seems to anticipate Barth’s mature Christological objectivism. In a nutshell, “Christological objectivism” in Barth’s mature theology refers to his idea of the objective *participatio* of all humans in Christ, as all human beings are *a priori* (“zum Vornherein”) elected in Christ. Israel and the Church are actualistic manifestations of this eternally objective *participatio*, and in this sense they are elected in a special way. This actualistic election of the community of faith is not to be confused with the eternally objective reality of election-in-Christ to which it corresponds. On this view, Barth’s understanding of the election of Israel in *CD I/2*, §16 seems to be more in line with this mature Christological objectivism than with the actualistic doctrine of election in *GD*.

Furthermore, in *GD* the Holy Spirit is the divine person who takes on the primary role in the act of election, but in *CD I/2*, Barth describes Christ as the electing God: “the Son of God elects and calls and justifies and sanctifies His own people in and from the midst of the world.”¹¹² This is also in line with the Christocentric doctrine of election that Barth had developed in 1936.

These evidences may be taken to suggest that before its completion in 1937 and publication in 1938, Barth had revised *CD I/2* so that the doctrine of election in it would more or less conform to the Christocentric one that he developed in 1936. My theory would be plausible if one considers the fact that *CD I/2* was completed in the summer of 1937 when the composition of *CD II/1* was already underway.¹¹³ It would be reasonable to think that before the completion of *CD I/2*, Barth had spent some time revising the work in accordance with his new theological discovery from 1936 while beginning to work on the next volume of his dogmatics. After all, why would Barth publish *CD I/2* in 1938 if the doctrine of election in it was still the actualistic rendition from *GD* and thus

¹¹² *KD I/2*, 246; ET 225.

¹¹³ Busch, *Barth: Life from Letters*, 282ff.

contradicted his new Christocentric doctrine published in 1936, which he deemed to be so momentous in his own theological development?

Of course, given the fact that most of *CD I/2* was composed between 1932 and his encounter with Pierre Maury's Christocentric doctrine of election in 1936 that occasioned the beginning of the decisive turning point in Barth's doctrine of election, this half-volume still stands in the shadow of the Göttingen-Münster period. While the subsequent volumes of *CD* would come to be dominated by Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election and its Christological objectivism, most of *CD I/2* is still free from its influence. That is, Barth's mature doctrine of election developed in 1936-42 does not undergird *CD I/2* as it does subsequent volumes of *CD*.

For one thing, still lacking in *CD I/2* is what Webster calls "an almost ruthless particularity, a concentration of the imagination on one point and one point only: the name of Jesus, his absolute specificity as 'this one', the first and the last and the most simple thing."¹¹⁴ This is not to say that Barth's "particularism" ('Barth's theology makes a concerted attempt always to move from the particular to the general') was not already in place early on in his career.¹¹⁵ Barth's theology has always been characterised by a strictly anti-metaphysical particularism. Yet, it would not be until 1936 that Barth begins the attempt to concentrate all his theology upon the one particular point of Jesus Christ, and this Christological concentration would not find its full-fledged expression until *CD II/2* (1942). In *CD I/2*, for instance, Barth's pneumatological consideration of the subjective possibility of revelation is still quite independent of Christology.

The only impact that Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election from 1936 had on *CD I/2* is that he had done his best to eliminate vestiges of the actualistic doctrine of election developed in *GD*. In this regard, *CD I/2* is a work "*zwischen den Zeiten*"

¹¹⁴ Webster, *Karl Barth*, 62.

¹¹⁵ George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32.

(between the times) in the successive phases of Barth's theological development: it bears the marks of both phases (before and after 1936) of Barth's thought.¹¹⁶

Incidentally, during the composition of *CD I/2* Barth underwent not only the inception of a decisive turning point in his theological development, but also the last physical removal in his life: in 1935 he was dismissed from Bonn in the midst of political turmoil, and within three days he received an invitation from the University of Basel for a special chair. Soon thereafter he moved back to his Swiss hometown and would take up residence there until his death in 1968.

¹¹⁶ This is the name of the theological journal that Barth co-founded with Eduard Thurneysen and Friedrich Gogarten in 1922.

Chapter 6

Gottes Gnadenwahl (1936): Christology and Predestination Converge—

The Inception of a “Purified ‘Infralapsarianism’”

Since the publication of Bruce McCormack’s *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, it has been generally accepted that Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of election developed in 1936 marks, in one way or another, the beginning of the mature phase of Barth’s theology. This view of the significance of the 1936 *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (*God’s Gracious Election*) is one of McCormack’s great contributions to contemporary Barth studies. Unquestionably, any student of Barth’s theology today is indebted to McCormack’s work.

Meanwhile, as we saw in Chapter 5, the implications of Barth’s new Christocentric doctrine of election did not immediately come to govern all aspects of his theology. McCormack himself would later “admit that the picture [he] drew in [his] book, of a sudden shift in Barth’s doctrine of election which was alleged to have taken place immediately after hearing Pierre Maury’s lecture on Calvin’s doctrine of predestination at the International Calvin Congress of 1936, needs to be revised a bit. The change was not immediate but gradual.”¹

This view of a gradual change in Barth’s formulation of predestination from 1936 to 1942 (*CD* II/2) was initially proposed by Matthias Gockel in his 2002 doctoral dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary under McCormack’s supervision.² Gockel argues that in 1936 Barth had only formulated the thesis that Christ is both the subject and object of predestination, but it was not until 1942 that Barth would develop an

¹ Bruce McCormack, “The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (ed. McCormack; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 213.

² Now published: Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 166ff.

understanding of “election as God’s self-determination to be God in a covenant with humankind.”³ In an article published in 2007, McCormack modifies his earlier thesis of a “sudden shift” in Barth’s doctrine of election in 1936, agreeing with Gockel that Barth’s “identification of ‘Jesus Christ’ with the electing God... did not appear until *CD II/2*.”⁴

While I agree with Gockel’s view that the final turning point in Barth’s theological development was not immediate but gradual, there are some specific points on which I read Barth differently. First, Gockel’s and McCormack’s portrayal of the development of Barth’s doctrine of election seems to suggest that the Christocentric revision of the doctrine in 1936 was primarily occasioned by the historical contingency of Barth’s audition of Maury’s lecture. According to McCormack, whom Gockel follows on this matter, “more than any other influence in Barth’s life, it was Maury who deserves credit for opening the way to that form of ‘christocentrism’ which became synonymous with the name of Karl Barth.”⁵ But why was Barth so impressed by Maury’s lecture, if Barth’s own theology, with all its basic convictions, was not already developing in a direction and at such a point of maturity that would demand him to embrace Maury’s Christological rendition of predestination? Would it not be more reasonable to say that Barth was occasioned by his own theological maturation to find himself inspired by Maury’s lecture to develop a Christocentric version of the doctrine of election, rather than suggesting that Maury had given Barth a sudden change of mind, leading him to a revision of his theology?

On this point, I hope to show in this chapter that Maury’s lecture only served as a catalyst, but the primary cause of Barth’s Christological revision of the doctrine of election in 1936 was the direction in which his own theology, especially the lapsarian

³ Ibid., 167.

⁴ Bruce McCormack, “Seek God where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin van Driel,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 60 (2007), 64.

⁵ Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 455.

aspect of his Christology and doctrine of election, was already developing. That is, in confronting the lapsarian problem (i.e., whether the incarnation and double predestination are primarily aimed at dealing with humankind's sin), Barth's doctrine of election was already moving towards a Christological concentration, and Maury's lecture gave Barth little more than a final push.

The second point on which I wish to dialogue with McCormack and Gockel is paradoxically the opposite from the first point above (which emphasises the continuity in Barth's theological development before and after 1936): more than McCormack and Gockel, I would stress the decisive newness of the core idea that Barth developed in 1936 (though it must be emphasised again that this new idea—namely, the marriage of Christology and predestination—was anticipated by the direction in which Barth's theology had already been developing).

I am certainly at one accord with McCormack and Gockel that Barth's mature doctrine of election was developed gradually from 1936 to 1942. I would contend, however, that the 1942 *CD II/2* does not contain anything radically new that is not rooted in the 1936 *Gottes Gnadenwahl*. In particular, I will challenge McCormack's and Gockel's thesis that Barth's identification of the incarnate Word (the *Logos ensarkos*) as the electing God—which McCormack calls the “truly decisive move”⁶ in the maturation of Barth's Christological reorientation of the doctrine of election—did not appear until *CD II/2*. McCormack, whom Gockel follows on this matter, claims that in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* Barth only speaks of the pre-incarnate Son (the *Logos asarkos*) as the electing subject, and that only in *CD II/2* does Barth begin to identify Jesus Christ, the *Logos incarnandus* (Logos certain to be incarnate, or, as McCormack explains: “the

⁶ Bruce McCormack, “Karl Barth's Historicized Christology,” in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 215.

Logos as he appears in the eternal plan, or *consilium* of God”⁷), as the subject of election.⁸ What they are contending is that in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* Barth still draws a distinction between the pre-incarnate Son and Jesus Christ, while in *CD II/2* Barth’s Christocentric epistemology has no place for a *Logos asarkos* that is not ontologically identical to the *Logos incarnandus*, and whenever he resorts to the concept of an immanent Trinity not constituted by God’s election to be *ensarkos*, it is an inconsistency on his part. This contention has been a much-debated issue in recent Barth studies, and I will discuss it in more detail in Chapter 9. Suffice it now to say that Barth has never jettisoned the notion of an immanent *Logos asarkos* ontologically independent of God’s act of election, so I do not think *CD II/2* contains anything radically new that is not rooted in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, which I think marks the decisive beginning of the truly Christocentric phase of Barth’s theology.

So, what is so decisively new about *Gottes Gnadenwahl*? And what was it in Barth’s own theology from the previous phases of his development that gave birth to this new idea upon hearing Maury’s lecture? Here lies the third point on which I think McCormack’s and Gockel’s presentation of the development of Barth’s mature doctrine of election leaves room for other scholarly contributions: they have not addressed the marriage of Christology and predestination in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*—the decisively new idea—in relation to Barth’s lapsarian treatment of the two doctrines.

One important thesis of this chapter is that Barth’s basically infralapsarian understanding of the event of the Word of God (see Chapter 5) was a chief factor that demanded a Christological revision of his doctrine of election. When Barth heard Maury’s lecture on predestination, its Christocentric orientation made sense to Barth, because in it

⁷ Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92ff.

⁸ See McCormack, “Seek God Where He May Be Found,” 64.

he saw a rendition of election that tied the loose ends in his previous attempt to understand God's sovereign grace in spite of and to humankind's sin. As I have shown in Chapters 4-5, Barth's previous attempts at explicating this matter was undergirded by basically infralapsarian convictions about sin and grace. This would remain so in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, and it is precisely because of Barth's infralapsarian Christology that he felt the need to replace his actualistic account of election with a thorough Christocentrism. My main aim in this chapter, then, is to demonstrate the inception of Barth's "purified infralapsarianism," as I suggest it be called, in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*.

Gottes Gnadenwahl (1936)

The Seed of the Idea: Maury's Lecture or Barth's Own Theology?

In 1936, Barth attended a lecture by Pierre Maury on Calvin's doctrine predestination at the *Congrès international de théologie calviniste* in Geneva. Maury stated in his lecture a thesis that Barth found to be of central significance to the doctrine of election, if not the entire enterprise of Christian theology:

Outside of Christ, we know neither of the electing God, nor of His elect, nor of the act of election... One cannot speak of damnation as a decision of God otherwise than on the basis of the cross on Golgotha, but on this basis one must speak of it... The cross on which Christ was damned, does not damn us. It makes us children of God.⁹

As mentioned earlier, McCormack and Gockel believe that Maury's thesis was by far the most important influence in Barth's life for the development of the specific form of Christocentrism that came to be identified with the name Karl Barth.

McCormack could have appealed to a passage in *CD II/2* to lend support to his argument, had he not thought that in *CD II/2* Barth "omitted to say that it was only as a result of his hearing of... a paper given by Pierre Maury, that he had been led to make the

⁹ Pierre Maury, "Erwählung und Glaube," in *Theologische Studien* 8 (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag Zürich, 1940), 7ff. Quoted in McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 457.

critical correction which, in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, he introduced against the view he had once held.”¹⁰ The fact is, in *CD* II/2 Barth never neglected to point out Maury’s significance. Barth credits Maury for being the one who brought out “the Christological meaning and basis of the doctrine of election... in our own time.”¹¹ Barth recounts that “this service has been rendered by Pierre Maury in the fine lecture which he gave on ‘Election et Foi’ at the *Congrès international de théologie calviniste* in Geneva, 1936.”¹²

However, was it really “only as a result of his hearing of... a paper given by Pierre Maury,” as McCormack claims, that Barth was led to a Christocentric revision of his doctrine of election? In other words, is Maury’s lecture really to be credited as the chief agent that caused Barth’s shift from an actualistic to a Christocentric rendition of predestination? McCormack himself has in fact suggested that during the composition of *CD* I/2, “already there were strong indications that [Barth] would like to revise this ontology [of his Christology].”¹³

Moreover, the immediate context of Barth’s excursus in *CD* II/2 from which I quoted above, wherein Barth gives Maury his due credit, suggests that Barth had other motivations for his 1936 theological revision besides Maury’s lecture: “Historically there are to hand all kinds of important materials which should encourage and even necessitate an adoption of this thesis [that Jesus Christ is the central mystery of election and reprobation].”¹⁴

The “important materials” that Barth identifies here include John Knox’s Scots Confession of 1560, Athanasius, Augustine, Coccejus, the Lapsarian Controversy, and the “general Reformation assertion that Christ is the *speculum electionis*.”¹⁵ These are

¹⁰ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 456.

¹¹ *KD* II/2, 168; ET 154.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ McCormack, “Barth’s Historicized Christology,” 207.

¹⁴ *KD* II/2, 168; ET 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; ET 154f.

important influences that Barth places alongside Maury's lecture, suggesting that it was not "only as a result of his hearing" of the lecture that he was led to his Christological reorientation of the doctrine of election.

Before encountering Maury's thesis in 1936, Barth was already wrestling with a host of historical materials that he felt to have demanded a Christocentric revision of the doctrine of election. Maury's lecture was a catalyst—a significant one to be sure—but Barth's engagement with the history of doctrine was already prompting him to move in the direction of a Christocentric doctrine of election.

More important than these historical materials, in my opinion, were Barth's own struggles with the lapsarian problem through the successive phases of his development. As we have seen in the previous chapters, much of Barth's theological development was driven by his attempts to explicate the problematic reality of humanity's sin on the supposition of God's free grace. Thus in the excursus wherein Barth credits Maury for advocating a Christocentric rendition of election, Barth begins not with Maury's lecture but by commending Knox's Scots Confession for pointing in the direction of a Christological doctrine of predestination. Barth stresses that Knox was driven by his struggles with the lapsarian problem to seek the marriage of Christology and predestination: "It can hardly be denied that in the *Conf. Scotica* the specific conception of sin is intimately connected with the peculiar Christological conception of predestination."¹⁶

Having developed the thesis that incarnation lies at the heart of election, Barth explicitly states in the same excursus that "we can appeal in support of our thesis... to the inevitability of such a solution in the light of the Supralapsarian [*sic.*] controversy."¹⁷ In other words, Barth explicitly states that the theological problem of the Lapsarian

¹⁶ *KD* II/2, 168; ET 154.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; ET 155.

Controversy inevitably demands a Christocentric rendition of the doctrine of election. As we saw in Chapter 1, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, among other Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century, also felt that the lapsarian problem had to be treated Christologically, and already developed Christocentric solutions to the lapsarian problem.

To be sure, Barth would deny that the Christocentric doctrine of election could be deduced from the lapsarian problem—for him that would have been metaphysical natural theology. For Barth, the lapsarian problem demands a Christocentric-predestinarian “solution” in the sense that only in light of this marriage of Christology and predestination can humanity’s fallenness be explicated—and that means non-explicated (see Chapter 8)—in relation, or, better put, non-relation, to the sovereignty and immutability of God’s eternal decree.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Christology and predestination became more and more closely interwoven in each successive phase of Barth’s development by an infralapsarian view of revelation. In *Romans II*, Barth had not yet adopted Chalcedon’s two-nature Christology, but he understood revelation, the central locus of which is Christ’s resurrection, as necessary (for humanity’s knowledge of God) on the supposition of the human condition of sin, without which humanity would have been immediate to God and would have needed no revelation in the form of God’s indirect self-disclosure to humankind. With regard to predestination, Barth’s understanding during this period was supralapsarian on the eternal-teleological level, but on the temporal-actualistic level the *obiectum praedestinationis* is *homo peccator*. Thus in *Romans II*, only the temporal-actualistic aspect of predestination is incorporated into Barth’s infralapsarian understanding of revelation. Christology and predestination in *Romans II* as such are not yet closely knit.

In *GD*, Barth's actualism is such that God's eternity is not an "ossified eternity" but one that is inseparable from history. There is no longer an "eternal" predestination above and behind God's present act in the person of the Holy Spirit. This actualism eliminates the eternal-supralapsarian aspect of Barth's understanding of predestination developed in *Romans II*, and the actualistic doctrine of election in *GD* begins to move towards infralapsarianism. In *GD*, the actualistic-pneumatological rendition of election is related to the enhypostatic-anhypostatic Christology by means of Barth's infralapsarian understanding of revelation: humanity in its original state existed in immediacy to God and needed no revelation in the form of God's indirect speech, and the very concept of revelation in this form presupposes humanity's sin. The incarnation as the objective aspect and election as the subjective aspect of revelation as such are both predicated upon humanity's fallenness.

In *CD I/1*, Barth's understandings of incarnation and election remain essentially the same as *GD*. However, the Anselm book gave Barth a more robust way of presenting the doctrine of the Word of God. The emphasis now shifts from the subjective-objective distinction (as found in *GD*) to the very concept of the Word of God itself, presented in the framework of an infralapsarian (as we saw in the last chapter) understanding of the *analogia fidei* (i.e., pre-lapsarian humanity would have known God directly; it is for fallen humans that the *intellectus fidei* can only indirectly and actualistically correspond to the ontic *ratio*). In terms of presentation, then, Barth's Christology and doctrine of election in *CD I/1* become much more closely interwoven than in *GD*. Barth no longer gives separate treatments of the two doctrines as he did in *GD*, but discusses both under the rubric of the Doctrine of the Word of God, which, as I have contended, is clearly predicated upon humanity's fallenness, aiming to explicate the *a posteriori* reality that inherently secular human talk in this fallen world can and does become talk about God. (When I refer to

Barth's "infralapsarian view of revelation" below, I mean that he sees revelation in the form of the Christ event as presupposing human fallenness).

From the foregoing discussions we see that in each of the previous phases of Barth's development, Christology and predestination have become more and more closely interwoven by his infralapsarian understanding of revelation that undergirds both doctrines. As Barth himself comments, which we saw earlier, the lapsarian problem inevitably demands a marriage of Christology and predestination.

On this view, one chief driving force behind the Christological reorientation of Barth's doctrine of election is really his basically infralapsarian view of the event of revelation. Maury's thesis gave Barth the final push to develop what the previous phases of his theology had already anticipated, but it is not the seed of Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election. The seed of this doctrine is Barth's basically infralapsarian understanding of revelation, which has been expressed through both Christology and predestination in all phases of his development since *Romans II*.

Brief Outline of Gottes Gnadenwahl

Having discussed the import of lapsarianism in Barth's theological development leading up to 1936, I now turn to an exposition of *Gottes Gnadenwahl*. This small book comprises a set of lectures published in *Theologische Existenz heute* in 1936. In this book there are four main parts and a lengthy "Fragebeantwortung" (Q&A).

In Part I Barth defines the concept of grace and explains what it means to say that predestination is God's grace. The lapsarian problem is stated here as the central theological question that the doctrine of God's gracious election seeks to address—the lapsarian problem really is one, if not *the*, chief driving force behind Barth's Christological reorientation of the doctrine of election!

Part II consists of methodological considerations, identifying predestination as “truth of revelation” (*Offenbarungswahrheit*), which is “truth in Jesus Christ.”¹⁸ Part III presents double predestination as a process of sublation: reprobation, which Christ suffered vicariously in place of sinful humankind, is God’s negation of humanity’s sin that negates God’s grace, and this negation of negation is for the purpose of God’s gracious election of all humans in Christ. In Part IV Barth revisits double predestination, this time setting forth the thesis that the elect and the reprobate are not two masses of people inflexibly predetermined by a *decretum absolutum Dei*, but rather all humans are elected in Christ who was vicariously reprobated for all.

Part I: Centrality of the Lapsarian Problem

Barth begins Part I with exegetical considerations, retaining his position in *Romans II* that Romans 9:11-13, which historic Calvinism customarily finds its proof for the doctrine of double predestination as *decretum absolutum Dei* that inflexibly divides humankind into two masses, must be read in the larger context of Romans 9-11, the theme of which “is not so much the development of the notion of predestination, but—while drawing on this notion—the proclamation of the merciful and yet severe, severe and yet merciful, freely-electing in every step, will of God for the people of Israel.”¹⁹ So, too, in all other biblical passages “where we encounter this notion [of predestination] expressly or *en substance*,” the doctrine “always occupies the role of a most highly emphatic, nay determinative and never-to-be-overlooked, statement with respect to other predications. It emerges and becomes important not for its own sake but for the sake of these other predications, appearing as salt in the food, so to say, and not as the food itself.”²⁰

¹⁸ *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 11. This work exists only in German, and in what follows I shall offer my own translation for passages quoted from it.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Implicit in this statement about the place of the notion of predestination in Scripture is Barth's understanding of the place of the doctrine in dogmatics, as he comments in the *Fragebeantwortung* on the question whether predestination belongs to the doctrine of the economy of salvation: "the doctrine of predestination may not come to be understood as the food itself, but merely as salt in the food. It must stand at the beginning and behind all Christian thinking, but it is not an element in the description of how humanity comes into union with God."²¹ Therefore, "in the economy of salvation the doctrine of predestination does not have its own place."²² Rather, Barth follows Reformed orthodoxy as he did in *GD* in contending that predestination belongs to the doctrine of God. Predestination is thus a presupposition that sheds light on all Christian doctrines and all biblical passages about God's works of salvation.

What all these biblical passages have in common, says Barth, is that the notion of predestination undergirding them "is always about the proclamation that God encountered certain humans in special and direct ways, attending to them and using them for God's own glory and for their own salvation."²³ Barth appeals to passages such as 1 Peter 2:9, 2 Thessalonian 2:13, Romans 8:30, Mark 4:11, and Eph. 1:3f, claiming that "all these and other passages tell us... that God would act as such towards these humans on these grounds, because they were chosen by God on account of God's own election and decision. In and of themselves, they are unable, nor have they determined, to receive God's grace. Rather, that this should happen is itself the grace of God: 'So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy' (Rom. 9:16)."²⁴

For Barth, to grasp the core of the doctrine of predestination is to understand it as concrete grace (from Part II onward, Barth will show that grace must be understood

²¹ Ibid., 35.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ Ibid., 5.

concretely as grace in Christ) that underlies all God's acts and works attested in Scripture, rather than treating it as an abstract first principle apart from the actuality of God's grace: "The doctrine of predestination is biblical doctrine as long as it consists in this exegesis. It loses its biblical grounding and therewith the right-of-residence in the Church immediately, when it becomes an autonomous proposition, such as: something about the sovereignty and immutability of God, or: about the meaning and content of the divine world-plan, or: about the various essences and fates of human individuals."²⁵

Thus in Part I, Barth's central contention is that predestination must be understood as grace: "it means grace, the reception of grace—that is the general and axiomatic meaning of the doctrine of predestination."²⁶ But what is grace? Having given the examples of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the summoning of the communion of the saints, the resurrection of the dead, the Second Coming of Christ, etc.—"that is all grace"—Barth defines grace as "the free, Fatherly beneficence, in which God adopts and treats us, *in time* and *for eternity*, as his children."²⁷ This understanding of grace encompasses the whole doctrine of election: "The Word of God's election is nothing more than the Word of God's grace."²⁸

So, what is the central theological problem that this doctrine of God's gracious election—this understanding of election as God's grace—seeks to answer? This is a crucial question that many Barth scholars have neglected to ask, despite the fact that the theological problem in question is explicitly stated in Part I of *Gottes Gnadenwahl* with obvious rhetorical emphasis: "Is man in the place to receive grace, God's grace? Is he not by nature in conflict with grace? Is it not his need from which he would have to be freed by grace in the first instance: that he is by nature sinful, which means that he does not will

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Ibid. Emphases mine.

²⁸ Ibid.

to live by God's grace?"²⁹ With humanity's sin in view, "where and how is this decision made, in which it comes to this step" in which sinners come to accept the offer of grace?³⁰

"This question," says Barth, "is the one that the doctrine of God's gracious election answers."³¹ In other words, the central theological question that Barth tackles in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is the lapsarian problem. Barth wants to take sin seriously in light of the freedom of God's grace. Humanity's fallenness is for the Barth of *Gottes Gnadenwahl* an *a posteriori* given, and his whole doctrine of election seeks to address the relation (in *CD* II/2 this relation, as it were, will be emphatically described as non-relation) between the freedom of God's grace and the sin of humanity, with truth-in-Jesus-Christ as his starting point. To miss this lapsarian problem in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is to miss the core of Barth's doctrine of election.

Part I: Barth's Misunderstandings of Supra- and Infralapsarianism

In fact, Barth explicitly refers to the lapsarian problem in Part I of *Gottes Gnadenwahl*. In answering the lapsarian problem, Barth takes an avowedly "supralapsarian" position: God chose humankind "'from the beginning' (2 Thess. 2:13), even 'before the creation of the world' (Eph. 1:14)..., in Godself independent of the actualisation and of the entire sinful or righteous state of our existence."³² Barth continues to comment that in this "so-called supralapsarian view of election..., one may see no scholastic sophistry. It was really no speculation, but it was opposed to the infralapsarian view..., which tried to distinguish God's omnipotence, goodness, and wisdom in the work of creation from God's justice and mercy in the work of

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 8

reconciliation as something primary and something actual.”³³

Barth continues to emphasise what he calls the “supralapsarian view” against this “infralapsarianism” (as he misunderstood it): “However, there is in God... no higher will than his gracious will... We cannot cancel out our being determined through grace on the ground of another higher determination of humankind.”³⁴

As we have already seen numerous times in previous chapters, the definition that Barth gives to supralapsarianism here, which he had adopted as early as *Romans II*, actually describes both supra- and infralapsarianism. Infralapsarians, as much as supralapsarians, stress that the divine act of election took place in eternity before the actual creation of the world, and none of God’s decisions constitutes a passive response to any historical actuality that caught God by surprise, including humanity’s fall. What Barth calls “infralapsarianism” here—which he misunderstands to imply that double predestination is a passive divine reaction to the “actual” human choice of sin—has in fact been rejected by Reformed orthodoxy in general, supra- and infralapsarianism alike.

Barth calls himself supralapsarian, because he thinks that supralapsarians are distinguished from infralapsarians by the conviction that even “the human decision over against the decision of the gracious God... took place... on the ground of divine predestination.”³⁵ However, as we saw in Chapters 1-2, this is a conviction shared by supra- and infralapsarians. It does not make Barth a supralapsarian.

In sum, in Part I of *Gottes Gnadenwahl* Barth’s purpose is to establish an understanding of predestination as God’s free and sovereign grace, which he, on his misunderstanding of the Lapsarian Controversy, identifies as a distinct feature of supralapsarianism over against the opposing view: “Gracious election, predestination,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

means: grace-in-grace. Grace-in-grace is God's freedom and sovereignty in grace."³⁶

Barth takes this to be a supralapsarian conviction, not realising that it actually characterises Reformed orthodoxy in general.

In any case, at this point in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, Barth has not yet explicitly offered his Christological reorientation of the doctrine of election, and the basic lapsarian shape of his new understanding of predestination is still unclear. This becomes clear in Part II.

Part II: Election "in Christ"

Having established in Part I that predestination means God's freedom and sovereignty in grace, Barth proceeds to Part II to set forth the thesis that election is "in Christ." He arrives at this thesis by methodological considerations, stating at the very outset that "God's gracious election is the truth of revelation [*Offenbarungswahrheit*]; it is confession of faith [*Glaubensbekenntnis*]" (note in passing how the language that he uses here resonates with *Anselm*—see Chapter 5).³⁷ This statement carries two negative implications: "it is not conceptual necessity [*Denknotwendigkeit*] and it is not an object of experience [*Erfahrungsgegenstand*]."³⁸

Here Barth employs Kantian terminology with reference to the analytic/synthetic and *a priori/posteriori* distinctions. *Denknotwendigkeit* refers to analytic judgments in which the predicate is analytically contained in the subject (e.g. 'all boys are male'): the rationalists of Kant's day relied on analytic *a priori* judgments to attain knowledge, but analytic judgments, though necessarily true, are tautological and do not render new information. By contrast, *Erfahrungsgegenstand* refers to *a posteriori* propositions attained through empirical judgment. Empiricists such as Locke and Hume relied on synthetic *a posteriori* judgments to obtain knowledge, but *a posteriori* judgments, though

³⁶ Ibid., 10.

³⁷ Ibid., 11.

³⁸ Ibid.

providing new information, are not necessarily true. For Kant, only synthetic *a priori* judgments can provide new knowledge that is necessarily true. Yet, he comes to the conclusion that synthetic *a priori* propositions are impossible in metaphysics, because of the gulf between the thing-in-itself and its appearances or phenomena.

As we have seen in previous chapters, this (neo-)Kantian critique of metaphysics is one fundamental theological starting-point to which Barth has held all through his career. If revelation is to be revelation (that is, revelation perceptible to human reason), then the medium of revelation must be of this phenomenal world, which Barth describes as fallen: for Barth, the noumena-phenomena gulf was caused by humanity's fall, as creation in its original state was immediate to God and no mediation was needed between God and humanity. We saw in the last chapter that this is indeed so in *CD I/1*, where Barth asserts the inherent secularity and necessary indirectness of the Word of God.³⁹ Only when God veils Godself in the garment of fallen creaturely reality can humans perceive God's self-revelation.

In fact, as we saw in Chapter 4, in *GD* Barth already developed a Christological notion of the objective possibility of revelation, stating that God becomes knowable to fallen humans only by becoming human without ceasing to be God. In *GD* this Christological understanding of revelation is placed side-by-side with an actualistic-pneumatological rendition of predestination as the subjective aspect of revelation. In *CD I/1*, the emphasis in Barth's understanding of revelation began to shift from pneumatology to Christology: of the threefold forms of the Word of God, only Christ is in the strictest sense and not in any derivative or secondary sense the very Word of God. However, whether a human individual will come to faith in Christ is still determined by the Holy Spirit's actualistic work of election in the here-and-now.

³⁹ *KD I/1*, 172; ET 166.

This means that in *CD I/1*, Barth still considers election as an act of God apart from Christ who is the very Word of God, who *is* revelation in the strictest sense. This approach to the doctrine of predestination would contradict Barth's own methodological conviction that humans can never talk about God without Christ. In fact, this contradiction was already present in *GD*. As we saw in Chapter 4, in *GD* Barth had already asserted, following Calvin, that Christ is the "mirror of election."⁴⁰ There he stated: "we must stand by the *revelation in Christ* and thus start with what predestination is in the first instance, that is, election."⁴¹ Yet, despite this methodological conviction, Barth still treated predestination apart from Christology. This self-contradiction in *GD* and *CD I/1* must be resolved, and it anticipated the Christological reorientation of the doctrine of predestination in 1936.

In *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, Barth again contends as he did in *GD* that Christ is the "mirror of election."⁴² By this he now means that the doctrine of God's gracious election is not *Denknotwendigkeit* or *Erfahrungsgegenstand* but *Offenbarungswahrheit*. With this statement, Barth is making a Copernican shift in his understanding of predestination from a centre in pneumatology to a centre in Christology: "God's gracious election is the truth of revelation. More concretely: it is biblical truth. With complete concreteness: it is truth in Jesus Christ. Its confession can thus be nothing—really nothing other than an exact form of confession of Jesus Christ."⁴³

This has direct implications for the doctrine of *double* predestination: if double predestination can only be understood Christologically, then reprobation, just as election, must be considered in light of Christ. For Barth, this means that reprobation cannot be metaphysical proposition based on analytic or empirical judgments—recall that

⁴⁰ *Unterricht I*, 207; ET 471.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 210; ET 474. Emphasis mine.

⁴² *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

predestination is not *Denknotwendigkeit* or *Erfahrungsgegenstand* but *Offenbarungswahrheit*: “It is with this axiom that we—in Jesus Christ and only in him and thus not in a logically deduced thought-form [*Denkbild*] or in the images [*Bildern*] of our experience—recognise what election and reprobation mean.”⁴⁴

But how can double predestination be understood Christologically? Barth, inspired by Maury’s lecture, interprets double predestination in light of the incarnation: “‘Chosen in Christ’—we must now return to the central mystery of the Christian message, namely to the incarnation, in order to understand [this statement].”⁴⁵

In a word—and this is the very core of Barth’s mature doctrine of election—election is God’s eternal decision to become incarnate: “It was the decision and act of the eternal Son and Word, by virtue of which this man, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, began to be the Son and the Word of God as he began to be human. That is election!”⁴⁶

This identification of election as incarnation carries the profound implication that Barth no longer sees predestination as an indirect work of God in the here-and-now as he did from *GD* to *CD* I/1: “[Incarnation] is election! And that also means our election is completely direct and immediate.”⁴⁷ This is because the incarnation is now identified with God’s eternal act of election—and this time Barth really means it (recall that in *GD*, Barth spoke of an actualistic eternity-in-time that is not really eternity). The central locus of humankind’s being chosen-in-Christ, that is, chosen in union with Christ’s human nature, is not found subjectively or existentially in time, but objectively in eternity. Christ’s birth in history is an act of God that corresponds to the eternal election of God’s Being—Barth’s notion of God’s Being-in-act is now in place even though the expression

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

of the notion still awaits maturation.

Barth's understanding of our participation in Christ, then, also undergoes a Copernican shift from a centre in history to a centre in eternity. Recall that in *GD* Barth states that "the incarnation is not an eternal relation," and election is the Holy Spirit's act in time.⁴⁸ In *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, however, Barth asserts that our being chosen through Christ's incarnation took place not in time but in eternity, so he can now say that election is "completely direct and immediate" (recall that for Barth, any temporal-historical human relation to God is necessarily indirect and mediated), something that he could not have said during the actualistic phases of his doctrine of election.

So, how does such an understanding of election as incarnation shed light on *double* predestination, especially the dreaded doctrine of reprobation? Barth's Christological answer with regard to reprobation is: "the completion [*Vollendung*] and the last word of the incarnation, the proof of its full and absolute actuality, is the suffering and death of Jesus Christ."⁴⁹ That is, Golgotha is the historical actuality of divine reprobation. "As God elected this man Jesus to be in union with himself in his Son, God gave himself up for us...: 'My god, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk. 15:34)."⁵⁰

But how does this manifest God's lordship, given that reprobation must be God's sovereign act? "Where is God's sovereignty now?"⁵¹ Barth's ultimate answer is that Christ's resurrection reveals God's sovereignty in double predestination. But before arriving at this conclusion, Barth argues that even in Christ's suffering and death, God's sovereignty is manifested:

It is with grave seriousness, that God made himself one with sinful and mortal man, taking man's sin and death upon himself. But God's union with himself, the union of the Father with the Son, cannot be broken, nor can his lordship be degraded, and because of this, the

⁴⁸ *Unterricht I*, 190; ET 155.

⁴⁹ *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Son—that he is truly God and truly human—does not have to truly bear the entire sin of humankind and truly suffer humankind’s entire death. Sure he had to, but this is because he willed to. It is precisely the will of God that he executes. Yet as he executes the will of God, as he executes his own will as very God, how should the lordship of God not become even greater: not in itself but for us and unto us, as revealed and reconciling lordship?⁵²

In other words, it is by his very sovereign decision that Christ “had to” bear humanity’s sin and suffer humanity’s death. But this “revealed and reconciling lordship” is precisely the meaning of Christ’s resurrection: “This is Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ: the revealed and reconciling lordship of the crucified Son of God, his lordship for us and unto us as new-born ones in his birth. Carried by him, our sin and our death are conquered and carried away.”⁵³ Again, the definitive locus of the reality of Christ’s death and resurrection is not the historical actuality, but God’s eternal election: “What took place on Golgotha for us and unto us, which became manifest on Easter—although it took place in time—is our eternal election.”⁵⁴

In short, the actuality of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection reveals to us the truth of God’s double predestination in the eternal act of incarnation. For the Barth of *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, it is through the *Offenbarungswahrheit* of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection that we come to an understanding of double predestination as the unity of God’s will that moves from reprobation to election.

Part II: Christological and Predestinarian Infralapsarianism

Now, it is important to note that the Christology to which Barth marries his doctrine of election in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is, just as in *GD* and *CD I/1-2*, infralapsarian. As we have seen, the meaning of Christ’s eternal incarnation is manifested in his death and resurrection. This means that the incarnation is God’s eternal act whereby “God made

⁵² Ibid. Note in passing that in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, the Trinity of God’s Being-in-act is eternally necessary, while election-incarnation is contingent upon God’s will.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 17.

himself one with sinful and mortal man, taking man's sin and death upon himself."⁵⁵ In other words, for Barth, the incarnation is by definition and *de jure*⁵⁶ to take care of the problem of humanity's sin (infralapsarian), rather than the result of God's decision to be with humanity regardless of humanity's fallenness (supralapsarian).

This infralapsarian Christology in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* implies a basically infralapsarian doctrine of election, since Barth has now identified predestination with God's eternal decision to be incarnate. Predestination involves reprobation, just as the "completion and the last word of the incarnation... is the suffering and death of Jesus Christ."⁵⁷ Predestination moves from reprobation to election, as it is God's choice to take on and then triumph over humanity's sin and death. Therefore sin—not just its historical happening but as an element posited in God's eternal decision to elect humankind in Christ—is presupposed in the divine act of double predestination. The human race that is elected in Christ from eternity, the human race for which God decided to become human without ceasing to be God, is on this view *homo lapsus*. It is precisely for this reason that Barth calls predestination the "reconciling will of God."⁵⁸ Unquestionably this means that Barth's doctrine of election in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is basically infralapsarian, notwithstanding his own claim to be a supralapsarian (misnomer!).

Recall that in *GD* and *CD* I/1, Barth's doctrine of election was only moving towards infralapsarianism, but not yet truly infralapsarian, because he had not yet developed the notion of predestination as a truly *eternal* act of God. Now that he marries Christology to predestination and shifts the centre of the doctrine from historical actuality to true eternity, Barth's understanding of election has become basically infralapsarian.

This Christological-predestinarian infralapsarianism was in fact latent in the very

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 4, page 137 for an explanation of the sense in which I use the term *de jure*.

⁵⁷ *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 16.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

first statement at the beginning of Part II of *Gottes Gnadenwahl*: “God’s gracious election is the truth of revelation.”⁵⁹ As we have seen, this statement entails that humankind cannot attain to the truth of divine election by synthetic *a priori* judgments, since fallen human reason cannot deduce from observable phenomena the truth of God. Revelation is necessary in order for sinners to come to recognise God’s gracious election. As we have seen, Barth’s notion of revelation has always been predicated upon the sin of humanity. Just as Christology and predestination are woven into his infralapsarian understanding of the event of the Word of God in *CD I/1*, Barth’s Christological-predestinarian infralapsarianism in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is implicit in his identification of God’s gracious election as *Offenbarungswahrheit*. Here, again, we see how Barth’s Christological reorientation of the doctrine of election was already anticipated in what I call his infralapsarian view of revelation (i.e., revelation in the form of the Christ event presupposes human fallenness; unfallen humanity knew God directly without the need of divine incarnation) in the previous phases of his theological development.

Part III: Double Predestination as Aufhebung

Having identified election as Christocentric *Offenbarungswahrheit* and discussed the meaning of double predestination in light of the incarnation, Barth proceeds to Part III to further explicate the notions of election and reprobation: “Election means... to see an act of freedom and lordship upon the elect... There is no election, where there is not also non-election, omission, and reprobation. The doctrine of predestination must thus be the doctrine of double predestination.”⁶⁰

However, Barth insists that reprobation must not be treated as a “logical postulate” that goes hand in hand with election, as if predestination had to be twofold because “there

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

is no Yes without No, no day without night.”⁶¹ Treating double predestination as such would be to speak of election and reprobation as existing in the “tidiness of an equilibrium [*Gleichgewicht*],” which Barth finds to be speculatively metaphysical: such a view, taught by Calvin, Beza, and classical Reformed theology (namely, the *decretum absolutum*), renders double predestination an unspeakably arbitrary will of God above and behind the God self-revealed in Jesus Christ.⁶²

But “is Jesus Christ merely the bearer of the divine Yes to humankind? Is he not at the same time the bearer of the divine No? Is he—and he alone—not also the divine Judge on the Left Hand? Then how did we come to speak of divine reprobation as if we knew it from somewhere else other than our knowledge of Jesus Christ?”⁶³ In a word, for Barth, double predestination is Christological doctrine—it cannot be derived from any sources other than the Christian knowledge of Christ.

Having established this Christocentric conviction, Barth proceeds to state his thesis:

We cannot recognise our election in Jesus Christ without first and above all recognising our reprobation in him. The Son of God, who took on human nature, is certainly the rejected Son of man (Mk. 8:13), who in Gethsemane prayed in vain that this cup be removed from him (Matt. 26:24), who saw himself abandoned by his heavenly Father on Golgotha (Mk. 15:34), who, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism Q. 37, ‘sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind.’⁶⁴

In a word, through Golgotha we come to recognise Christ as the human vicariously reprobated *from* eternity for the sins of all humankind, for the purpose of God’s gracious election of all *from* and *to* all eternity.

In view of Golgotha, Barth stresses that reprobation and election do not exist in a balanced equilibrium. Rather, reprobation serves the purpose of election, as Christ died in order to conquer death. Thus, even the crucified Christ was reprobated as God’s elect.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 19.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 20.

“Mark well: even Jesus Christ on the cross is surely God’s elect,” for he was the “only one who willed and did the will of God.”⁶⁵ In other words, Christ as God’s elect was chosen to be reprobated in the place of sinful humankind, and he was reprobated for the sake of his own election and the election of all humankind in him. The election of the man Jesus, which includes and presupposes his reprobation, was to manifest God’s righteousness: “...[Christ’s election] is the highest righteousness of this God—and Jesus himself is surely God’s Son—to be the reprobated human in our place and to bear our punishment himself.”⁶⁶

In this way, double predestination is for Barth not balanced equilibrium but sublation (*Aufhebung*, sometimes translated as ‘supersession,’ literally meaning ‘lifting up’: this is the Hegelian⁶⁷ notion of the negation of a negation, resulting in the abrogation of the negatives while preserving their rationality and fulfilling their purpose): “But as God’s righteousness is determined and executed here, as our reprobation becomes manifest and surely manifest in its justice here, as God’s elect [Jesus Christ] accepted it in faith and took it upon himself, our reprobation is sublated [*aufgehoben*].”⁶⁸ That is, reprobation is God’s eternal negation of humanity’s sin that negates God’s grace, and this negation of negation in Christ is sublated in the event of election. “Only if we see it [reprobation] as having been sublated do we see it truly. But where we see its having been sublated, we see it truly, and there is no evasion from or revolt against the free and in-its-freedom-justified decision of God.”⁶⁹ In a word, Christ was reprobated vicariously for the sins of all humankind, so that all humankind, partaking of him, may be elected in and with him.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ While Barth is merely doing “a little Hegeling” here, Graham Ward is right that Barth’s “observation that for Hegel, ‘God is only God in his divine action of revelation, creation, reconciliation, redemption; as an absolute act, *actus purus*’ demonstrates how close Hegel (and Aquinas) is to Barth.” See “Barth, Hegel and the Possibility for Christian Apologetics,” in J. McDowell and M. Higton, eds., *Conversing with Barth* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 60.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 23.

Part III: Aufhebung and Infralapsarianism

In light of Barth's Christological rendition of double predestination as *Aufhebung* of the divine No against sin, we may now proceed to delve deeper into the lapsarianism that underlies his doctrine of God's gracious election. Recall that according to supralapsarianism, God issued forth election-reprobation irrespective of human sin. Reprobation, in particular, is simply God's decree to manifest God's glory in justice, but the object of this justice is God's eternal conception of unfallen humanity. In other words, on the supralapsarian view, double predestination does not presuppose humanity's sin. By contrast, infralapsarianism holds that the object of double predestination is *homo lapsus* (fallen humanity), not in historical actuality, but strictly as God's eternal conception of humanity before the actual creation of the world. Accordingly, double predestination is God's plan to take care of the problem of sin, the dark element that God freely presupposed in the double decree of election and reprobation.

Now, when Barth formulates double predestination as Christological *Aufhebung*, the element of sin is undeniably presupposed in God's gracious election. Barth states that there is no election without reprobation: election is the sublation of reprobation, while reprobation is the negation of sin. For Barth, Golgotha reveals that Christ took on the sin of humanity and was vicariously reprobated for humankind from all eternity, and precisely in this eternal act of willing and doing God's will on the cross is the man Jesus, who is himself God, revealed to be God's elect.

Barth's notion of predestination as *Aufhebung* of God's No against sin is such that Christ took on humanity's reprobation so that humankind may participate in his election. Strictly speaking, however, although Christ is the only reprobate (Barth already hints at this in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, though he does not spell it out as explicitly or extensively as

he does in *CD II/2*), reprobation is in fact God's will against sinful humankind: Christ is "reprobated human *in our place*."⁷⁰

Now, the question is: in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, is the object of divine reprobation and election fallen or unfallen humanity? The following passage makes it clear: "Just as the Law of God can kill and must kill human beings who are contemptuous of grace (grace is the mystery of the Law), just as God charges, banishes, condemns, and, with temporal and eternal death, punishes the sinner, so everything becomes manifest here: God's holy justice in his eternal reprobation of the *massa perditionis*."⁷¹ In other words, God's justice in the act of reprobation is against the sin of *homo lapsus*.

In this light, Christ's vicarious reprobation is for Barth God's eternal negation of humanity's sin, and this negation of negation is presupposed in election as the *Aufhebung* of reprobation, manifested in the actuality of Christ's resurrection. Barth's understanding of double predestination as Christological *Aufhebung* is basically infralapsarian: double predestination deals with the element of sin, and the *obiectum praedestinationis* is *homo lapsus*.

Of course, with regard to teleology, Barth's understanding of election-in-Christ in terms of the logic of *Aufhebung* might echo more with supralapsarianism, because supralapsarians tend to ascribe teleological priority to election more than infralapsarians. However, as we saw in Chapters 1-2, many infralapsarians would also describe election as the highest purpose in the will of God. As far as the question of the object of election is concerned, Barth is basically infralapsarian.

Part IV: Election of All in Christ

Having asserted in Part III that double predestination is not "balanced equilibrium"

⁷⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁷¹ Ibid., 22.

but *Aufhebung*, Barth proceeds to Part IV to claim that the grace of election is for all humankind. He begins by stating: “We are not in the place to make the declaration, who is elected and who is rejected.”⁷² In fact, proponents of the classical Reformed doctrine of election have made the same statement, too. Therefore, in order to distinguish his own doctrine from historic Calvinism, Barth contends that “we must go even further: we are not in the place to make the general declaration either, that there are two classes of humans as elects and reprobates.”⁷³

This is in fact not the first time in his career that Barth takes issues with the classical Reformed understanding of the *decretum absolutum*, the doctrine that humankind is inflexibly divided by an absolute and unsearchable divine decree into two masses as elects and reprobates. Recall from Chapter 3 that in *Romans* II, Barth cited Romans 11:32 (‘for God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all’), contending that this is the passage whereby “the final meaning of ‘Double Predestination’ seeks to make itself known.”⁷⁴ Barth argued there that while election appears to be dividing humankind into believers and unbelievers in the here-and-now, on the eternal-eschatological level reprobation is only a means towards the goal of the election of all humankind

During the Göttingen-Münster period (see Chapter 4), Barth retained this exegesis of Romans 11:32: “the way leads fundamentally from rejection to election, not vice versa. God has shut up all in disobedience in order to have mercy upon all.”⁷⁵ However, in this phase of his development he no longer differentiated between God’s eternal will and actualistic work. The distinction was now between the side of God’s decree and the side of the elect that might perish against this decree. For this reason, Barth rejected the notion

⁷² Ibid., 26.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Römerbrief* II, 407; ET 421.

⁷⁵ *Unterricht* II, 193; ET 461.

of any absolute assurance of being chosen on the part of the elect. Yet, in contending for a relative assurance, the Barth of Göttingen-Münster still held that in the death and resurrection of Christ we see a movement of God's will from reprobation to election.

In *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, Barth would again appeal to Romans 11:32 to interpret double predestination as a universal movement—a process of *Aufhebung*—of all humankind from reprobation to election. Barth writes:

The insight that we gain from the recognition of gracious election is the twofold insight of faith in Jesus Christ. By faith in Jesus Christ, Paul wrote—and by the same faith we are to recognise and confess: ‘God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all’ (Rom. 11:32). All: that is to say without doubt from the meaning and the context: all, upon whom God decides and shall have mercy in Jesus Christ... All: precisely because all are ones upon whom God decides and shall have mercy in Jesus Christ, the notion that there might be elects who are not threatened with reprobation or reprobates who are not promised with election is firmly excluded.⁷⁶

That is, in Christ all humans are placed under the threat of reprobation in order to be elected:

God hath shut up all unto disobedience’: that is the threat from which we have been freed through the promise freely given to us in Jesus Christ... The fact that all of us, the good and the evil, the pious and the ungodly, belong in this prison [of the threat of reprobation] is shown to us by God's wrath from Gethsemane to Golgotha, shown to us by the matter-of-fact [*Tatsache*] that the one elect who has never sinned bears this wrath as righteous wrath.⁷⁷

In a word, “by faith in Jesus Christ we cannot avoid the recognition that our reprobation is determined and deserved and really executed.”⁷⁸

Yet, that our reprobation has been executed in Christ leads to the very next step of the *Aufhebung* process: “‘that he might have mercy upon all’: that is the promise.”⁷⁹ As Barth has just stated, this promise frees humankind from the threat of reprobation. However, “it does not eliminate the threat. The promise presupposes that our reprobation

⁷⁶ *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 27.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 27f.

is determined, deserved, and really executed. The threat was and is thus not a game.”⁸⁰ In other words, there is no election without reprobation. Election is “reprobation sublated [*aufgehoben*] in the promise”: in election, the purpose and rationality of reprobation are fulfilled and preserved.⁸¹

In this way, the vicarious reprobation that Christ suffers in the stead of all sinners constitutes all humankind’s election in him who is the one elect of God—this is for Barth the core meaning of the doctrine of God’s gracious election: “that God—God in Jesus Christ—is with us on the way through such threat and promise in this double and yet unbalanced [*ungleichen*] foreordination, holding us in his hand: that is the insight that we gain from the recognition of gracious election.”⁸²

Now, it is clear again from the foregoing discussions that the *obiectum praedestinationis*, that is all humankind in Christ, is *homo lapsus* (fallen humanity) for whose disobedience Christ is vicariously reprobated from eternity. Election as a process of *Aufhebung* presupposes reprobation, and the reprobation of all humankind is God’s act whereby “God hath shut up all unto disobedience.” In other words, for the Barth of *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, reprobation is not a divine fiat whereby God arbitrarily condemns the reprobate, but rather God’s substitutionary punishment of Jesus Christ on the ground of humankind’s disobedience unto which God has shut them all up (this would be the *infralapsarian* position).

Barth explicitly states: “Outside of the promise, [the threat] exists in force with the full severity of a real and necessary judgment of God: shut up in disobedience. It is this disobedience of our own being and action; but even so, it is by divine reprobation that God... shuts us up in this prison wherein we are without grace and in conflict with the grace of our own Lord” (recall that Barth had earlier defined sin as being in conflict with

⁸⁰ Ibid., 28.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 28f.

grace).⁸³

Here Barth's notion of reprobation must be understood as comprising two distinct but inseparable aspects: the reprobation of all humankind in Christ, and the vicarious reprobation that Christ suffers in the place of all humankind. The abiding distinction and inseparable union of these two aspects are predicated upon a basically Chalcedonian understanding of humankind's *participatio Christi*: human beings participate in Christ without ever becoming identical to Christ, but they and Christ are really one such that they are indivisibly and inseparably united to Christ, in much the same way as Christ's two natures are joined together in the person of the Son.

Now, because of the abiding distinction between Christ and the rest of humankind that participates in him, the reprobation of all humankind in Christ must be distinguished from the vicarious reprobation that Christ suffers for all humankind. In the former aspect, God shuts up all in disobedience by the decree of reprobation; in the latter, God reprobates Jesus Christ on the ground of the guilt of the disobedience of all humankind transferred (via *participatio*) to him who is guiltless in himself.

It is important to note here that of these two aspects of divine reprobation, it is the latter that is constitutive and determinative of the former. That is, for Barth, God's decree in Christ is definitive of the state of humankind as *homo lapsus*. Yet, this does not make Barth a supralapsarian, because the decree of reprobation is not two but one, and in the constitutive and determinative aspect of this decree the *obiectum praedestinationis*, Christ, is reprobated on the ground of humanity's guilt of disobedience.

In other words, by God's decree of reprobation, humankind is confined to the prison of disobedience, and the vicarious reprobation that Christ suffers is for disobedient

⁸³ Ibid., 27.

humans whom God has pronounced guilty (“*die Schuldiggesprochenen*”).⁸⁴ The object of God’s double predestination as *Aufhebung* is thus *homo lapsus*. It becomes clear again here that the Christological doctrine of predestination in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is basically infralapsarian, albeit with “a little Hegeling,” as it were, to distinguish it from classical infralapsarianism.

Implications of Gottes Gnadenwahl

Having given an exposition of Barth’s Christocentric revision of predestination in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, some concluding observations are now in order.

Actualism and Critical Realism

First, with his Christocentric revision of the doctrine of election, Barth has resolved a contradiction between his actualism and critical realism that marked the chief defect of his theology from *GD* to *CD* I/1. Recall that in *GD*, Barth rejected the claim of any knowledge of an eternal predestination of God above and behind the eternity-in-actuality intuitable to human beings in time and space. Double predestination must and can only be understood actualistically as manifested in the Holy Spirit’s work in the here-and-now. Christ’s death and resurrection mirrors a movement in God’s will from reprobation to election, but there is no absolute assurance that all are elected in Christ, or that a believer will always remain an elect, for to claim such assurance would be to speculatively probe into a will of God above and behind God’s revelation-in-act, that is, revelation in the divine act of double predestination in the here-and-now.

This premature version of Barth’s actualism would carry two possible implications, both of which would contradict his own axiomatic “critical realism.” The first possible

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

implication would be that the electing God is indeed objectively real in eternity above and behind temporal actualities (this is Barth's 'realism'), but humans can only come to know the God self-revealed in temporal actualities without also knowing the eternal God-in-Godself. This could not have been Barth's contention, for it would have amounted to positing the existence of a deity apart from the God self-disclosed in the act of revelation, which Barth would have found uncritically metaphysical. If Barth were to accept this possible implication of his actualistic doctrine of election in *GD*, his theological realism would have ceased to be critical (i.e., it would violate Kant's critique of human reason, which Barth takes as one of his axiomatic starting-points).

Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 4, Barth's intention in *GD* was precisely to establish that God-in-Godself is one and the same as the God who has entered into the veil of objectivity without ceasing to be the Subject. To say that believers may know of God's election-in-act without knowing election-in-eternity would be to contradict this very intention.

The second possible implication would be that there is no God apart from the God whose eternity is bound to temporal actualities. If Barth were to accept this implication, he would indeed have avoided uncritical speculations about the existence of a deity above and behind God's revelation-in-act, but then his theological realism would have been compromised, since this possible implication of his actualistic doctrine of election would have erased the distinction between the electing God's objectively real Being and God's temporal acts. As George Hunsinger points out, although God's Being and act are inseparable in Barth's thought, there is always a distinction between the two.⁸⁵ In the language of his mature theology, God is Being-in-act rather than Being-as-act: God and God's act are not *simpliciter* identical, but rather God's Being, distinct from God's act, is

⁸⁵ George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 180.

in act so that God's Being cannot be known apart from God's act. This distinction is crucial to Barth's mature theology, for to blur this distinction would lead to a denial of the objective reality of God's transcendent Being that is *in act*.

Now, if Barth's actualistic doctrine of election in *GD* is taken to imply that there is no distinction between the electing God-in-eternity and the electing God self-disclosed through the temporal actuality of faith and unfaith, then an eradication of the distinction between God's Being and act would be inevitable, which would then amount to denying the objective reality of God's transcendent and eternal Being. While some have found this possible implication of a sort of process theology in the earlier Barth appealing,⁸⁶ it blatantly contradicts his intentions.

In either case, then, Barth's actualism would have contradicted one or another aspect of his critical realism. This defect in Barth's theology from *GD* to *CD* I/1 is resolved by his Christocentric revision of the doctrine of election in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, where he develops the notion of God's Being-in-act for the first time in his career.

In *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, predestination no longer consists in merely temporal actualities. Rather, predestination really is God's eternal act of election and reprobation. Incarnation, which is now identified with predestination, is also eternal. This eternity, moreover, is not merely eternity-in-time. It is an objectively real eternity that has entered into temporality without ceasing to be eternal.⁸⁷ Predestination is thus God's eternal Being *in* God's eternal act, transcendent over time and space, entering into time by the Christ-event while remaining wholly other as ever. The Being of the eternal God-in-Christ

⁸⁶ For example, Robert Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future as Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

⁸⁷ Barth's understanding of eternity is at once traditional and modern. Reappropriating an Augustinian-Boethian understanding, Barth sees eternity as "in some strong sense" timeless and successionless (Hunsinger). Yet, with reference to Whitehead and Hegel, Barth also thinks of eternity as involving a kind of temporality and procession. Barth's notion of eternity is grounded upon his Trinitarian thought, which I shall not discuss here. Suffice it to say that for Barth, eternity as God's time is wholly other than creaturely and fallen temporality. See George Hunsinger, "Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity," in *Disruptive Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 186ff.

is made known to humans through Christ's birth, death, and resurrection in history. These historical works of God in Christ actualistically correspond to God's eternal act of predestination-incarnation: "What took place on Golgotha for us and unto us, which became manifest on Easter—although it took place in time—is our eternal election."⁸⁸

With this new actualism describing God as Being-in-act, whereby God's works and acts perfectly correspond to God's Being with abiding distinction, Barth is now able to say that God's objectively real Being in eternity is made knowable and indeed known to humans through God's works in fallen creaturely time and space. In other words, Barth's Christocentric revision of the doctrine of election has harmonised his actualism and critical realism, which had previously stood in mutual contradiction as well as contradiction to some of his other methodological axioms. It is with this notion of God's Being-in-act that he was able to say that God's gracious election is not *Denknotwendigkeit* or *Erfahrungsgegenstand*, but *Offenbarungswahrheit* (as I have already demonstrated in this chapter).

Christocentric Particularism

With his Christocentric notion of God's Being-in-act now in place, Barth's "particularism" also becomes concentrated in the person and work of Christ. Hunsinger explains the meaning of this term: "particularism means that Barth strove to take his bearings strictly from the particularities of the biblical witness, especially its narrative portions. The particulars from which he wanted to move toward general theological constructions were the events of grace as attested in scripture and centered on Jesus Christ."⁸⁹

Particularism and actualism are closely related in Barth's theology. He refuses to

⁸⁸ *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 16.

⁸⁹ George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 33.

begin with general statement about reality in his theological constructions. The classic instance is his treatment of the biblical predication, “God is love.” He insists that one should not probe into what God is by examining general truths about love. For Barth, such *analogia entis* would lead to what Ludwig Feuerbach famously calls the “anthropological essence” of religion. Interestingly, Barth finds that Feuerbach is “no mere sceptic and nay-sayer” in his charge of anthropomorphism and idolatry against Christian theology.⁹⁰ It has too often been the case that in Christian theology, especially in the various traditions of natural theology, divine attributes are understood in light of human attributes, and, as Barth sees it, Feuerbach is certainly right in pointing out that “if the divine predicates are attributes of the human nature, the subject of those predicates is also of the human nature.”⁹¹ Barth thinks that such *analogia entis*⁹² is the seed of the so-called anthropological turn in theology to which modern consciousness theology gave rise. In an attempt to counter Feuerbach’s charge of anthropomorphism, Barth challenges Feuerbach’s assumption that “what the subject is lies entirely in the attributes of the subject,” and insists that in Christian theology it is the divine subject that defines the attributes, not vice versa.⁹³

Thus Barth stresses that in the biblical statement “God is love”—Feuerbach is fond of saying that Christianity ascribes to the divine object the human attribute of love—it is the subject that defines the predicate, and not *vice versa*: God is love, but love is not God. To know what love is, then, one must first know the God who is love—this is one important principle of Barth’s *analogia fidei* (see Chapter 5).

⁹⁰ Karl Barth, *Die Theologie und die Kirche* (Zurich: Zollikon, 1928), 291; ET 222.

⁹¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus, 1989), 25.

⁹² Amy Marga has argued that despite Barth’s avowed antagonism towards natural theology, he in fact allows room for some form of an *analogia entis* during his Göttingen-Münster years. Marga suggests at the end of her book that Barth’s theology from 1936 onward might leave even more room for the *analogia entis*. See Amy Marga, *Karl Barth’s Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster: its significance for his doctrine of God* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 172.

⁹³ See Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 25.

Yet, because of the epistemological gulf between God and sinful creatures, direct human knowledge of God's Being is impossible, thus one may know the God who is love only by knowing God's particular act of love (in Barth's mature theology, God's act of love would be entirely centred upon Jesus Christ). To know God's act of love is to know the God who is love, for God is Being-in-act.

Now, since Barth's actualism from *GD* to *CD* I/1 was not yet the Christocentric notion of God's Being-in-act, but a Trinitarian understanding of God's revelation-in-act, his particularism was also not yet Christocentric. For the Barth of *GD*, God's act of double predestination is known through subjective human experiences of existential faith-obedience and unbelief-disobedience in the here-and-now. Although these experiences are described as God's sovereign act in the person of the Holy Spirit, human knowledge of divine predestination still in one sense begins with a general *Erfahrungsgegenstand* ('object of experience,' alluding to Kant's analytic/synthetic and *a priori/posteriori* distinctions). This would violate the neo-Kantian rejection of the empiricist view of experience.

In *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, however, all human knowledge of God's gracious election is centred on Jesus Christ, and Barth has now made the attempt to strip away every last element of epistemological subjectivism (that is, establishing human knowledge of God on the ground of the subjective consciousness or experience of human individuals): recall from earlier that Barth would now insist that knowledge of God's gracious election is neither *Erfahrungsgegenstand* (object of experience) nor *Denknotwendigkeit* (conceptual necessity), but *Offenbarungswahrheit* (revelational truth), which is *Wahrheit in Christus* (truth in Christ).⁹⁴ Logical necessity or general observations of existential faith and unbelief no longer provide any sort of starting-point for Barth's theological reflection on

⁹⁴ *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 11.

divine predestination. The particular person and work of Christ have now become the sole ground for Barth's theological inquiry. Thus we find in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* a thoroughly Christocentric particularism, which was not yet in place in the previous phase of Barth's development.

Christological-Objectivist Soteriology

The next point of observation concerns the development of Barth's "Christological objectivism," also known as his "objectivist soteriology." As already noted, one crucial difference between *Gottes Gnadenwahl* and his Göttingen-Münster theology is that rather than ascribing double predestination to the subjective sphere of faith and obedience in the here-and-now, Barth would now describe election as a completely objective reality eternally accomplished in Christ.

As Hunsinger points out, Barth's objectivism is both epistemological and soteriological: "Objectivism... has two important aspects. The one concerns knowledge of God, the other, salvation in Christ."⁹⁵ In Chapter 5, we saw that in *CD I/1*, Barth had already asserted that revelation *is* reconciliation. This soteriological emphasis on the doctrine of the Word of God was a slight improvement upon his Göttingen-Münster theology, where, as we saw in Chapter 4, even its basically Chalcedonian Christology was formulated in a primarily epistemological rather than soteriological setting. This is not to say that soteriology was absent in Barth's Göttingen-Münster theology, since Barth has always considered the concept of revelation as one in which the sin of humanity must be overcome. However, in the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth's primary concern was with the possibility of revelation, and soteriology was in many ways subservient to epistemology. In *CD I/1*, the emphasis had shifted a bit such that soteriology and

⁹⁵ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 35.

epistemology began to carry more or less equal weight in the doctrine of the Word of God, the centre of which was the person and work of Christ.

In *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, soteriology has become the central focus of Barth's Christology, and some epistemological principles have governed his construction of the doctrine while other epistemological implications would follow from this new Christocentric ontology.⁹⁶ Barth's main concern now is how Christ has defeated sin by the eternal act of double predestination, rather than how humanity may come to know God through Christ. To be sure, the concept of revelation still carries substantial weight in Barth's thought, but it has now made way for a soteriological emphasis in his Christology.

The great import of Barth's soteriology in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is that humankind's salvation is entirely determined in Christ from all eternity, and no subjective element from the human side may have any effect on an individual's status as elect or reprobate. This differs from the actualistic rendition of predestination in *GD*, where whether a person is elect or reprobate is determined by his existential status of faith or unbelief (though the Barth of *GD* would emphasise that this takes place by the sovereign decision of God through the work of the Holy Spirit).

This thoroughgoing Christocentrism in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* carries far-reaching implications for Barth's theological method: he would now treat every theological topic in light of his new Christological ontology. We shall explore these implications in Chapters 8-9. Suffice is now to say that Barth's Christocentric epistemology developed in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is aimed at ensuring that "the knowledge of God as confessed by faith is objective in the sense that its basis lies not in human subjectivity but in God."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ For a discussion of Barth's Christological ontology, see Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: the role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92ff. Also see Aaron Smith, "God's Self-Specification: His Being is His Electing," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009): 1ff.

⁹⁷ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 35.

Conclusion: “Purified ‘Infralapsarianism’”

Finally, we return to the topic of Barth’s lapsarianism. In this chapter we have seen how Barth’s Christology and doctrine of election converge through his treatment of the reprobation and election of all in Christ as a process of *Aufhebung*. I have also shown how this Christological doctrine of election in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* is basically infralapsarian in that the object of double predestination is fallen humanity—*homo lapsus*.

In an excursus on the Lapsarian Controversy in *CD II/2*, Barth would, by a misnomer inherited from earlier periods of his development (as I have pointed out since Chapter 3), label his doctrine as “purified supralapsarianism.” I shall discuss this excursus in detail in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that the adjective “purified” refers to some fundamental presuppositions in the classical Reformed doctrine of predestination, the most important of which is the notion of a *decretum absolutum Dei* whereby humanity is inflexibly divided into two masses for election and reprobation.

We have seen in this chapter that it is in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* that Barth “purified” his doctrine of election by replacing the traditional Reformed understanding of the *decretum absolutum* with a Christological notion of election as *Aufhebung* of God’s rejection of sin. Now, since Barth’s doctrine of election is closer to infra- rather than supralapsarianism, I suggest that it be called a “purified infralapsarianism.”

This “purified ‘infralapsarianism,’” as I suggest it be called, that Barth develops in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* subtly holds together all the themes that I have just treated in the foregoing discussions, as it constitutes the very core of Barth’s mature Christological-predestinarian ontology.

First of all, Barth’s mature notion of God’s Being-in-act is predicated upon this “purified ‘infralapsarianism.’” Of course, with regard to Barth’s Trinitarian ontology, whether God’s Being-in-act presupposes election has been a subject of debate for a

number of years now. I leave this discussion for Chapter 9. Suffice it now to say that when I assert that Barth's notion of God's Being-in-act is predicated upon his "purified 'infralapsarianism,'" I am not referring to God's Trinitarian acts *ad intra*, but to God's Being in the act of election.⁹⁸

According to Barth's mature theology that found its inception in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, God's act of election is the act of becoming human without ceasing to be God in order to take on and defeat humanity's sin from all eternity by suffering reprobation in the place of all humankind for the sake of the election of all in Christ. This is the act in and by which the objective reality of God's transcendent Being is mediated and revealed to sinners.

Now, without the infralapsarian character of this notion of God's Being-in-act (that is, if God's act of election does not presuppose humanity's sin), Barth's actualism would be void of its central soteriological-epistemological import. The reason is self-evident: Barth's critically realistic theology is not about a paradise where creatures are immediate to God, but finds its setting in a world plagued by the plight of sin and separation from God, thus Barth cannot claim direct knowledge of God's Being *ad intra*. By speaking of God as Being-in-act, Barth begins not with the immanent Trinity, but with the particular person and work of Christ as God's act of election which mediates and reveals God to sinners, and since this act of election is to take care of the problem of sin, it is basically infralapsarian in character and it is identified as the *Aufhebung* of God's No to sin rather than "balanced equilibrium" (in a word, it is "purified infralapsarianism"). It is this "purified infralapsarianism" that gives to Barth's mature actualism its soteriological-epistemological import in the setting of a critically realistic theology.

The same may also be said about Barth's Christocentric particularism. As I just pointed out in the last paragraph, when Barth discusses God's Being-in-act, he begins

⁹⁸ One of the most important works in this area of Barth studies in recent years is Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007). See especially pp. 4-12, 110-35, and 161-67.

with the particular person and work of Christ. The reason is simple: he is doing theology in the setting of a critical realism in which humankind is found in the plight of sin and separation from God, and for Barth, there is nowhere else to begin than the person and work of Christ, since the incarnation—identified with election in Christ—is God’s act of overcoming humanity’s plight. This, again, reflects an infralapsarian Christology married with a basically infralapsarian doctrine of election, which constitute Barth’s “purified infralapsarianism.”

Finally, Barth’s Christological-objectivist soteriology is also predicated upon his “purified infralapsarianism.” The “purification” of Barth’s doctrine from the classical Reformed understanding of the *decretum absolutum* implies that human faith and unbelief by no means reflect divine election and reprobation as two sides of a decree standing in balanced equilibrium. For Barth, the temporal realities of faith and unbelief cannot alter the objective reality of the eternal election of all in Christ.

Moreover, the soteriological character of Barth’s Christological objectivism reflects his basically infralapsarian position. Barth does not speak of the objective reality accomplished in Christ through election-incarnation as unfallen creatures’ union with God. Rather, for Barth, the objective reality eternally accomplished in Christ is the mediation between God and fallen humankind. The incarnation is to take care of the problem of sin—it is for our salvation (this is infralapsarian Christology); the object of election is sinful humanity (this is the basic conviction of predestinarian infralapsarianism). It is this Christological-predestinarian infralapsarianism that gives to Barth’s mature Christological objectivism its central soteriological character. In the next chapter, we shall see how Barth develops this “purified infralapsarianism,” as I suggest it be so-called, into maturity in *CD* II/2.

Chapter 7

CD II/2 (1942): God's Non-Capricious No and Definitive Yes—

“Purified ‘Infralapsarianism’”

In this chapter I pick up where I left off in Chapter 2, in which I offered a discussion of Barth's mistakes in defining supra- and infralapsarianism in his excursus on the Lapsarian Controversy in *CD II/2*, §33. I contended that Barth's doctrine of election in this excursus is in fact basically infra- rather than supralapsarian. Recall that supralapsarianism is the position that the object of election-reprobation is God's eternal conception of unfallen humanity (*homo labilis* or *homo nondum lapsus*), while the infralapsarian thesis is that the object of double predestination is God's eternal conception of fallen humanity (*homo lapsus*). When applied to Christology, supralapsarianism holds that God's will to become incarnate logically precedes God's will to deal with humanity's sin, and infralapsarianism asserts that God's purpose behind the incarnation is to overcome sin. I contended in the last chapter that Barth's Christological formulation of the doctrine of election in 1936 is basically infralapsarian, and in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* all the decisively new ideas for his mature understanding of predestination are firmly rooted, though yet to be fully developed.

The task of this chapter, then, is to give an exposition of Barth's full-fledged Christocentric doctrine of election in *CD II/2* to explore how he developed his new ideas into maturity from 1936 to 1942. I will demonstrate that in *CD II/2* Barth is basically infralapsarian in his Christological doctrine of election, just as he has been since 1936.

CD II/2: Jesus Christ as Electing God and Elected Human

Volume II of the *Church Dogmatics* is titled *The Doctrine of God*, with its second

half-volume (*CD II/2*) comprising two chapters on “The Election of God” and “The Command of God.” In the introductory summary to §32, “The Problem of a Correct Doctrine of the Election of Grace,” found at the very outset of *CD II/2*, Barth states:

The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because of all words that can be said or heard it is the best: that God elects man; that God is for man too the One who loves in freedom. It is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because He is both the electing God and elected man in One. It is part of the doctrine of God because originally God’s election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself.¹

It is not an exaggeration on Barth’s part to call the doctrine of election “the sum of the Gospel,” for, as we shall see in the next two chapters, all of his subsequent doctrinal writings are predicated upon his Christological understanding of election (though he offers a highly historical-actualistic revision thereof in *CD IV/1*).

Barth’s identification of Jesus Christ as both electing God and elected human is of central importance to *CD II/2*. As we saw in the last chapter, this idea was already in place in the 1936 *Gottes Gnadenwahl*. However, it is in *CD II/2* that this idea is fully developed. As stated in the quote above, the ontological identification of Christ as electing God and elected human carries epistemological significances: the doctrine of election is “grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because He is both the electing God and elected man in One.”

In *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, Barth’s focus was on the knowledge of humanity’s election in Jesus Christ; in *CD II/2*, the emphasis is not only on the knowledge of election as an act of God, but of Jesus Christ as both God’s act and Being, that is, as both God’s election and the electing God. In other words, since Christ, who is the electing decree of God, is himself the electing God, to know Christ is to know the God who elects. Thus, in *CD II/2* Barth would describe God’s Being as epistemologically accessible. Of course, the idea of God’s Being-in-act was already developed in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (as I argued in Chapter

¹ *KD II/2*, 1; ET 3.

6), but it is in *CD II/2* that Barth would begin to emphasise that to know Christ is to know God's gracious election and the graciously electing God.

Furthermore, Christ the electing God is knowable to humankind because he is also the elected human. More concretely, as Barth puts it in the quote above, Christ is "electing God and elected man *in One*." Here Barth is intimating what might be called a "basically Chalcedonian" (with discretion, as Paul Nimmo reminds us) understanding of humanity's participation in Christ: human beings are united to Christ on the basis of their consubstantiality with Christ.² Meanwhile, Christ is truly and fully God who became truly and fully human without ceasing to be truly and fully God. Thus, to know Christ is to know God, and to participate in Christ is to share in God's election of the human Jesus Christ.

Yet, as we saw in the quote above, "God's election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself." Expressions like this in Barth's later writings have been an issue of debate in recent years, which I shall discuss in Chapter 9. Suffice it now to say that I see in Barth a consistent concern to maintain the perfect correspondence between God's act and Being. In the act of election God has chosen to *become* human, but what becomes of the life of the Triune God in the act of election does not alter what God necessarily and unchangeably *is* in God's eternal Trinitarian act *ad intra*.

It is with the understanding that God became human without ceasing to be God that Barth writes in the quote above, "God is for man *too* the One who loves in freedom." God-in-Godself is the *I-am-that-I-am* who *loves* in the perfect freedom of God's

² See George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basically Chalcedonian Character," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). There are debates as to how "Chalcedonian" Barth's Christology is. See Bruce McCormack, "Karl Barth's Historicized Christology," in Bruce McCormack, ed., *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). Also see Paul Nimmo, "Karl Barth and the *concursum Dei*: A Chalcedonianism Too Far?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007). Nimmo, without substantially discrediting Hunsinger's interpretation, helpfully cautions on historical, material, and methodological grounds that the term "Chalcedonian" as a description of Barth's theology should not be used without discretion.

Trinitarian acts *ad intra*, and God-*pro-nobis*, the God who elects humankind in Christ, is the very same God who loves in perfect freedom.

Since Barth's treatment of God's love and freedom is important for understanding his basically infralapsarian formulation of God's Being in the act of predestination, I will offer a discussion thereof before proceeding to an exposition of Barth's doctrine of election itself.

God's Love: Freedom or Caprice?

The theme of God's love and freedom is found at the very beginning of *CD II/2*, §32. On one hand, God is love: love is intrinsic to God's very Being, or, better put, God's Being is always in the act of love—we know this from the love of God in Christ. On the other hand, God is free, and God loves in complete freedom—we know this from the divine sovereignty that Christ manifests even in his death. The question, then, is this: How are we to think after (*nach-denken*) the fact that love is intrinsic to God's Being while God's love is completely free?

First, apophatically speaking, Barth's notion of divine freedom is that of aseity and unconditionedness. Timothy Bradshaw explains: "The free God is self-grounded and unconstrained God. This means that God is free in that he is unconditioned, which can be seen as a freedom defined by absence of another conditioning factor..."³ In describing God's love as free in this sense, Barth's implicit presupposition is Trinitarian: God's Being is eternally in the act of the loving fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, love is an act towards an object. If God subsisted in one hypostasis, then to say that God's Being is eternally in the act of love would imply that there is an object of divine love that is not God. This would mean that the predication "God is love" can be true only

³ Timothy Bradshaw, "Karl Barth on the Trinity: A Family Resemblance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 146.

insofar as this object of divine love exists, be it creation, humankind, the world, a second god, or what not: in other words, God would be love not in and of Godself, but only in relation to the object that is not God. If that were so—if God subsisted in only one hypostasis—the aseity of God cannot be maintained.

For Barth, the freedom of God’s love first means the aseity and utter independence of the God whose Being is love: God is love regardless of whether the object of divine love exists or not. To think after the truth of the freedom of God’s love, then, is to think after the truth of the Triune God: God is love in and of Godself as God’s Being is eternally in the act of loving communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, while Barth affirms “positively” that “in the free decision of His love, God is God in the very fact and in such a way, that He does stand in this relation, in a definite relationship with the other [viz., the object of divine love that is not God],” Barth sets forth the axiomatic predication: “God is love. But He is also perfect freedom. Even if there were no such relationship [between God and the other], *even if there were no other outside of Him, He would still be love.*”⁴

In other words, for Barth, God’s freedom first entails God’s aseity and thus utter independence. As Bradshaw puts it, “Barth rejects definitely any suggestion that the world is ‘needed in order that there should be otherness for Him’ [CD II/1, 137]. Rather: ‘Before all worlds, in His Son, He has otherness in Himself from eternity to eternity [Ibid.]. The inner being or history of God is utter freedom complemented, in supreme harmony, by the ‘foil’ of the Son’s otherness.’”⁵ This is the first sense in which Barth describes God’s love as free.⁶

⁴ KD II/2, 4; ET 6. Emphasis mine.

⁵ Bradshaw, “Barth on Trinity,” 148.

⁶ On this point I do not entirely agree with Paul Jones, who argues that this understanding of the self-sufficiency of the immanent Trinity applies only to CD I, but in CD II “a clean distinction between God’s immanent existence qua Son and God’s economic activity qua Son no longer holds.” See Paul Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London: Continuum, 2008), 64f.

Second, God's love is free in the sense that God's act of entering into loving covenant with the creature is completely sovereign. This is understood in two ways: first, God's freedom is not even constrained by aseity and independence, but God is free to bind Godself to covenant with the creature; second, even in this covenant, God remains utterly free. Bradshaw explains:

...Barth's view is that God's freedom is not conditioned even by this freedom from any constraining or correlating factor... Divine free transcendence is not only sheer unconditionedness..., 'but furthermore and supremely in the fact that without sacrificing His distinction and freedom, but in the exercise of them, He enters into and faithfully maintains communion with this reality other than Himself' [CD II/1, 103]. God's love, his overflowing generosity, and God's freedom, a freedom which transcends simply freedom from being conditioned, are the two main *foci* in Barth's vision of God.⁷

Thus Barth:

To be truly Christian, the doctrine of God must... [make] the Subject known as One which in virtue of its innermost being, willing and nature does not stand outside all relationships, but stands in a definite relationship *ad extra* to another. It is not as though the object of this relationship... constitutes a part of the reality of God outside of God... It is not as though God is forced into this relationship... It is not as though He is in any way constrained or compelled by this other.⁸

This passage shows that for Barth, God's election to enter into loving covenant with humankind in Christ is not an absolutely necessary act (even though it is of a hypothetical necessity contingent upon God's free decision) on God's part, nor does Barth think of God's act of election-incarnation as constituting the basis God's Being *ad intra* in such a way that the *Logos asarkos* is *simpliciter* identical to the *Logos incarnandus*. Rather, God's covenantal love perfectly corresponds to the intra-Trinitarian love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and this love draws the creature into union with God in Christ. As Bradshaw puts it, "God the Trinity not only corresponds with himself *ad extra* in the event of revelation and the knowledge of God, but also establishes man in participation

⁷ Bradshaw, "Barth on Trinity," 146.

⁸ *KD* II/2, 4; ET 5f.

with God thereby. For Barth the divine reality and self-knowledge exist as the primary entity and, by virtue of their movement into the creaturely sphere, the covenant union of God with man occurs.”⁹

For Barth, God’s entry into covenant union with the creature is irrevocable and determinative of God’s Being *pro nobis*:

Jesus Christ is the decision of God in favour of this attitude or relation. He is Himself the relation. It is a relation *ad extra*, undoubtedly; for both the man and the people represented in Him are creatures and not God. But it is a relation which is irrevocable, so that once God has willed to enter into it, and has in fact entered into it, He could not be God without it. It is a relation in which God is self-determined, so that the determination belongs no less to Him than all that He is in and for Himself.¹⁰

George Hunsinger explains that Barth draws a distinction between the *constitution* of God’s Being and God’s *self-determination*: God’s eternal Trinitarian acts *ad intra* constitute God’s Triune Being, while divine *self-determination* is an act of God’s will that presupposes God’s Being.¹¹ God eternally determines to be *pro nobis* in Christ, and this eternal decision “presupposes the creation and fall of the world” (this is the infralapsarian thesis!): it is a completely free act on God’s part, though it corresponds perfectly to God’s Being.¹² For Barth, the act of God’s will does not ontologically precede or supersede God’s Being, but the two are equally basic and imply each other: God is Being-in-act.

In a word, divine self-determination presupposes God’s Triune Being-in-act. Therefore, when Barth states in the block quote above that God “could not be God without” the covenant relationship, he means that God could not choose to contradict or revoke what God has elected: one of Barth’s concerns in *CD II/2* is to avoid portraying

⁹ Timothy Bradshaw, *Trinity and Ontology: A Comparative Study of the Theologies of Karl Barth and Wolhart Pannenberg* (PhD Dissertation, University of Nottingham, 1984), 9.

¹⁰ *KD II/2*, 6; ET 7.

¹¹ George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” in *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 181.

¹² *Ibid.*, 193.

divine predestination as the “caprice of a tyrant.”¹³

In a consistent effort to maintain both the constancy and freedom of God’s love, Barth writes:

The fact that God makes this movement, the institution of the covenant, the primal decision ‘in Jesus Christ,’ which is the basis and goal of all His works—that is grace. Speaking generally, it is the demonstration, the overflowing of *the love which is the being of God*, that He who is *entirely self-sufficient*, who even *within Himself cannot know isolation*, *willed* even in all His divine glory to share His life with another, and to have that other as the witness of His glory.¹⁴

In this passage, when Barth comments that God “within Himself cannot know isolation,” he is implying that God is eternally and immutably Triune. God is love in and of Godself: God’s love is free in the sense of the utter aseity of the God whose Being is the intra-Trinitarian act of love—“the love which is the being of God.” Meanwhile, God “willed... to share His life with another”: it was God’s free decision to enter into loving covenant with humankind.

God’s act of entering into this loving relationship with humankind in Christ is completely free on God’s part. Yet, God’s will corresponds perfectly to God’s Being, which is “entirely self-sufficient” just as it is in the intra-Trinitarian act of love. Precisely because election corresponds perfectly to God’s Being-in-act *ad intra*, it is a decision that God does not revoke. For this reason, God “cannot be God without” the loving relationship into which God has decided to enter.¹⁵

Paul Nimmo offers an incisive exposition of these relations of correspondences and distinctions between God’s love *ad intra* and the covenantal relationship that God has

¹³ *KD* II/2, 45; ET 43. Kevin Hector rightly recognises God’s act of election as “volitionally necessary.” However, in defending McCormack’s take on election and Trinity in Barth, Hector wrongly takes Barth’s epistemological refusal to regress to a *Logos asarkos* logically prior to election to be an ontological denial of the logical priority of divine triunity. I will address this debate in Chapter 9. See Hector, “Immutability, Necessity and Trinity: Towards a Resolution of the Trinity and Election Controversy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (2012): 71ff.

¹⁴ *KD* II/2, 9; ET 10. Emphases mine.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5; ET 7.

elected in Christ:

For Barth, the covenant relationship effected and revealed in Jesus Christ repeats for God ‘*ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence’ [CD III/2, 220]. This means that the relationship between God and the true human revealed in Jesus Christ is analogous to the prior intra-Trinitarian relationship of God the Father to God the Son. These two relationships are analogous not in terms of any correspondence of similarity of being, an *analogia entis*, but in terms of what Barth calls ‘an *analogia relationis*’ [Ibid.]. Jüngel asserts that this *analogia relationis* is ‘a correspondence of relationships which are constituted by... the “Yes” of the free love of God, which the Trinitarian God speaks to Godself and which God then also speaks to God’s creature, thereby creating its correspondence.’¹⁶

This understanding of the *analogia relationis* implies that the Triune God freely elected to enter into loving covenant with humankind, and it is by this free decision that God “could not be God without” the covenant, for God’s freedom is not the caprice of a tyrant, but the “overflowing” of the constancy of the unchanging “love which is the being of God” (see preceding quotes).

Although Barth’s lapsarian position is not explicit in his discussion of God’s love-in-freedom, we shall see later that his concern to avoid rendering double predestination the caprice of a tyrant goes hand in hand with what I shall show to be his basically infralapsarian “purification” of the classical Reformed doctrine of election.

Christ as Election

The foregoing discussions have focused on CD §32, which addresses prolegomenal issues concerning the doctrine of election. In §33, Barth sets forth the heart of the doctrine, and this paragraph is titled “The Election of Jesus Christ.” §33 comprises two sections: “1. Jesus Christ, Electing and Elected,” and “2., The Eternal Will of God in the Election of Jesus Christ.”

Barth’s central thesis in §33, just as in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, is that election is *in*

¹⁶ Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 89. See Eberhard Jüngel, *Barth-Studien* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1982), 221f.

Christ. As mentioned earlier, in *CD II/2* Barth consistently stresses that humans can know no other God than the God who has entered into loving covenant with humankind. Concretely speaking, Christ *is* this covenant. Otto Weber calls this the “ground-laying thesis” of Barth’s doctrine of election, of which Weber offers the following summary: “When we talk about God’s election, we are not talking about some dark secret beside, behind or above the revealed God, but rather we gaze exclusively ‘upon the name Jesus Christ and the existence and history [*Geschichte*] of the people actualised [*verwirklichte*] in Him, whereof the beginning and end are determined in the mystery of His name.”¹⁷ Methodologically, this implies that Barth’s theology is entirely anti-metaphysical and Christocentric: “we do not talk about an abstract God, but about God in Christ.”¹⁸

Insisting that predestination must be understood Christologically, Barth identifies Christ as “Electing and Elected” just as he is very God and very human.¹⁹ At the beginning of §33 Barth expounds on this notion: “Between God and man there stands the person of Jesus Christ, Himself God and Himself man, and so mediating between the two.”²⁰ Yet, before explaining that Christ is at once “Electing” and “Elected,” Barth first identifies Christ as election—God’s absolute decree:

He [Christ] is the decree of God behind and above which there can be no earlier or higher decree and beside which there can be no other, since all others serve only the fulfilment of this decree... He is the election of God before which and without which and beside which God cannot make any other choices. Before Him and without Him and beside Him God does not, then, elect or will anything.²¹

This brings us back to Barth’s notion of the freedom of God’s love. As noted earlier, God’s free decision to enter into loving covenant with humankind in Christ is not the “caprice of a tyrant.” Rather, it is an immutable decree that binds God to the covenant in

¹⁷ Otto Weber, *Karl Barths Kirchliche Dogmatik: Ein einführender Bericht* (Düsseldorf: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), 69. Translation mine.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70. Translation mine.

¹⁹ *KD II/2*, §33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 101; ET 94.

²¹ *Ibid.*

such a way that “once God has willed to enter into [covenant relationship with humankind], and has in fact entered into it, He could not be God without it.” Now Barth is restating the same thesis in more concretely Christological terms: Christ is God’s absolute decree “before which and without which and beside which God cannot make any other choices.” In other words, once God decided to and has indeed become incarnate, it is impossible that God ceases to be *ensarkos*, for God does not revoke God’s decision: drawing upon Chalcedon, Barth insists, as he always has since *GD*, that Christ’s deity and humanity are united inseparably.

Barth’s innovative reappropriation of Chalcedon in identifying Christ as God’s immutable decree is a manoeuvre to engage with the notion of *decretum absolutum* in Reformed orthodoxy. Recall that in Reformed orthodoxy, the *decretum absolutum Dei*—absolute decree of God—is an immutable decision whereby God inflexibly divides humankind into two masses for election and reprobation from all eternity. Barth agrees with Reformed orthodoxy that God’s decree of election is immutable once it has been issued. However, he insists that election must not be understood abstractly apart from Christ. Rather, election is immutable because Christ *is* God’s very decree of election.

Furthermore, when Barth states that “Jesus Christ is Himself the divine election of grace,” he means to say that God’s works *ad extra* in the person of Christ correspond perfectly to God’s inward Being: “He, Jesus Christ, is the free grace of God, provided that this not only remains identical with the inward and eternal Being of God, but is active in the ways and works *ad extra* of God.”²²

Here Barth clearly affirms that in operating *ad extra* Christ remains identical with the eternal God-in-Godself, positing God’s immanent existence *qua* Son, “the inward and eternal Being of God.” In becoming human, Christ does not cease to be God—for Barth

²² *KD* II/2, 102. “Er, Jesus Christus, ist die freie Gnade Gottes, sofern diese nicht nur mit Gottes innerem, ewigem Wesen identisch bleibt, sondern in Gottes Wegen und Werken nach außen kräftig ist.” Translation mine. Original translation is on ET 95.

this is the central meaning of the statement that “Jesus Christ is Himself the divine election of grace.” In other words, election is God’s Being-in-act.

Christ as Electing God and Elected Human

Having thus expounded upon the meaning of the statement that Christ *ensarkos* is God’s decree of election, Barth proceeds to identify Christ as electing God and elected human. As God’s Son, Christ is the electing God; as Son of Man, Christ is the elected human in whom all humankind is elected. Here Barth has in mind an ontological notion of the participation of all humankind in Christ, which we shall discuss in more detail anon.

Note again that in speaking of Christ as “Electing and Elected,” a basically Chalcedonian view of Christ’s deity and humanity undergirds Barth’s doctrine of election: “The name of Jesus Christ has within itself the double reference: the One called by this name is both *very God and very man*. Thus the simplest form of the dogma may be divided at once into the two assertions that Jesus Christ is the electing God, and that He is also elected man.”²³

This basically Chalcedonian rendition of the doctrine of election entails an *abiding distinction* between Christ’s two natures and thus the subject and object of election in the person of Christ. Thus Barth comments that Christ constitutes “God’s dealings with the reality which is *distinct* from Himself.”²⁴

Barth is very careful to state that “as the Son of the Father He has no need of any special election.”²⁵ Here, again, we see that Barth posits the immanent Trinity and the Son *asarkos* as a logical presupposition of (i.e., logically preceding) election and incarnation: the pre-incarnate Son in Godself has no need of any special election, and the election of the Son presupposes the *assumptio* of human agency.

²³ Ibid., 110; ET 103. Emphasis mine.

²⁴ Ibid., 109; ET 102. Emphasis mine.

²⁵ Ibid., 110; ET 103. Emphases mine.

Now, since Christ's deity and humanity are inseparably united in one person—that of the Son—and not two or more persons, there is a communication of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) between Christ's deity and humanity such that whatever may be said about the one can also be said about the other. It is in this derivative sense that the Son is elected by the Father in eternity. Barth states: "Because as the Son of the Father He has no need of any election, we must add at once that He is the Son of God elected *in His oneness with man*."²⁶

Note here that Barth's understanding of the election of Christ already intimates an infralapsarian understanding of the logical relations between election and creation, even though the fall is not yet mentioned: if election presupposes Christ's union with the creature, then, as Hunsinger puts it, "[election] presupposes the creation... of the world"—recall that this is the infralapsarian view against the supralapsarian understanding that election does *not* presuppose God's decree of creation.²⁷

These logical relations between the Trinity, election, and the incarnation bring us back to the theme of God's freedom in the act of election: the eternal election of the Son, unlike God's inner-Trinitarian act of the eternal generation of the Son, is God's decision that God could have chosen otherwise, though once God has made this decision, "God could not be God" without it. In other words, for Barth, God's freedom in election is implicit in the abiding distinction between God and the reality that is not God: "It is as God's election that we must understand the Word and decree and beginning of God over against the reality which is *distinct* from Himself. When we say this, we say that in His decision all God's doings [*Tun*], both 'inward' and 'outward,' rest upon His freedom."²⁸

As a note of explanation, in the earlier volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, including II/2, Barth distinguishes between God's work (*Werk*), doing (*Tun*), and act (*Tat*). When

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity," 193.

²⁸ *KD* II/2, 107; ET 99 (revised).

Barth uses the words *Werk* or *Tun*, he never refers to God's Trinitarian *opera ad intra*, to which he usually designates the word *Tat*. *Werk* usually refers to God's dealings with the actually existent reality that is not God, such as the works of creation and reconciliation, but excludes the eternal act of election. By contrast, the word *Tat* can refer to the inner-Trinitarian acts of God, the eternal act of election, or the historical acts of reconciliation, and it is with this word that Barth speaks of God's Being-in-act (*Sein in der Tat*). The word *Tun* is often used synonymously with *Tat*, but does not cover the Trinitarian *opera ad intra*, so Barth does not use this word in association with God's Being. Therefore, in the quote above, by "God's doings, both 'inward' and 'outward,'" Barth is referring to the eternal actuality of election and the historical actuality of God's works of reconciliation. He is saying that God's eternal election, just as God's works of reconciliation in the here-and-now, rests completely upon God's free decision, since God's dealings with the reality that is distinct from God are always free on God's part.

Meanwhile, though there is an abiding distinction between God's eternal act of election and the historical actuality of God's works of reconciliation, Barth also stresses the perfect correspondence between them:

For these are two separate things: the Son of God in His oneness with the Son of Man, as foreordained from all eternity; and the universe which was created, and universal history which was *willed for the sake of this oneness*, in their communion with God, as foreordained from all eternity.... On the one hand, there is God's eternal election of grace, and, on the other, God's creation, reconciliation and redemption *grounded in* that election and ordained *with reference to it*.²⁹

Note that Barth says here that the historical actuality of God's works are *grounded in* God's eternal election: the actuality of God's dealings with the historical reality that is distinct from God was "willed for the sake of this oneness," that is, for the sake of the incarnation and thereby the communion of all creatures with God. For this reason, Christ's

²⁹ Ibid., 111; ET 104.

being elected as a creature corresponds perfectly to his divine act of election: “Even the fact that He is elected corresponds as closely as possible to His own electing.”³⁰ This is because from all eternity God willed “the closest possible union” with God’s covenant-partner.³¹ It is in the hypostatic union of the Electing and the Elected that “the inner glory of God overflows.”³²

Infralapsarian Aufhebung: God’s Non-Capricious No

Yet, why was the hypostatic union in the divine act of election necessary for the sake of the communion between God and creatures? The reason is that for Barth, the divide between God and creation is not merely ontological. The election of Christ is to overcome the gulf of sin and death that separates the world from God, which Barth describes as follows: “Face to face with temptation [man] cannot maintain the goodness of his creation in the divine image and foreordination to the divine likeness... Exposed to the power of the divine negation, he is guilty of death.”³³

Therefore, Barth, in line with the basically infralapsarian (i.e., the object of election is fallen humanity; election presupposes the fall) position he already developed in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, maintains in *CD II/2* that election-in-Christ includes within itself reprobation and judgment:

“The Word became flesh” (Jn. 1⁴). This formulation of the message of Christmas already includes within itself the message of Good Friday. For “all flesh is as grass.” The election of the man Jesus means, then, that a wrath is kindled, a sentence pronounced and finally executed, a rejection actualized... From all eternity judgment has been foreseen—even in the overflowing of God’s inner glory...³⁴

As we saw in Chapter 5, in *CD I/2* Barth already stated that Christ took on a “flesh of

³⁰ Ibid., 112; ET 105.

³¹ Ibid., 130; ET 121.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 131; ET 122f.

³⁴ Ibid., 131; ET 122.

sin.”³⁵ The “sanctification,” “obedience” and “sinlessness” of Jesus is such that “he has judged sin in the flesh, whereby he set the Reconciliation in order, that is, whereby he, *in the place* of a sinner, was struck down under divine judgment and alone implored the grace of God.”³⁶

In *CD II/2*, Barth retains this infralapsarian-Christological understanding of the incarnation (i.e., the view that incarnation presupposes the fall) and applies it to the doctrine of election, stating that “the rejection which all men incurred, the wrath of God under which all men lie, the death which all men must die, God in His love for men transfers from all eternity to Him in whom He loves and elects them, and whom He elects as their head and in their place.”³⁷ Barth then maintains that Christ became a sinner as humanity’s sin—which is not Christ’s own—is transferred to him from all eternity, and Christ alone suffered divine judgment in the place of all humankind, thus there is “other than Him no reprobate.”³⁸

It should be stressed, however, that this statement needs qualification. In one sense, Christ is the only reprobate; in another sense, all humans are reprobated in and with Christ: since all humans participate in Christ from all eternity, the reprobation that Christ alone suffered also applies to all humankind that is in him. Moreover, strictly speaking not the Son of God but the human Jesus is the reprobate, and he who is sinless is reprobated for the sin of all others.

Note here that it is “from all eternity” that “the elected man Jesus was foreordained to suffer and to die.”³⁹ Now, as we saw in Chapter 6, in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* Barth had developed a basically infralapsarian understanding of election as the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of reprobation: reprobation is God’s act of negating humanity’s sin that negates God, and

³⁵ Ibid., 171; ET 155.

³⁶ Ibid., 172; ET 157. Translation mine.

³⁷ *KD II/2*, 132; ET 123.

³⁸ Ibid., 389; ET 353 (revised).

³⁹ Ibid., 131; ET 122.

this negation of negation is sublated in election. On this view, double predestination presupposes sin.

Barth retains the same understanding in *CD* II/2, in which reprobation is described as God's defeat of humanity's sin that negates God and God's grace. Since Christ was reprobated from eternity in order to be elected from and to all eternity, in *CD* III/2 Barth would describe sin as having been defeated "*a priori*" ("*zum Vornherein*"). Sin is thus an "ontological impossibility": when humans choose to sin, they are choosing that which they cannot choose.⁴⁰

Although Barth does not develop this language of impossibility, which he draws from his own *Romans* II, until *CD* III (see Chapter 8), the idea is already implicit in *CD* II/2 or even *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, where he speaks of sin as having been eternally rejected in Christ. This does not mean that humans cannot or do not sin. What Barth means is that sin is an absurd and unexplainable reality, or, better put, an ontological non-reality that is nevertheless existentially real. As we shall see in the next chapter, sin, which is a form of "nothingness" (*das Nichtige*), exists only by God's non-willing—recall that in his mature doctrine of election Barth is emphatic that God's will never contradicts God's Being, as God's freedom in election is not caprice.

Once again, when the "ontological impossibility" of sin is understood in light of election as *Aufhebung* of God's No against sin, the teleological nature of Barth's rendition of double predestination becomes apparent. While Barth would agree with Reformed orthodoxy that double predestination is God's immutable decree, he would insist against Reformed orthodoxy that Christ is this very decree, and in Christ we see a definite teleological movement from reprobation to election. For Barth, double predestination is not a balanced equilibrium—it is not the kind of *decretum absolutum* of which Reformed

⁴⁰ *KD* III/2, 174; ET 146. ET renders "from the very first."

orthodoxy speaks. Rather, the purpose of reprobation is election. Daniel Migliore's words succinctly describe the understanding of double predestination as a process of *Aufhebung*: "the grace of God includes judgment, and the judgment of God serves the purpose of grace."⁴¹

Precisely because in *CD II/2* Barth insists on understanding election as divine *Aufhebung* of reprobation, he would emphasise, as he already did in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (see Chapter 6), that there is no election without reprobation. That is, for Barth, predestination has to be *double* predestination. What is decisive, however, is not reprobation but election, since election is the purpose of reprobation. As Hunsinger puts it, "although God's grace never occurs without judgment, nor God's judgment without grace, *in Jesus Christ* it is always God's grace, Barth believes, that is decisive."⁴²

The preposition "in" is key to understanding this sentence. For Barth, to be *in Christ* "does not simply mean *with* Him... Nor does it only mean *through* Him."⁴³ Humans are elected *with* and *through* Christ on the basis of their being *in Christ*, that is, their objective participation in Christ from all eternity. This *participatio* is an ontological union with Christ's human nature, and through this union, all humans participate also in the Being of God, since Christ is very electing God as he is very elected human.

Moreover, recall Barth's "actualism": God is Being-in-act. Therefore, *participatio Christi* also implies participation in God's act of election, that is, in God's eternal covenantal decision *pro nobis* in Christ. Therefore Barth states that to be *in Christ* "means in His person, in His will, in His own divine choice, in the basic decision of God which He fulfils over against every man."⁴⁴ Note here that for Barth, participation in Christ means participating in the very "basic decision of God."

⁴¹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 187. This quote is not a commentary on Barth's theology, but it serves well as a summary of Barth's position.

⁴² George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 142.

⁴³ *KD II/2*, 125; ET 117.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Now, since this “basic decision of God” is a twofold will constituting an *Aufhebung* that moves from reprobation to election, the participation of all humans in Christ means that the sin and evil that assail them are “sublated [*aufgehoben*] in the positive will” of God, so that they are all elected in Christ.⁴⁵ Thus understood, the communion between God and humankind is not only the purpose of election as *Aufhebung* of the divine No, which we already saw earlier, but also it serves as the basis whereupon God executes, as it were, the act of election.

Election is God’s free and gracious Yes to all humankind. Yet, just as Barth had stated in *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, God’s Yes—because it is *Aufhebung*—presupposes God’s No. By describing double predestination as a process of *Aufhebung*, Barth wants to emphasise that God’s No is not the caprice of a tyrant, but rather a rejection that corresponds to God’s unchanging love overflowing from God’s immutable Being-in-act for the fallen covenant-partner in Christ. It is with this basically infralapsarian understanding of election-in-Christ that Barth renders reprobation a non-capricious No of God.

“Purified ‘Infralapsarianism’”

As we saw in Chapter 2, in a lengthy excursus in *CD II/2*, §33, Barth calls his doctrine of election a “purified Supralapsarianism.”⁴⁶ Having seen some key features of Barth’s formulation of the doctrine in *CD II/2*, we are now ready to consider (1) what the adjectival participle “purified” means and how this is important for understanding Barth, and (2) why the doctrine should be called “purified infralapsarianism” rather than “supralapsarianism.”

It might be helpful to briefly revisit the definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 189; ET 175 (revised).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 153; ET 140.

before proceeding. According to infralapsarianism, the object of double predestination is fallen humanity (*homo lapsus*). Note that *homo lapsus* is God's eternal conception of humanity guilty of sin, but not actually created and fallen human beings. On the infralapsarian view, then, double predestination presupposes God's eternal decision—but not the historical event—of effectually permitting the fall.

By contrast, supralapsarianism is the position that in God's eternal plan, the object of double predestination is God's conception of human individuals as unfallen (*homo labilis* or *homo nondum lapsus*). For supralapsarians, double predestination does not presuppose the fallenness of the object of predestination. On the contrary, the divine decree to permit humanity's fall presupposes double predestination.

Now, before proceeding to identify Barth as basically infralapsarian, it is necessary to clarify some crucial points upon which he differs from traditional supra- and infralapsarians, and how he “purifies” the classical Reformed doctrine of predestination from certain presuppositions that he considers dangerous.

In the Lapsarian excursus in §33, Barth claims that his “purification” is of the supralapsarian doctrine, which he considers, unlike infralapsarianism, worthy of salvage.⁴⁷ However, as I showed in Chapter 2, Barth wrongly defines the infralapsarian term “*homo lapsus*” as humans actually created and fallen in history, while his definition of supralapsarianism in fact applies to Reformed orthodoxy in general. Therefore, when Barth claims that he is “purifying” the supralapsarian doctrine from its “dangerous” presuppositions, he is actually engaging with Reformed orthodoxy in general, supra- and infralapsarianism alike. In what follows, then, I shall speak of Barth's “purification” of the theological starting points of Reformed orthodoxy, rather than of supralapsarianism alone.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 155; ET 143.

Barth outlines four common presuppositions of supra- and infralapsarianism that he finds fatal in Reformed-orthodox formulations of the doctrine of predestination. First, according to Barth, in Reformed orthodoxy “the *obiectum praedestinationis* is the individual abstractly understood”: if this so, says Barth, “then it is most dangerous to seek God’s primal and basic purpose in election and reprobation.”⁴⁸ The keyword here is “abstractly”: for Barth, to be “abstractly understood” is to be considered detachedly from Jesus Christ. Regardless of whether Barth is entirely accurate in his understanding and criticism of Reformed orthodoxy, his main intention is to revise the Reformed doctrine in strictly Christological terms.

The second “common presupposition” in Reformed orthodoxy that Barth names is that “predestination consists in the eternal setting up of that fixed system which governs all temporal reality”; the third is that “within that system election and reprobation are evenly balanced.”⁴⁹ Barth criticises these presuppositions: “it is most dangerous so unconditionally to carry through the thought of the divine sovereignty that the fall and evil are understood as means foreseen and foreordained by God to the attainment of the finally good purpose which He has willed.”⁵⁰ Barth’s concern is that on his understanding, Reformed orthodoxy does not sufficiently describe reprobation, the fall, and evil in terms of God’s absolute non-willing, as something absolutely alien to God’s will and Being. In this way, Barth thinks that Reformed orthodoxy, especially supralapsarianism, is prone to render God the author of evil (I will leave it to the reader to decide to agree or disagree with Barth’s criticism).

Finally, according to Barth, the Reformed-orthodox understanding of the *decretum absolutum* “is the last possible word concerning the basis of divine predestination.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid., 153; ET 140.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Barth's critique of this presupposition is that "it is most dangerous to think of God as the One who sees and plans and achieves His own glory in the foreordaining of a certain number of individuals irresistibly to heaven and of a certain number of individuals no less irresistibly to hell."⁵² Additionally, "it is most dangerous to believe that for this purpose God created the world, and permitted and to that extent willed the existence of sin and then the devil, and then of course, in line as it were with these prior acts, accomplish the work of redemption."⁵³ Even more:

it is most dangerous to believe that, in virtue of His over-all determination, this redemptive work must itself mean both calling and also hardening, that it must be a means of election and also a means of rejection—and both with that unshakeable fixity, both in that indestructible equilibrium, both as the fulfilment of that secret good-pleasure of God which is wholly anonymous and completely close in upon itself.⁵⁴

In a word, Barth's main criticism of Reformed-orthodox formulations of the doctrine of election is that in positing a *decretum absolutum Dei*, along with the decree of the fall, above, behind, and thus detachedly from the God self-revealed in Christ as Being-in-act, they inevitably render God's eternal will arbitrarily capricious and rigidly tyrannical. That is, Barth thinks that Reformed orthodoxy fails to understand predestination Christologically, thus detaching God's act of predestination from the constancy of God's love-in-freedom. Regardless of how accurate Barth is in his evaluation of Reformed orthodoxy, his intention in "purifying" classical Reformed lapsarianism is, as stated early on in *CD II/2*, to avoid making double predestination the "caprice of a tyrant."⁵⁵

Barth's solution is that instead of considering election and its object "*in abstracto*" as he thinks Reformed orthodoxy does, he insists on treating them "*in concreto*," which for

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 45; ET 43.

him means *in Christo*.⁵⁶

Barth agrees with Reformed orthodoxy that Scripture indeed teaches both election and reprobation. Yet, for him, the elect and the reprobate are not to be considered as two classes of individuals. Rather, all are reprobated in and with Christ so that all may be elected in and with him. Thus Barth: “[the elect man] should testify to His Yes and to what He wills, and he should also testify to His No and to what He does not will.”⁵⁷

What God does not will is humankind’s fall into sin: “It is not God’s will that elected man should fall into sin. But it is His will that sin, that which God does not will, should be repudiated and rejected and excluded by him.”⁵⁸ As we shall see in more detail in Chapter 8, for Barth, sin as that which God does not will exists only upon the basis of God’s absolute non-willing and reprobation. Yet, in order for the elected human to actually manifest God’s Yes as sublation (*Aufhebung*) of God’s No to the sin that negates God, the elected human herself must also “repudiate what He repudiates.”⁵⁹ Paradoxically, then, sin became absurdly actual, but has no part whatsoever in God’s will, in order that it be actually repudiated by God’s covenant-partner.

In this actualistic scheme with which Barth counters what he thinks to be Reformed orthodoxy’s description of predestination as rigid (in the sense that it is not understood as the activity of God’s Being) and capricious (in the sense that it is described detachedly from the constancy of God’s Being-in-act), he is basically infralapsarian, since he identifies the “elected man” as “sinful man”: “God does not will and affirm evil and the fall and an act of sin on the part of this man, but for the sake of the fullness of His glory, for the sake of the completeness of His covenant with man, for the sake of the perfection of His love, He wills and affirms this man as sinful man..., as the one foreordained to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 153; ET 140.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 153; ET 141.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

utter the same No and thus to corroborate the divine Yes.”⁶⁰

Note again the actualistic nuance of this basically infralapsarian scheme. We have already talked about Barth’s notion of God’s Being-in-act in his discussion of God’s love-in-freedom: God’s works in history perfectly correspond to God’s eternal Being-in-act. Because of this principle of correspondence, humankind’s fall into sin could not possibly be an act or work of God, otherwise there would have corresponded to the absurd element of sin a dark, capricious secret in God’s Being. If the history of humankind is to correspond to the history of the electing God’s free love in Christ, the creaturely covenant-partner must utter the same non-capricious No to sin and “thus to corroborate the divine yes” in history.

In the case of the elected human, then, “the defeat of this evil power cannot be so self-evident as it was in God’s case. In his [the elected human’s] case it must take on the character of an *event*. It must become the content of a history: the history of an obstacle and its removing; the history of a death and a resurrection; the history of a judgment and a pardon; the history of a defeat and a victory.”⁶¹ This is not the case for God—“in God Himself there is a simple and immediate victory of light over darkness.”⁶² In the “creaturely sphere,” however, God’s eternal act of double predestination “must take on historical form, thus becoming an event in time.”⁶³

By God’s act of election, then, God “wills the confrontation of man by the power of evil.”⁶⁴ That is, in the language of Reformed-orthodoxy, God wills *obiectum praedestinationis* as *homo lapsus*. God “does so in order that man should proclaim His glory as the one who is freed by Him from the dominion of sin, the one who is saved by Him from death the consequence of sin, the one for whom He Himself must and will and

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

does act as Pledge and Substitute if he is really to take this path.”⁶⁵

In a word, “God wills *homo labilis* [sic.: Barth’s misnomer actually refers to *homo lapsus*], not in order that he may fall, but in order that *when he has fallen* he may testify to the fullness of God’s glory.”⁶⁶ The following summarises what Barth calls “purified supralapsarianism,” which, as I have argued, should actually read “purified infralapsarianism”:

The existence of this man, the predestined bearer and representative of the divine Yes and the divine No, foreordained to victory over sin and death but also to the bearing of the divine penalty, is the divine promise, the divine Word, in which the God who elects from all eternity confronts all humanity and each individual, in which His electing will encounters us and through which He Himself has dealings with us.⁶⁷

“Such, then,” says Barth, “is the supralapsarian theory”—which is in fact basically infralapsarian—“as detached and purified from the doubtful presuppositions of the older theology.”⁶⁸ In this “purified ‘infralapsarianism’” (as I suggest it be called) Barth intends to “remove completely... the thought of the foreordination of a rigid and balanced system of election and reprobation. Above all, we [have expunged] completely the idolatrous concept of a *decretum absolutum*.”⁶⁹ In place of these Reformed-orthodox presuppositions, Barth introduces “the knowledge of the elect man Jesus Christ as the true object of the divine predestination,” thus developing infralapsarianism “in a Christological direction.”⁷⁰

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have seen how Barth “purifies” his Christological doctrine of election from Reformed-orthodox assumptions regarding the *decretum absolutum*, and

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 153; ET 141f.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 154; ET 142.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.; ET 143.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

how this doctrine is basically infralapsarian in terms of both Christology and predestination: Barth sees the incarnation as presupposing the fall, and the object of election as sinful human. Part and parcel of this “purified infralapsarianism,” as I suggest it be so-called, is Barth’s actualism—the notion of God’s Being-in-act.

While the actualistic “purified infralapsarianism” in *CD II/2* already addresses the correspondence between God’s eternal act and the history of God’s covenant-partner in Christ, Barth has not yet developed a strong notion of the history (*Geschichte*) of God’s Being-in-act by Christ’s assumption of human history. In the next two chapters, we will see how Barth applies his actualistic “purified infralapsarianism” to his discussion of sin, evil, and death as “nothingness” in *CD III/3*, and how he in turn develops his “purified infralapsarianism” in a highly historical and actualised direction in *CD IV/1* on the basis of his Christological understanding of sin as nothingness.

Part III

Chapter 8

CD III/3, §50 (1950): “Impossible Possibility” Again—Barth’s Basically

Infralapsarian Defiance of the Theodicy Problem

This chapter focuses on *CD III/3, §50* (‘God and nothingness’) to demonstrate how Barth develops an understanding of sin, evil, and death as “nothingness” in light of what I suggest we call his “purified infralapsarianism.” As I showed in Chapters 2 and 7, Barth shares with nineteenth-century Reformed dogmaticians the complaint that supra- and infralapsarianism inevitably ascribe to God a voluntaristic “good pleasure” (a term derived from Ephesians 1:9)—which Barth calls the “caprice of a tyrant” —whereby God arbitrarily decides to reprobate a fixed number of human individuals whom God does not consider guilty of sin (i.e., the supralapsarian thesis that the object of predestination is unfallen humanity), or to decree the fall of humanity (i.e., the nineteenth-century misunderstanding that infralapsarians cannot tell why God decreed humanity’s fall except to say that it is simply God’s arbitrary good pleasure).¹ While the nineteenth-century Dutch dogmatician Herman Bavinck dismisses the lapsarian inquiry as unanswerable, however, Barth believes that this shipwreck, as he sees it, is worthy of salvage, which he attempts to accomplish in the *CD §33* excursus by replacing the seventeenth-century lapsarian assumption of the *decretum absolutum* (an absolute and inflexible divine decree whereby humankind is divided into two masses for election and reprobation) with a Christological reinterpretation of double predestination. As we saw in the last two chapters, Barth’s Christological doctrine of election is such that reprobation and election are not two decrees of equal weight, but rather election is the result and purpose of

¹ *KD II/2, 45; ET 43.*

reprobation, as reprobation is God's negation of humanity's sin that negates God. In other words, for Barth, double predestination is to be understood teleologically with the Hegelian grammar of *Aufhebung* (sublation).

In *CD* §50, Barth further challenges the Reformed-orthodox lapsarian assumption that sin and evil arose out of God's permissive decree as a means to bring good out of evil. Recall from Chapter 1 that Calvin appeals to Augustine in stating that the almighty God, who had the power to prevent Adam's sin, permitted the fall in order to manifest God's glory by allowing evil and then bringing good out of evil. This Calvinist-Augustinian understanding has been restated in various forms by various Reformed-orthodox theologians through the ages, and appears in major Reformed standards such as Westminster, Heidelberg, and Dort.

From Barth's perspective, this Reformed-orthodox assumption, along with the *decretum absolutum*, inevitably posits an arbitrarily electing God (*supra*), and/or a God decreeing humanity's fall for God's sheer good pleasure (*infra*), apart from the God self-revealed in Christ. In place of these "speculative" assumptions, as he sees them, Barth insists that double predestination and the occurrence of sin and evil must be understood Christologically.

Thus in basically Chalcedonian patterns Barth identifies Christ as at once the electing God and elected human, who as elected human is shown on the cross to have vicariously taken on God's wrathful reprobation.² On this view, double predestination is not a *decretum absolutum* whereby humanity is arbitrarily divided into elect and reprobate. Rather, Christ the electing God *is* the absolute decree, the primal decision of God to become incarnate. In his decision to become human, the Son of God, who is primarily the subject of predestination, becomes the object of both election and reprobation, and there is

² I acknowledge that the description "basically Chalcedonian" needs to be used with caution. See Paul Nimmo, "Karl Barth and the *concursum Dei*—A Chalcedonianism Too Far?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007).

no reprobate other than him. This Christological formulation of predestination constitutes the core of Barth's understanding of sin, evil, and separation from God (death), which Barth designates as "nothingness."

Knowledge of Nothingness

Before inquiring into what nothingness is, Barth first asks how human knowledge of nothingness is possible. Hans Frei notes that "for [Barth]... the evil that we believe, do, and feel is unveiled to our self-apprehension not directly, but only as the refracted distortion of Jesus' free, obedient goodness in which God has overcome evil."³ This is hardly surprising, since Barth's Christological ontology developed from 1936 to 1942 dictates that no true human knowledge is possible apart from God's self-revelation in Christ. Thus Barth makes it clear at once that in order to develop any knowledge of nothingness, "we must revert to the source of all Christian knowledge, namely, to the knowledge of Jesus Christ."⁴

This "knowledge of Christ" entails an infralapsarian Christology: "We know all this [about nothingness]... from... the knowledge of Jesus Christ. For the revelation of the goodness of God's creation in its twofold form alone, the incarnation of the Word of God would obviously have been unnecessary."⁵ Barth explains:

When God Himself became a creature in Jesus Christ, He confirmed His creation in its totality... as His good creation without blemish or blame. Yet much more than this was involved... The Word became a creature which had fallen under the sway of a possessive and domineering alien... That the Word became flesh means that the Word became a... lost creature.⁶

³ Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, eds. G. Hunsinger and W. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 174.

⁴ *KD* III/3, 344; ET 302.

⁵ *Ibid.*; ET 303. Translation mine. Bromiley wrongly translates the subjunctive (*Konjunktiv* II) into the indicative, thereby misleadingly suggesting a supralapsarian Christology reminiscent of Duns Scotus: "It must be clearly grasped that the incarnation of the Word of God was obviously not necessary merely to reveal the goodness of God's creation." Original: "Allein zur Offenbarung der Gute der Schöpfung Gottes in ihrer doppelten Gestalt *wäre* die Fleischwerdung des Wortes Gottes offenbar nicht nötig *gewesen*."

⁶ *Ibid.*, 344f; ET 303f.

It should be remembered here that for Barth election and incarnation are two sides of the same coin, distinct in some ways but certainly inseparable. Thus, to say that Barth holds to an infralapsarian Christology is to say that Barth is basically infralapsarian in a predestinarian sense also: for him, both election and incarnation presuppose the fallenness of creation. Barth spells out his lapsarian position even more clearly in the following statement: “In plain and precise terms..., nothingness is the ‘reality’ *on whose account* (i.e. against which) God Himself willed to become a creature in the creaturely world, yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it.”⁷ In other words, God’s election of humanity in Christ is for the purpose of overcoming nothingness: for Barth, election and incarnation presuppose nothingness.

Further clarifying this statement, Barth proceeds immediately to speak of Christ’s victory over nothingness in the Hegelian language of *Aufhebung*, just as he did in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (see Chapter 6): “Nothingness is thus the ‘reality’ which opposes and resists God, which is itself subjected to and overcome by His opposition and resistance, and which in this twofold determination as the reality that negates and is negated by Him... Only from the standpoint of Jesus Christ, His birth, death and resurrection, do we see [nothingness] in reality and truth.”⁸

Describing Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection (which together correspond to the ‘becoming’ of God in the single act of election-incarnation in eternity) in the Hegelian grammar of *Aufhebung* shows that for Barth, the *a priori* triumph of divine grace in the act of election presupposes the negative element of nothingness (as we saw in Chapters 6-7). This will become clearer in the next section. For now, suffice it to note that in Barth’s Christological epistemology whereby he claims knowledge of nothingness, he holds to a Christological-predestinarian infralapsarianism.

⁷ Ibid., 345; ET 305. Emphases mine.

⁸ Ibid.

Barth on Nothingness: In Dialogue with Reformed Orthodoxy

According to Barth's Christological epistemology, the assumption of a *decretum absolutum* in both supra- and infralapsarianism of the seventeenth century is problematic because, as he sees it, it posits an arbitrarily electing God above and behind the God self-revealed in Christ. Furthermore, Barth takes issues with the lapsarian inquiry in Reformed orthodoxy, because it constitutes a *theodicy*: it seeks to explain the *origin* of evil by identifying the fall as a divine decree in relation to God's higher decree to bring good out of evil. Barth states the theodicy-problem as follows: "God is either good, but obviously neither divine nor omnipotent in relation to [nothingness], or He is divine and omnipotent, but obviously not good in relation to this element."⁹

This is essentially the tension in the lapsarian debate, with infralapsarians tending to stress God's immutable holiness and supralapsarians tending to emphasise God's omnipotence. Barth complains that theodicy as such constitutes abstract metaphysical speculation: "But where does it lead us to pose these alternatives [in the theodicy-problem]? We obviously pose them in this way only if the relationship between Creator and creature, general world-occurrence under the divine government, is considered abstractly and as it were detachedly, in forgetfulness of the fact that this relationship and general world-occurrence under the divine government are centred in the history [*Geschichte*] of the covenant, grace and salvation..."¹⁰ Thus Barth opposes what he deems to be the speculative theodicy of historic Calvinism.

Recall again that Calvin follows Augustine in contending that evil arose out of God's good creation by God's permissive decree in order to bring good out of evil to manifest God's glory.¹¹ Barth would agree that God "made all things very good," but firmly

⁹ Ibid., 422; ET 365.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1961), 67.

opposes the Augustinian-Calvinist notion that “evil would arise out of this good.”¹² For Barth, if evil is said to have arisen out of God’s good creation, God’s creature would have become the direct cause of evil, which would have rendered God the Unmoved Mover from which evil ultimately originated. Barth thinks that Reformed orthodoxy cannot avoid this undesirable conclusion, because it follows Calvin in speaking of the occurrence of evil as a divine decree apart from and independent of God’s decision to become incarnate.

As Francesca Aran Murphy comments:

Calvinists...attributed the problem of evil to the character of God... Barth disapproved of this Calvinist manoeuvre. He saw it as insinuating that, back behind the God described by Scripture, there is an impenetrable reservoir of darkness, out of which loom apparently arbitrary decrees. For some, the rejection of the concealed *decretum absolutum* is at the heart of Barth’s theology of revelation. As Barth would have it..., *Christ*, the revelation and exposition of God to humanity, is the *decretum absolutum*.¹³

Therefore, Barth insists that God’s permission of evil is not a decree that stands on its own—in fact it is not a decree at all—but a negative element paradoxically part and parcel of God’s only absolute decree, Jesus Christ.

Rejecting the Augustinian-Calvinist understanding of evil, Barth introduces the term “nothingness,” reminiscent of Hegel, Heidegger, and Sartre, to describe what is traditionally referred to as “evil.” The English translation of the term is admittedly misleading.¹⁴ It is not meant to convey the quality of being nothing; it is not *die Nichtigkeit* or *das Nichts*. Barth clarifies that “it would be foolhardy to rush to the conclusion that [nothingness] is therefore nothing, i.e., that it does not exist.”¹⁵ Rather, he chooses the unusual word *das Nichtige* and gives it the “definitions and delimitations, of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9.

¹⁴ CD III/3, 289. See editor’s notes. Also see William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 97.

¹⁵ KD III/3, 402; ET 349.

‘that which is not.’”¹⁶

Nothingness is that which is not: it is not God; it is not God’s creature; it did not arise out of God’s good creation. It negates God’s Being and all beings properly so-called (i.e., created beings), and is itself negated by God. It cannot be identified, for aside from God and God’s creation, there is indeed nothing. Yet nothingness is real; it really exists; it is not non-being. Its existence is absurd, peculiar, and unexplainable; it contradicts both the Creator and the creature. Nothingness is for Barth such a dark mystery that he would only describe it in absolutely apophatic terms.

Nothingness has no ontological status. Nothingness is real only in the forms in which it is manifest, including sin, evil, and spiritual death. Thus, “there is actual [*wirklich*] evil and actual death as well as actual sin.”¹⁷ Yet, in Kantian terms, no *Ding-an-sich* stands behind the real phenomena of nothingness as sin, evil, and death. In this way Barth rejects any dualist understanding of nothingness: “[Nothingness] is not a second god, nor self-created.”¹⁸

Against Meontological Interpretations

On the other hand, one would miss Barth’s point by rushing to Richard Swinburne’s conclusion that Barth falls within the so-called meontological tradition. Swinburne comments:

Writers in this tradition... had in their mind the view that each thing belongs to a kind... and the bad consists in not being a perfect specimen of the kind... This idea of the bad as in some way a lack of being surfaces again in Hegelian thought, and in modern continental theologians influenced by Hegel or Heidegger. For Barth, evil is *das Nichtige*, the ‘nothingness’ which inevitably accompanies the creation of creatures.¹⁹

¹⁶ *CD* III/3, 289n2.

¹⁷ *KD* III/3, 353; ET 310.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 405; ET 351.

¹⁹ Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 37f.

This interpretation of Barth misses his critique of the meontological tradition: he complains that in this tradition “the reality of nothingness is not seen sharply enough, even in its concrete form as sin, if sin is understood only generally as aberration from God and disobedience to His will.”²⁰ For Barth, the abstract generalisation that the meontological tradition makes about nothingness falls short of understanding nothingness concretely (i.e., Christologically). He comments that in this tradition, sin and nothingness “are basically no more than our essential and natural imperfection in contrast with [God’s] perfection,”²¹ a “deficiency” which “is not our true sin.”²²

To avoid such an error, says Barth, nothingness must be understood concretely in light of Golgotha as that which negates and opposes God’s Yes, and sin is that form of nothingness whereby humankind resists God’s gracious election. (Again, one might take my cue here to argue against my infralapsarian interpretation, contending that for Barth, the fall presupposes election-in-Christ just as election presupposes the fall. I would answer that an infralapsarian would have no difficulty accepting such mutual presupposing between election and the fall. The supralapsarian, on the other hand, would insist that election does *not* presuppose the fall, which is incompatible with Barth’s view). According to Barth, “this is what gives such seriousness to the opposition between God and human sin, between God and the sinner. This is what reveals the true nature of sin and nothingness as our repudiation of the goodness of God.”²³ Thus only in a qualified sense does Barth describe nothingness as *privatio*: “This negation of [God’s] grace is chaos, the world which He did not choose or will, which He could not and did not create, but which, as He created the actual world, He passed over and set aside, marking and excluding it as the eternal past, what is alien and adverse to grace, and therefore without it. In this sense

²⁰ *KD* III/3, 349; ET 307f.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 350; ET 308

²² *Ibid.*, 348; ET 306.

²³ *Ibid.*, 350; ET 308.

nothingness is really privation.”²⁴

Referring to this qualified view of nothingness as *privatio*, however, Nicholas Wolterstorff, whom Swinburne follows on this matter, thinks that for Barth, nothingness “necessarily accompanies” creation.²⁵ According to Wolterstorff, Barth asserts—or at least cannot avoid the implication—that nothingness consists of “unactualised possibilities” that God rejected in creating the world.²⁶

Wolterstorff continues to explain that the rejected possibilities in Barth’s thinking must not be understood as entities existing alongside God before creation. An “Augustinian interpretation” of Barth is necessary here: “Before creation there was indeed just God and nothing else,” hence the term “nothingness.”²⁷ Wolterstorff takes it that for Barth, the rejected “possibilities” for creation are brought into existence by God’s very rejection of them. “In creation, God’s Yes implies a No. And his Yes amounts to his saying Yes *to something*; those are the creatures. Likewise, his saying No, amounts to his saying No *to something*; those are the uncreated possibles.”²⁸

Opus Dei Alienum

While Wolterstorff is not alone in so understanding Barth,²⁹ this interpretation misses the significance of the Lutheran term “*opus Dei alienum*” (work of God alien to God’s nature) that Barth adopts in the same section where he speaks of nothingness as *privatio*.³⁰ Like Luther, Barth wants to emphasise by this term that nothingness is *alien* to God just as it is God’s own work. It is God’s work, because “nothingness has no existence

²⁴ Ibid., 407; ET 353.

²⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Barth on Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (1996), 589. Cf. Swinburne, *Providence and Evil*, 38. Note that neither classical supra- nor infralapsarianism would assert that nothingness necessarily accompanies creation. According to both, the divine decree of creation precedes God’s decision to permit humanity’s fall.

²⁶ Ibid., 597f.

²⁷ Ibid., 590.

²⁸ Ibid., 597.

²⁹ E.g. R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

³⁰ *KD* III/3, 407ff; ET 353ff.

and cannot be known except as the object of God's activity as always a holy activity."³¹

However, nothingness is God's work only on the "left hand of God," because it is completely alien to God.³² Nor is it even willed by God. Nothingness exists, only because God decided that God's Yes on the right hand should include within it a No on the left. George Hunsinger warns that God's decision to issue forth the Yes and No in such a way is "eternally contingent" upon God's will.³³

In this way, contra Wolterstorff, Hunsinger helpfully demonstrates with a predestinarian understanding that Barth firmly rejects the monist view that evil necessarily accompanies God's creation. Meanwhile, the term "*opus Dei*" underscores Barth's rejection of the dualist view that the alien element is some kind of a second god.

Nothingness: a Christological-Predestinarian Concept

Even so, Barth insists that this *opus alienum Dei* must not be understood as a divine "decree." To be sure, even nothingness cannot escape God's providential ruling. Yet this must not be taken to mean that nothingness came into existence by God's will.³⁴ Barth speaks of nothingness as an "ontic peculiarity" grounded in double predestination: it exists because it is rejected by God, as "God elects and therefore rejects what He does not elect."³⁵ It is precisely in this connexion that Barth uses the term *das Nichtige* ('that which is not') to designate evil, sin, and death. That nothingness *ist nicht* does not connote a meontological notion of evil as ontological privation. Rather, central to this "*is not*," this "*privatio*," is a deeply Christological-predestinarian understanding of reprobation.

In other words, "*das Nichtige*" is primarily a predestinarian term. Nothingness "is not"—it negates God and creation—because God has said No to it. Nothingness exists

³¹ Ibid., 411; ET 356.

³² Ibid.

³³ George Hunsinger, "Election and Trinity," 193.

³⁴ *KD* III/3, 413f; ET 358

³⁵ Ibid., 405; ET 351.

precisely because of God's No. It cannot exist apart from God's "non-willing," and paradoxically this divine non-willing becomes the ground whereupon nothingness exists.³⁶ In this sense nothingness is really *opus Dei*; in this sense Barth could say that "[God] is the basis and Lord of nothingness too."³⁷

Only in this sense, too, does Barth speak of God's "permission" of nothingness.³⁸ Contra Reformed-orthodox lapsarianism, however, this is not a "permissive decree" whereby God wills evil to bring good out of evil. For Barth, God's activity is always a holy activity, and God's Being in God's holy activity has absolutely nothing to do with nothingness; God does not even will it for a higher good, since to attribute evil to the act of God's will is to ascribe evil to God's Being-in-act. God rejects nothingness absolutely, and only in rejecting it does God permit it. For Barth, the *decretum absolutum Dei* is not God's decision to divide humankind into elects and reprobates, but absolute negation of nothingness in Christ and thereby God's election of all humankind in and with Christ as the *Aufhebung* of reprobation.

Of course, it is open to question whether Barth is always consistent with this conviction, for Barth states that God allows nothingness to exist "in order to overcome it."³⁹ Thus it is not without reason that Paul Fiddes comments: "[Barth's] *opus alienum* comes down heavily on the side of the *opus*... It is too much '[God's] own' and not enough 'alien...'"⁴⁰ Yet, at least in his intention Barth feels obligated to reject the term "permissive decree," regardless of how consistently he can carry through with this conviction.

Therefore, Barth emphasises God's "non-willing" to contend against seventeenth-century lapsarianism that evil cannot be causally related to God by means of

³⁶ Ibid., 407; ET 353.

³⁷ Ibid., 405; ET 351.

³⁸ Ibid., 424f; ET 367f.

³⁹ Ibid., 343; ET 305.

⁴⁰ Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 218.

predestination. Meanwhile, however, nothingness can have no independent existence apart from God's non-willing. As to the question how God's non-willing could have given nothingness its existence, Barth rejects any kind of rationalisation. Instead, Barth resorts to the category of "paradox," calling the existence of nothingness an "impossible possibility"—it exists absurdly "as inherent contradiction."⁴¹

Impossible Possibility: Barth's Non-Theodicy

Recall from Chapter 2 that in *Romans II*, Barth speaks of God's acts in history as "impossible possibilities." Until *CD III/3*, Barth has not used this dialectical term again, though in *III/2* he began to speak of sin as "ontological impossibility." Now that he picks up this dialectical term from decades past, he uses it to denote the negative element of nothingness, which is completely opposite from its usage in *Romans II*. In *Roman II*, an "impossible possibility" is a human impossibility made possible by God's act. In *CD III/3*, the logic is reversed. For the Barth of *CD III/3*, nothingness is a possibility into which the creature may fall, and this possibility is made impossible by God's act of non-willing. To say that nothingness exists as impossible possibility is to say that the existence of nothingness is absolutely absurd. With this term, then, Barth aims to avoid any rationalisation of nothingness.

Of course, whether Barth is always true to his resolute refusal "to satisfy our demand for a theodicy" is open to question.⁴² Wolterstorff might well be right that Barth comprehends and explains too much about evil despite "his claim that evil is 'incomprehensible and inexplicable.'⁴³ Whatever the case, Barth's intention is to avoid any rationalisation of nothingness. On Barth's understanding, the theodicies of

⁴¹ *KD III/3*, 405; ET, 351. See John McDowell, "Much Ado about Nothing: Karl Barth's Being Unable to Do Nothing about Nothingness," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4 (2002): 310f. Contra Joseph Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (London: WJK, 2004), 99.

⁴² Mangina, *Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*, 101.

⁴³ Wolterstorff, "Barth on Evil," 598.

seventeenth-century supra- and infralapsarianism claim to know too much about the God whom Luther calls *absconditus*, and Barth wants to bring lapsarianism into Christological light.

Covenant and Nothingness: Barth's Purified Infralapsarianism

According to Barth, nothingness must be understood Christologically in terms of the covenant, which is really another description of the history (*Geschichte*) of election-incarnation. The covenant is God's act by which, "having created the creature, [God] has pledged His faithfulness to it."⁴⁴ In *CD* III/1, Barth formulates his famous notion of "creation as the external basis of the covenant" and "covenant as the internal basis of creation."⁴⁵ These two propositions are basically two corollaries stating the notion that creation is the work whereby and realm wherein the covenant is actualised, and that the covenant is the purpose of creation.

This alludes to an *ordo decretorum Dei* (order of divine decrees, see Chapter 1): does the covenant teleologically precede creation, or vice versa? Obviously, "God creates the world in order to bring about his covenant," thus Oliver Crisp thinks that Barth's covenant theology "relies upon his commitment to a supralapsarian view of the ordering of the divine decrees."⁴⁶

However, as I have shown in Chapter 1, supra- and infralapsarianism in Reformed orthodoxy are not always defined in terms of an *ordo*. Moreover, even for supralapsarians, the orderings are not exclusively teleological. Therefore, the teleological order in Barth's creation/covenant distinction does not necessarily place him in the supralapsarian camp. The same teleological order, as we saw in Chapter 1, is also found in leading

⁴⁴ *KD* III/3, 411; ET 356.

⁴⁵ *KD* III/1, §41.

⁴⁶ Oliver Crisp, "Karl Barth on Creation," ed. Sung Wook Chung, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 83.

seventeenth-century English Puritan John Owen's infralapsarian distinction between the origin and design of God's decrees, which bears strong resemblances to John Webster's description of Barth's creation/covenant distinction.⁴⁷

Moreover, in *CD* III/1, Barth has not yet introduced the negative element of nothingness, thus the creation/covenant distinction on its own is not yet sufficient for determining Barth's lapsarian position, namely, whether election-incarnation presupposes sin, evil, and death. In *CD* III/3, however, Barth revisits his covenant theology under the rubric of "God and nothingness," and here his basically infralapsarian position becomes evident.

Leading up to his discussion of covenant and nothingness, Barth sets the ground rule that contention with nothingness "is primarily and properly God's own affair."⁴⁸ To be sure, God-in-Godself has no need to contend with nothingness, since nothingness is not a second god. Moreover, "the Creator has effected [the] negation [of nothingness] once and for all."⁴⁹ So how can nothingness still come into existence and oppose God and God's creature? Barth simply dismisses this question, saying that "we must not pursue this thought to its logical end."⁵⁰

Rather, Barth insists that knowledge of nothingness must be sought covenantally, that is, Christologically: "We have not to forget... the fact that God did not will to be God for His own sake alone, but that as the Creator He also became the covenant Partner of His creature, entering into a relationship with it in which He wills to be directly and primarily involved in all that concerns it."⁵¹ Thus, "He whom nothingness has no power

⁴⁷ John Webster, *Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2004), 98. Also: Eberhard Busch, *Barth*, trans. R. Burnett (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 48; Suzanne McDonald, "Evangelical Questioning of Election in Barth," in B. McCormack and C. Anderson, eds., *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 250ff.

⁴⁸ *KD* III/3, 409; ET 354.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 411; ET 356.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

to offend is prepared on behalf of His creature to be primarily and properly offended and humiliated, attacked and injured by nothingness.”⁵²

God’s confrontation with nothingness takes place in Christ: “in the incarnation God exposed Himself to nothingness even as His enemy and assailant. He did so in order to repel it and defeat it.”⁵³ Christ defeated nothingness “by suffering death..., the death of condemnation... for the forgiveness of the sins of many... in order to take away the power of death.”⁵⁴

According to Barth, Christ’s work on Golgotha is not merely the actualisation of God’s eternal plan. Rather, it is the temporal actuality of election; it corresponds perfectly to its eternal actuality. That is, Christ’s work of atonement and God’s eternal election-in-Christ are not two causally related events, but distinct aspects of the same reality. Christ “is the decree of God behind and above which there can be no earlier or higher decree and beside which there can be no other, since all others serve only the fulfilment of this decree.”⁵⁵

As we have already seen in the last chapter, Barth identifies Christ as electing God and elected human in *CD* II/2. Just as nothingness poses no threat to God-in-Godself, the Son of God is in need of no special election,⁵⁶ since election entails God’s decision to defeat nothingness on behalf of God’s covenant-partner. Therefore, properly speaking Christ is the object of predestination (*obiectum praedestinationis*) not in his deity but in his humanity, standing in solidarity with all God’s creatures. “Face to face with temptation [the creature] cannot maintain the goodness of his creation in the divine image and foreordination to the divine likeness... Exposed to the power of the divine negation,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 354; ET 311.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 355; ET 312.

⁵⁵ *KD* II/2, 101; ET 94.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 110; ET 103.

he is guilty of death.”⁵⁷ However, “the rejection which all men incurred, the wrath of God under which all men lie, the death which all men must die, God in His love for men transfers from all eternity to Him in whom He loves and elects them, and whom He elects as their head and in their place.”⁵⁸ The vicarious sacrifice that Christ suffered on Golgotha reveals that there is “other than Him no reprobate.”⁵⁹

In this line of thought, Christ as the proper object of predestination is clearly reprobated and elected as the bearer of sin. It should be noted, however, that Barth never held to a “fallenness view” of Christ’s humanity, as some have contended.⁶⁰ Barth makes it clear that Christ took the place of a sinner as God “transferred” humankind’s sin to him. Yet, because the transfer is real, Daniel Price is correct in saying that Christ’s humanity not only determines the “real human,” but also “Barth’s ‘real sinner’ is... determined by the humanity of Jesus.”⁶¹ The intricacies in this line of reasoning will become clearer in the next chapter. For now, suffice it to say that for Barth, Christ as the proper object of predestination is not unfallen humanity as the supralapsarians would have it, but rather a very concrete, “real sinner” to whom God pronounced the sentence of reprobation.

Meanwhile, Christ’s resurrection reveals that God’s No suffered vicariously by Christ is only penultimate. By no means is this No a capricious rejection of God’s creatures, but rather it corresponds perfectly to God’s holiness and serves the purpose of God’s Yes. That is, God’s No is against the nothingness to which God’s creatures have fallen prey. As God’s No pronounced upon Christ negates nothingness—“that which is not” (that which negates God)—this sublation of nothingness is the election of all humans unto glory in Christ.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid., 131; ET 122f.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *KD* II/2, 389; ET 353 (revised).

⁶⁰ Contra Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90ff.

⁶¹ Daniel Price, *Karl Barth’s Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 125.

⁶² *KD* II/2, 131; ET 122f.

In this way Barth claims to have “purified” Reformed-orthodox lapsarianism of the assumption of a *decretum absolutum* behind and above God’s will revealed in the history (*Geschichte*) of the incarnation. Again, Barth agrees with Reformed orthodoxy that God’s decree of double predestination is indeed absolute, but this *decretum absolutum* is none other than Jesus Christ.

According to the *Christ-Geschichte*, the incarnation is God’s act of taking on humankind’s sin. To be sure, Christ did not assume sinful human nature, but he took on the sin of all humans by uniting them to him (in *CD IV/1*, which we discuss in Chapter 9, Barth will speak of the union of sinful human history to the history of Christ). Thus R. Scott Rodin notes that in Barth’s doctrine of election, “God did not positively will the Fall of the creature, but in His eternal election of Jesus..., the Fall is fully assumed as the state of humanity.”⁶³ This, again, shows that Barth is infralapsarian (i.e., for Barth, the object of predestination is fallen humanity).

Applying the doctrine of election to his discussion of “God and nothingness,” Barth defines nothingness “in plain and precise terms” as “the ‘reality’ on whose account (i.e., against which) God willed to become a creature in the creaturely world, yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it.”⁶⁴ Note here that election-incarnation is a decision to overcome the nothingness that assails creaturely existence. The creature that God has in mind in the act of election is thus what Reformed-orthodox infralapsarians call “*homo lapsus*” (fallen humanity).

God’s covenantal decision to be *pro nobis* is such that “God is not too great, nor is He ashamed, to enter this situation which is not only threatened but already corrupted, to confess Himself the Friend and Fellow of the *sinful creature*... Though Adam is fallen and disgraced, he is not too low for God to make Himself his Brother... For the sake of

⁶³ Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy*, 113.

⁶⁴ *KD III/3*, 343; ET 305.

this Adam God becomes poor.”⁶⁵

Barth’s covenant theology here is basically infralapsarian in that God’s decision is to enter into covenant with sinful humanity, humanity that has fallen prey to nothingness. Sure enough, as we saw in the case of Thomas Goodwin in Chapter 1, a doctrine of the covenant in which God’s covenant-partner is fallen might well be combined with a supralapsarian doctrine of predestination, but this is not the case with Barth, since his covenant theology—as well as his entire soteriology for that matter—is just another narration of the *Geschichte* of divine predestination. Thus, in an otherwise problematic interpretation that places Barth in the “ancient but questionable meontic tradition,” John Hick rightly comments that for Barth, humanity’s falling prey to nothingness is a condition “presupposed by [the] divine act of salvation.”⁶⁶

Wolf Krötke also observes that for Barth,

the ‘primal history’ of [the] covenant leads directly to God’s primal encounter with nothingness. For the humans whom God elected in accordance with his revelation are *sinner*s. God makes the destiny of these sinners his own by electing them. God would ‘rather be unblest with His creature than be the blessed God of an unblest creature’ [*CD* III/3, 358]. For this reason in Jesus Christ God puts himself in the place of *sinful humanity*.⁶⁷

While Krötke does not offer clear definitions of supra- and infralapsarianism, his description of Barth’s covenantal-Christological understanding of nothingness, shared by most mainstream interpreters of Barth, is basically infralapsarian.

In a single, decisive paragraph towards the end of *CD* §50, Barth spells out his predestinarian-Christological-covenantal infralapsarianism in narrative style: “In face of real nothingness the creature is *already* defeated and lost... It tries to be itself the hero who suffers and fights and conquers, and therefore like God. And because this decision is

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 412; ET 357. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: McMillan, 1977), 139.

⁶⁷ Wolf Krötke, *Sin and Nothingness in the Theology of Karl Barth*, eds. trans. P. Ziegler and C. Bammel (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 21. Emphases mine.

a decision against the grace of God, it is a choice of evil.”⁶⁸

Note here that unlike Reformed orthodoxy, Barth does not describe humanity’s fall as the origin of evil, but rather a choice to succumb to the threat and temptation of nothingness (his notion of the fall will be developed more thoroughly in *CD IV/1*, as we shall see in Chapter 9).

Barth continues: “[God] knows [nothingness as] that which He did not elect or will as the Creator... Yet He is Lord over that which imperils His creature.”⁶⁹ Nothingness cannot escape God’s sovereign ruling, and by God’s gracious election “God has sworn fidelity to His *threatened* creature. In creating it He has covenanted and identified Himself with it... In the decisive action in the history [*Geschichte*] of His covenant with the creature, in Jesus Christ, He actually becomes a creature, and thus makes the cause of the creature His own in the most concrete reality and not just in appearance, really taking its place.”⁷⁰

In the last sentence above, “the history of His covenant” denotes the totality of the actuality of God’s salvation, both in eternity and creaturely time; the phrase “in the most concrete reality and not just in appearance” may therefore be read as “in God’s story and not just in history as understood by a historian.”⁷¹ Thus understood, God’s act of making the cause of the fallen creature God’s own is not merely an event within the realm of creaturely existence, but rather God’s eternal act of election, of which the Virgin Birth is the creaturely-historical actuality. According to Barth’s description of Christ’s *Geschichte* in *CD III/3*, in God’s eternal act of election just as in the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, the object of predestination just as the man on Golgotha is (by communication via

⁶⁸ *KD III/3*, 413; ET 358.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ To use a phrase from *CD I/1*, this history is not “*bloss historisch*.” While the *Geschichte/Historie* distinction does not come to the foreground in *CD III/3*, Barth would continue to use the word *Geschichte* to refer to the actuality of God’s dealings with humankind in Jesus Christ.

participation) sinful human. In short, Barth's narration of the *Geschichte* of God's dealings with nothingness in Christ is basically infralapsarian.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how Barth developed the notion of nothingness on the basis of his "purified infralapsarianism" from *CD* II/2. By means of conclusion, I shall discuss how Barth's "purified infralapsarianism" illuminates his reflections on God and nothingness in *CD* §50. Two points may be observed.

First, Barth's "purified" infralapsarianism goes hand in hand with his concern to uphold the consistency between God's will and the perfections of God's Being. Seventeenth-century infralapsarians, as we saw in Chapter 1, stress that God does not will to punish *homo nondum lapsus* (not-yet fallen humanity), and that a perfectly righteous God does not leave sin unpunished (a position that Barth also develops in *CD* IV/1, as we shall see in the next chapter—he is not even shy to speak of what God 'cannot' do). It is with this concern to maintain the perfect correspondence between God's Being and act that Barth develops the notion of *das Nichtige* as an absurd existence grounded in God's non-willing: God's Being has absolutely nothing to do with nothingness.

Second, Barth's employment of the term "nothingness" is really a way for him to say, "I don't know." "Nothingness" is "that which is not"; it cannot be identified or explained. This contradicts the rationalism of most supralapsarians. The teleological element in supralapsarianism implies that supralapsarians are usually ready to explain the ground and origin of humanity's fall as God's purpose of self-glorification in double predestination, assuming that God is free to decree the fall as a means to this end. Infralapsarians, however, usually refrain from claiming such teleological knowledge about sin and evil. Rather, as John Owen's origin/design distinction shows (see Chapter 1), the only

knowledge that infralapsarians can claim to possess about humanity's fall is that Christ has assumed a flesh of sin and endured God's punishment.

Barth's creation/covenant distinction, when applied to his basically infralapsarian discussion of nothingness, also stresses this Christological-covenantal aspect of God's solidarity with humanity under the threat of nothingness. That is to say, nothingness exists to occasion the cross, as God's non-capricious No serves the purpose of the election of all in Christ. Thus understood, the term "nothingness" serves to utter a metaphysical "I don't know" about the ontological peculiarity of sin, evil, and death, while Barth's "purified infralapsarianism" proclaims a Christological "I know" about God's grace that triumphs over nothingness.

It is with this central conviction of Christian witness to God's solidarity with humankind in Christ that Barth seeks to address the peculiar existence of nothingness. Even though whether or not he has always remained true to his own convictions and intentions is open to question, it serves well to note that the basically infralapsarian doctrine of election whereupon Barth's defiance of the theodicy problem is based was developed in a time (1936-42) when the "Christian explanation of the world," as sociologist Peter Berger puts it in a chapter entitled "The Problem of Theodicy," had been seriously challenged by enlightenment worldviews for over a century, and Hitler's rise to power gravely threatened what Berger calls the "Christian legitimation of social order."⁷² One might think of the composition of *CD III/3* (1950) as an afterthought reflecting upon all the chaotic forces that the world had witnessed during the Second World War, as well as the aftermath of the War in which the world was placed under the threat of nuclear destruction. It was a time when the meaning of the social existence of Christianity was at stake, and Barth, as a theologian of the Church and for the Church, sought to point the

⁷² Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 80.

Church to Jesus Christ in the midst of all the chaos of the time as an attempt to defy a very real problem of theodicy that threatened to dissolve Christianity from without and within.

Chapter 9

CD IV/1 (1953): Adamic History and History of Christ—

A More Thorough “Purified ‘Infralapsarianism’” in Barth’s Doctrine of Sin

In the last chapter we saw how Barth developed the notion of nothingness in *CD III/3*, §50. In this chapter we turn to *CD IV/1*, §60, “The Pride and Fall of Man,” which is in many ways developed on the basis of his notion of nothingness. However, §60 is not just a restatement of §50. Rather, prior to §60, Barth offers a nuanced rendition of incarnational Christology in §59, “The Obedience of the Son of God,” which some have described as “historicised.”¹ How helpful this term may be for an accurate understanding of Barth is a question I address towards the end of this chapter. Suffice it now to say that in *CD IV/1*, the humanity that Christ assumes is described in deeply historical terms.

While much secondary literature has been written on the Christology of *CD §59* in recent years, this chapter focuses instead on §60 in order to gain an understanding of the Christological doctrine of election underlying Barth’s development of the notion of human sin and fallenness. I will show that Barth’s doctrine of sin everywhere presupposes an infralapsarian Christology, and that his notion of fallen Adamic history precludes any supralapsarian interpretation of his understanding of the object of God’s electing grace. My thesis in this chapter is that by his new emphasis on the category of history in *CD IV/1* Barth has become even more infralapsarian in his Christological doctrine of election.

Knowledge of Sin in Light of Christ: Barth’s Infralapsarian Christology

Epistemological Considerations

At the outset of an exposition of Barth’s doctrine of sin it is important to keep in

¹ See Bruce McCormack, “Karl Barth’s Historicized Christology: Just How ‘Chalcedonian’ Is It?” in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

mind that according to him, no true knowledge of sin is possible apart from the believer's knowledge of Christ. Therefore, while the material content of his doctrine of sin primarily consists of two parts, "The Pride of Man" and "The Fall of Man," Barth begins with an epistemological-methodological consideration of the doctrine in a section titled "The Man of Sin in the Light of the Obedience of the Son of God."²

In this introductory consideration Barth states: "In this section we are apparently going back a step behind the knowledge that we have already won of the salvation which has come to man in the self-sacrifice and death of the Son of God in our flesh and which is revealed in His resurrection."³ Here we find that for Barth, even though Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection negatively presuppose humanity's sin (hence 'going back a step'), when it comes to epistemological considerations knowledge of Christ logically precedes knowledge of sin.

Barth continues: "We are apparently concerned with the negative presupposition of this event, the disruption of the relationship between God and man which made this event necessary and which was overcome by this event."⁴ Sure enough, the "event" of which Barth speaks here is "the salvation which has come to man in the self-sacrifice and death of the Son of God in our flesh and which is revealed in His resurrection," and so one might argue that this "event" does not refer directly to the incarnation.⁵ However, on the previous page at the very outset of this section, Barth states: "We now turn to the question of the perception of the human situation in the light of *the event* in which for our sake the Lord became a servant, the Son was obedient to the Father, the Word became flesh of our flesh, the Judge was Himself judged on the cross of Golgotha."⁶ On these pages Barth continually refers back to this "event." This makes it unquestionable that in this context

² *KD* IV/1, 395ff; ET 358ff.

³ *Ibid.*, 395f; ET 359.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 395; ET 359.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 394; ET 358. Emphasis mine.

Barth is speaking of the cross and the incarnation as the same “event” of which sin is the “negative presupposition.” Barth’s statement that sin “made this event necessary” contradicts Edwin van Driel’s assertion that Barth holds to a supralapsarian Christology according to which the incarnation was primarily occasioned by other divine purposes than confrontation with sin (see Chapter 2).⁷ Clearly, Barth sets forth his discussion of the doctrine of sin on the basis of an infralapsarian Christology. According to this infralapsarian Christology part and parcel of what I suggest we call Barth’s “purified infralapsarianism” (namely, that in Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of election developed in 1936-42, election-in-Christ presupposes the fall), sin could not have existed apart from God’s rejection of it in Christ.

In *CD IV/1*, Barth retains this view and insists that if sin is not understood Christologically, that is, in light of God’s rejection thereof for the sake of election-in-Christ, then the “sin” that we claim to know is not the true sin of humankind. Humankind’s evil “nature and actions,” “the imperfection and problematical nature of [human] existence,” etc.—these may be manifestations of sin but these are “not as such [humankind’s] sin.”⁸ (Here Barth loosely speaks of human nature as “evil,” but as we shall see, he stresses that strictly speaking human nature as created by God is and always remains good, and that the sin that extends to every part of the human being is and remains completely alien to human nature). For Barth, to consider sin independently of Christ as such is to give to sin an ontological status alongside God, thus turning sin into a second god. In order to avoid such idolisation of sin, says Barth, one must develop knowledge of sin in light of Christ—this much has already been stated in *CD III/3* as discussed in Chapter 8.

In *CD IV/1* Barth develops this Christological epistemology further. If Christ is the

⁷ See van Driel’s chapter on Barth as well as introduction to his book, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸ *KD IV/1*, 397; ET 360.

“mirror of sin,” as Barth now puts it (in *CD* II/2 Barth only spoke of Christ as ‘mirror of election’), the “basic question” would be: “to what extent we really have in the obedience of the Son of God and therefore in Jesus Christ the mirror in which we can see the man of sin as such.”⁹ Barth makes four rather lengthy points of epistemological consideration. For my purpose of demonstrating the basically infralapsarian character of the Christological doctrine of election underlying Barth’s discussion of sin, I will skip to the fourth point.

Sin as Impossible Possibility: Christological-Predestinarian Infralapsarianism

The point is this: “the knowledge of Jesus Christ is... the knowledge of the significance and extent of sin, or in the words of Anselm: *quanti ponderis sit peccatum* [how great the weight of sin is].”¹⁰ Barth’s answer to Anselm’s question is: the weight of sin is properly measured “only when it is seen that this was the cost to God—in the person of His Son—of our reconciliation with Him,” namely, “that the Judge allowed Himself to be judged and caused the man of sin to be put to death in His own person.”¹¹

Yet, before arriving at this answer, Barth makes a qualification of fundamental importance: “Whatever evil is, God is its Lord.”¹² Reiterating his position in *CD* §50, “God and Nothingness,” Barth comments that “evil is a form of that nothingness which as such is absolutely subject to God.”¹³ Echoing Luther’s notions of God’s *opus alienum* and *proprium*, Barth asserts that “in the light of the fact that in Jesus Christ, in His death (the meaning of which is shown in His resurrection to be His victory and the liberation of man), we see evil overcome and indeed shattered and destroyed by the omnipotence of the

⁹ Ibid., 439; ET 397.

¹⁰ *KD* IV/1., 451; ET 407.

¹¹ Ibid., 457; ET 412.

¹² Ibid., 452; ET 408.

¹³ Ibid.

love and wrath of God.”¹⁴ Sin as such “was impressed into the service of God and contrary to its own nature became necessarily an instrument of the divine triumph.”¹⁵

Meanwhile, Barth stresses that sin as an instrument of God is absolutely rejected by God. “The superiority with which God confronts sin in Jesus Christ is that of His unconditional No to this element and to us as its representatives. It is a No in which there is no hidden Yes, no secret approval.”¹⁶ Sin truly exists, but without ontological status. Reiterating his understanding of sin as *das Nichtige*—that which is not—Barth writes:

Sin has no positive basis in God, no place in His being, no positive part in His life, and therefore no positive part in His will and work. It is not a creature of God. It arises only as the exponent, and in the creaturely world the most characteristic exponent, of what God has not willed and does not will and will not will, of that which absolutely is not, or is only as God does not will it.¹⁷

On this basis Barth proceeds to discuss the possibility of human sin. The observable fact is that humans do sin. However, “when man sins, he does that which God has forbidden and does not will. The possibility of doing this is not something which he has from God.”¹⁸ Against the free-will argument of humanity’s fall, Barth contends that the possibility to sin does not pertain to the freedom and rationality of the “creaturely nature of man.”¹⁹

So if the possibility to sin originated from neither God nor the creature, on what basis has it arisen? Barth answers: “It has no basis.”²⁰ The possibility to sin is purely negative in its existence. “It has, therefore, no possibility—we cannot escape this difficult formula—except that of the absolutely impossible.”²¹

Here we come back to Barth’s notion of sin as “impossible possibility.” I have

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 453; ET 409.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 454; ET 410.

²¹ Ibid.

already pointed out in Chapter 8 that Barth first developed this formula in *Romans II* to describe faith and human knowledge of God through revelation, and that he rarely used the same formula again until *CD III/3* and *IV/1*, where the “impossible possibility” now refers to human sin and unbelief.

This contrast between *Romans II* and *CD III/3-IV/1* is a significant indicator of Barth’s theological development. In *Romans II*, the formula describes God’s act of election in the existential here-and-now: human faith in Christ’s resurrection is impossible because of sin, but God makes the impossible possible by God’s act of election on the present-actualistic level. Yet, as long as humankind remains within fallen time, the impossibility that God has made possible remains impossible, hence faith and salvation as “impossible possibilities.”

In *CD III/3-IV/1*, by contrast, what is definitive of all reality is what Christ has objectively accomplished from all eternity. According to Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of election developed in 1936-42—which I have shown to be basically infralapsarian—whether a person is eternally saved is not determined by his/her existential faith or unbelief. Rather, all are reprobated in Christ in order for all to be elected in him. This entails that the sin of all is *a priori—zum Vornherein*—negated and defeated in Christ from all eternity. For this reason, faith and salvation are no longer impossible possibilities for Barth. Contrarily, sin is now the impossible possibility—it is a paradox.

For the Barth of *CD III/3-IV/1*, “paradox” denotes that which is blatantly self-contradictory and irrational in itself. Here Barth would no longer follow Kierkegaard in calling the God-human a “paradox”: “It is not paradoxical or absurd that God becomes and is man. It does not contradict the concept of God. It fulfils it.”²² However, “it is

²² *KD IV/1*, 465; ET 419.

certainly paradoxical and absurd that man wants to be as God. It contradicts the concept of man.”²³

When Barth says in *CD* IV/1 that the incarnation “fulfils” the concept of God, he has in mind the divine act of election as discussed in *CD* II/2. For Barth, the doctrine of election belongs to the doctrine of God. Election is God’s eternal act of choosing to be God-with-us, thus assuming human agency from all eternity. Even more: in the act of election God has eternally negated humankind’s sin by the act of incarnation. This, again, manifests the basically infralapsarian character of Barth’s Christological doctrine of election.

It is in this infralapsarian manner that Barth sees the incarnation as fulfilling the very concept of God: Election-in-Christ as manifested in his death and resurrection reveals that in the person of Christ God judges sin in the flesh for the sake of God’s love-in-freedom. That is, the incarnation fulfils the concept of God because by the incarnation (which, as we recall, includes within it Christ’s death and resurrection) God rejects that which negates God and God’s covenant-partner, and remains true to God’s absolute perfection. This rejection serves the purpose of the mercy of the God who is unchangingly love-in-freedom. For Barth, the incarnation is by no means paradoxical or absurd.

Contrarily, it is humankind’s sin, the prideful attempt to be as God, that is paradoxical and absurd, for it contradicts the very concept of humanity: to be human is to be God’s creature and covenant-partner *in Christo*. To be *in Christo* means that sin is impossible: sin is *a priori* (*zum Vornherein*) negated and defeated in God’s eternal double predestination in Christ (this, again, is basically infralapsarian). For this reason the human possibility to sin is “absolutely impossible.”²⁴ Thus Barth calls sin an “impossible possibility”: “how else can we describe that which is intrinsically absurd, but by a formula

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 454; ET 410.

which is logically absurd? Sin is that which is absurd, man's absurd choice and decision for that which is not... Sin exists only in this absurd event."²⁵ Barth continues: "The possibility [of sin]... can be described only as that which God has denied and rejected and forbidden, as that which is nothing in itself, as that which is as such impossible, which exists only on the left hand of God."²⁶

But the question is, "How do we know this?"²⁷ Barth answers: "We know it, we have to know it, from the fact that sin has been treated in this way by God Himself in Jesus Christ, with an opposition which excludes any compact with it, any explanation or exculpation of the fact that it has taken place, with an uncompromising No."²⁸ This "No," this "supremely real wrath of God," is "what took place in the death of Jesus Christ at Golgotha."²⁹

Yet, Golgotha is that event which perfectly corresponds to the vicarious reprobation, the non-capricious No of God, that Christ sublated from all eternity. Thus we see again that Barth is basically infralapsarian in both his Christology and doctrine of election: the incarnation is to negate humankind's sin, while election as the *Aufhebung* of reprobation presupposes the sin of all humankind communicated to Christ.

Understanding this basically infralapsarian character of Barth's Christological doctrine of election would shed light on Barth's insistence that only in Christ is the weight of sin truly revealed:

The truth is that Anselm's question: *quanti ponderis sit peccatum?* is given an answer either from the cross of Christ or not at all... The serious and terrible nature of human corruption, the depth of the abyss into which man is about to fall as the author of it, can be measured by the fact that the love of God could react and reply to this event only by His giving, His giving up, of Jesus Christ Himself to overcome and remove it and in that way to redeem man, fulfilling the judgment upon it in such a way that the Judge allowed Himself to be

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 455; ET 411.

judged and caused the man of sin to be put to death in His own person.³⁰

Sin as Human Pride in light of an Infralapsarian Christology

Actualism Revisited: Human Act of Sin as Paradox

Having established that sin must be understood Christologically, Barth proceeds to ask: “But what is sin as seen from this place?”³¹ He answers: “the sin of man is the pride of man.”³² To be sure, this is not an exhaustive definition, but neither is it “just a part of the content” of sin.³³ While it is also to be defined in other ways, “sin in its unity and totality is always pride.”³⁴

Human pride is the concretion of disobedience and unbelief. Here Barth sets forth the thesis that in light of Christ, the general acts of disobedience and unbelief are revealed concretely as humankind’s pride. Now what remains to be seen is how Barth substantiates this statement. He begins by asking: “What is it that God does in Jesus Christ?”³⁵

What God does in Christ, says Barth, is an obedient act of *humility*: in obedience the Son “gives Himself and humbles Himself to go into the far country, as very God to become... man, flesh of our flesh, to take to Himself human existence not only in its creaturely limitation but in its sinful contradiction and misery...”³⁶ The act of incarnation is the event of “divine obedience and humility.”³⁷

Here Barth stresses that this act of obedience and humility by no means takes away God’s freedom. In basically Chalcedonian grammar Barth states that “the Lord becomes a servant but does not cease to be the Lord,” stressing that “as a servant He is truly the Lord

³⁰ Ibid., 456; ET 412.

³¹ Ibid., 457; ET 413.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 462; ET 417.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

in His very Godhead.”³⁸ This is basically another way of saying that the incarnation fulfils the concept of God rather than contradicting it. Christ’s servanthood is a perfect manifestation of rather than contradiction to divine lordship. In the act of incarnation God “does not give Himself away or give Himself up, but offers Himself in His divine lordship, and as such maintains Himself.”³⁹

At this juncture Barth revisits an important theme in *CD II/2*, which I addressed in Chapter 7, namely, the notion of God’s love and freedom. Recall that for Barth, true freedom is not caprice. Thus in *CD IV/1*, he again rejects any voluntaristic understanding of divine freedom: God does not elect to become human “in the chance of a caprice or variation of His divine being.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, to say that the incarnation is a free act of God is to say that it is not “under the compulsion of any inward or outward necessity.”⁴¹

On this point, Bruce McCormack issues the caveat that Barth’s understanding of “God’s freedom cannot be exhaustively described when reference is had only to such negations.”⁴² Positively stated, McCormack comments, “God’s freedom is the freedom of the love that God is to set itself in concrete relationship to that which is other than itself.”⁴³ Thus Barth immediately proceeds to state that God elected to become a servant

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bruce McCormack, “Election and Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010): 223.

⁴³ Ibid. While McCormack’s “thesis” on and “explanation” of Barth’s understanding of divine freedom is helpful, and granted that for Barth “God is what he is in the eternal decision of election,” I am not quite sure how McCormack arrives at the conclusion that with regard to logical relationship, Trinity presupposes election. In fact, McCormack himself concedes that “where the logical relationship of election to trinity is concerned,” his “foregoing considerations,” including those on divine love and freedom, “would allow us to take either element as a starting point” (223). That is, to say that God is what God is in the eternal decision of election does not necessarily imply that Trinity presupposes election. McCormack seems to have provided little textual evidence to sustain this inference. The closest one he provides, it seems to me, is found earlier in his article (218): “God is not *in abstracto* Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the triune God. He is so with a definite purpose and reference” (*CD II/2*, 79). However, this “definite purpose and reference,” which Barth identifies in the selfsame sentence that McCormack does not quote, is “the love and freedom in which *in the bosom of His triune being* He has foreordained himself from and to all eternity” (*CD II/2*, 79).

“in the determination of His free love on the basis of His eternal election in fulfillment of the eternal decree of His mercy.”⁴⁴

To recapitulate what I have already argued in Chapter 7, Barth’s notion of the freedom of God’s love in the act of election is such that it is neither the voluntaristic “caprice of a tyrant,” as Barth puts it, nor the compulsion of any inward or outward necessity on God’s part, but *perfect correspondence* between God’s Being-in-act *ad extra* and *ad intra*. By virtue of this actualism, God’s election to assume the form of a servant is to be understood as a perfect manifestation of God’s lordship.

Moreover, it must be stressed that the incarnation is God’s sovereign election to be *pro nobis*: “It is for our sake (*pro nobis*) that God determined and came to this action which cuts right across all human belief and surmise and thought about God, this action in which His Word becomes flesh.”⁴⁵

Now, if God’s eternal election is *for us*, and if, in Paul Nimmo’s words, “the activity of God and the activity of the creature are... inseparable and must be understood ‘as a single action’ [CD III/3, 132],” then there should correspond to God’s eternal election a human act of faith and obedience *for God*.⁴⁶ This is indeed true in the human Jesus, whose acts of humility and obedience perfectly correspond to God’s act of election *pro nobis*.

Yet, as God really carries through with the act of election, this act does not stop short at the point of Christ’s obedience and humility. The whole human race must also act in correspondence to God’s act *pro nobis*. In CD II/2 Barth already pointed to humankind’s

That is, God foreordained Godself from and to all eternity unto this definite purpose and reference of love and freedom *in the bosom of God’s Triune Being*: election presupposes the Trinity. Of course, Barth states in the same excursus that we “cannot speak of the being of God without at once speaking of this *interna actio* of His being, i.e., the election” (CD II/2, 79). However, here Barth does not indicate what the logical relation between Trinity and election is. My reading of Barth is such that election logically follows the Trinity. I shall provide more textual evidence to sustain this reading later.

⁴⁴ KD IV/1, 462; ET 417.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 463; ET 418.

⁴⁶ Nimmo, “*Concursus Dei*,” 60.

election of God in correspondence to God's election of humanity: "...the decision of the sovereign God, His election of grace... has as its sole content that God elects humanity in order that it be awakened and called, that it might also elect God..."⁴⁷

In *CD IV/1* Barth reiterates the same notion: "if it is not in vain that He [God] does what He does [namely, electing to be *pro nobis*], then it is right and proper that we should turn from His action to ours, that we should ask concerning the *correspondence* of our actions to His action, concerning our own form as reflected in what God does, and does for us."⁴⁸ In Barth's discussion of justification *by faith* in *CD IV/1*, he shows that human faith and obedience have indeed become actual in the here-and-now by the Holy Spirit, and points to an eschaton in which the faith-obedience of all humankind becomes fully actual.

Yet, before going there, Barth stresses that in the here-and-now human sin as pride is still actual, because, as Nimmo puts it, "Jesus Christ corresponds perfectly, in his existence, to that which—in the event of election—he determined and was determined to be in essence. Barth writes of Jesus Christ that 'as a man He exists analogously to the mode of existence of God' [*CD IV/2*, 166]. The creature, however—through sin—does not."⁴⁹

In *CD IV/1*, this is the juncture where the notion of sin comes sharply to the foreground in Barth's discussion: sin is "the pride of man" as "a terrible *paradox*, that man is the being whose attitude not only does not *correspond* to the attitude of God as revealed and active in Jesus Christ, but contradicts it and actively opposes it, that the two attitudes move in a diametrically opposite direction..."⁵⁰ The actuality of sin is paradoxical because it does not correspond to God's gracious election. The prideful

⁴⁷ *KD II/2*, 198; ET 180.

⁴⁸ *KD IV/1*, 464; ET 418. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ Nimmo, "*Concursus Dei*," 67.

⁵⁰ *KD IV/1*, 464; ET 418. Emphases mine.

human “loves and chooses the inner nothingness which can only reveal itself to his shame in the impotence of his action,” and “the omnipotent act of [Christ’s] humility exposes us as proud men.”⁵¹

Four Key Points and Their Underlying Infralapsarian Christology

On this ground Barth proceeds to delineate four main points to explain how sin is always human pride. First, sin is the human attempt to be as God. Sure it is “paradoxical and absurd that man wants to be as God,” and “the only result of his attempts is the revelation of his impotence to do so...”⁵² Yet, “the impotence of the enterprise does not alter the fact that for all its perversion it does take place.”⁵³ To this extent sin is “something actual.”⁵⁴ Yet, it is actual only as that which God has already rejected in Christ. It is precisely God’s omnipotent act of election-in-Christ that the human act of sin is revealed to be impotent. Likewise, God’s attitude of humility in becoming human reveals and overcomes the pride of humankind in trying to become as God: “To that attempt of man to become as God..., God has made answer with the gracious and triumphant act that He Himself became as man: ‘The Word was made flesh.’”⁵⁵

Second, Christ reveals the prideful character of human sin by taking on the form of a servant. “The Lord became a servant”: this is what Barth calls the “main Christological definition,” “the humility of the act of God which took place for us in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶ This reveals the prideful character of sin, since “the man for whom God is God in this [humble] way in Jesus Christ is the very opposite—the servant who wants to be lord.”⁵⁷

Third, Barth revisits the notion of Christ as “the Judge judged in our place” (*CD IV/1*,

⁵¹ Ibid., 465; ET 419.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 470; ET 423.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 479; ET 432.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

§59, Section 2), foreshadowing a key element in his doctrine of justification, namely, that God does not leave sin unpunished, but actually judges sin in Christ: “The real Judge [i.e., Christ] not only wills to accuse and sentence and judge, but does so.”⁵⁸ The Judge judges the sin of all by taking on our very sin and being judged in our place. Properly speaking, God—and Christ is God—is the Judge. Yet, at Golgotha, sinners attempted to judge the Judge judged in their place. The Judge humbly justifies the sinner, yet the sinner condemns—with no power or validity—the Judge. This paradox, again, reveals the prideful character of sin.

Lastly, the “free grace” of justification that God has accomplished in Christ reveals that human attempts at “self-help” are not only futile, but also sinfully prideful: “the man whose place and kind God made His own in Jesus Christ is, in clear antithesis to the One who in this way humbled Himself for him, the man who has always thought and still thinks that he can help himself and that in this self-help he has a claim to the help of God.”⁵⁹ Here Barth is repudiating every possible form of synergism, the idea that humans can help themselves to merit God’s help. In an exegetical excursus on Genesis 3, Barth describes Adam’s fall as a “move to self-help in paradise.”⁶⁰ First, they ate the fruit to help themselves attain unto autonomous knowledge of good and evil. Then, for a second time they committed the prideful sin of self-help when they vainly attempted to cover their shame with fig leaves. Finally, Adam attempted to help himself with the “pitiable excuse” that the woman made him eat the fruit, and Eve in turn tried to help herself with the “pitiable excuse” that the serpent made her eat it.⁶¹ The result is that humankind became “catastrophically helpless.”⁶² Yet, this is precisely the very helplessness that Christ took upon himself. On behalf and in the stead of all humans who helplessly try to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 495; ET 446.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 509; ET 458.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 518; ET 466.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

help themselves, “Jesus cried on the cross, the helpless One taking the place of all those who gaily help themselves: ‘My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?’”⁶³ It is in Christ’s humbly vicarious helplessness, then, that human attempts at self-help are revealed to be futile and sinfully prideful.

Now, if we reflect upon these four key points on the Christological notion of sin as pride, we recognise an infralapsarian Christology underlying Barth’s doctrine of sin. Recall that Barth begins his discussion of Christ’s revelation of sin as human pride by asking, “What is it that God does in Jesus Christ?”⁶⁴ What God does in Jesus Christ is, as we saw in the four key points above: (1) God became human without ceasing to be God; (2) the Lord became a servant without ceasing to be Lord; (3) the Judge became the judged without ceasing to be the Judge; (4) the Helper became helpless without ceasing to be the Helper. As we have seen, all these four aspects of what “God does in Jesus Christ” are predicated upon and for the purpose of overcoming humankind’s sin. Recall that according to supralapsarian Christology, God would have become incarnate regardless of humanity’s sin, since God has other, deeper motives behind the incarnation than to overcome sin. In the current analysis this is clearly not the case for the Christology underlying Barth’s understanding of human sin as pride. It is on the basis of an infralapsarian Christology that Barth discusses how the incarnation reveals humankind’s sin concretely as pride.

The Sinner as Fallen: Infralapsarian *Homo Lapsus*

Having discussed human sin as pride, Barth proceeds to expound on the statement that “the man of sin is fallen man.”⁶⁵ He begins with two caveats, the first of which is hardly surprising: no knowledge of the fall is possible apart from “the revelation of the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 462; ET 417.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 531; ET 478.

Word of God,” that is, Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

The second caveat is a recapitulation of the notion of sin as nothingness (i.e., “that which is not”), and here Barth’s basically infralapsarian understanding of God’s covenantal election-in-Christ is of fundamental importance: “As *eternally ordained* and unalterably established by God, [the covenant of God with man] is faithfully kept and restored and renewed by Him *with reference to fallen man* as God turns to him.”⁶⁷ My italics here manifest the basically infralapsarian character of Barth’s doctrine of election: the object of election is “fallen man” (*homo lapsus*).

Whatever nothingness is, God is its Lord, even though “with this nothingness He Himself has nothing to do according to His positive will.”⁶⁸ Because nothingness is under God’s ruling and absolutely rejected by God, when God’s creaturely covenant-partner falls prey to it, he/she cannot be “fallen completely away from God.”⁶⁹

Again, nothingness has no ontological status, and this means that fallen humanity cannot be “absolutely and ontologically godless.”⁷⁰ For Barth, “to speak of an ontological godlessness of fallen man, of a sinfulness which has become the substance of man,” would be to idolise sin as a second god to which “the living God who is in covenant with man and has become one with him has not merely suffered death but fallen prey to it.”⁷¹

But if humankind’s fallenness is not to be understood as “a sinfulness which has become the substance of man,” and if humanity’s fall into the state of corruption is to be understood in light of Christ, then, asks Barth, “What is the *status corruptionis* which is set aside by [Christ’s] intervention but cannot be set aside except by His intervention?”⁷²

Barth answers immediately: “Our corruption cannot be any different, it cannot be

⁶⁶ Ibid., 531f; ET 478f.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 535; ET 481.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 534; ET 480.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 535; ET 481.

⁷² Ibid., 538; ET 484.

greater and it cannot be less than that on account of which, and to overcome which, He suffered and died for us on the cross.”⁷³ So, then, Barth proceeds to put the question more concretely: “What is this corruption of ours which is shown to us by Him as the Saviour who is as such the living Word of God to us?”⁷⁴ That is, how does Jesus Christ reveal to us what our fallenness is?

The Weight of Sin: God’s Son Among Homo Lapsus

Barth answers this question with three basically infralapsarian propositions. First, the *status corruptionis* “consists in the fact that man is God’s debtor.”⁷⁵ Here Barth is explicitly engaging with Anselm’s satisfaction theory set forth in *Cur Deus Homo*. Barth agrees with Anselm that human sin consists in an infinite debt that the creature owes to the Creator, and that this “disturbance... has to be followed by some action which radically reverses it.”⁷⁶ The reason, as Anselm puts it, is that “it does not befit God to allow anything inordinate in his kingdom.”⁷⁷ Thus far Barth is in agreement with Anselm, but he takes issue with Anselm’s conclusion from these statements that “it is not worthy of God to forgive man his sin *sola misericordia* [by mercy alone].”⁷⁸

Recall that for Barth, the incarnation does not contradict the concept of God, but fulfills it. Similarly, the atonement, which for Barth is objectively accomplished in the eternal act of incarnation, is “the action of His perfect righteousness as well as that of His pure mercy, and therefore supremely worthy of God.”⁷⁹ Here again, Barth’s actualism comes to the foreground: God is Being-in-act and as such God’s act never contradicts God’s Being. The incarnate act and atoning works of the Son “overflowed” from God’s

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 540; ET 486.

⁷⁷ Ibid. See Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, I. 12. Translation mine.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 542; ET 487.

Triune Being *ad intra* “in the form of avenging righteousness..., so that in face of this opposition [from fallen creatures as debtors] His forgiveness was His... sword of justice. This God, the God who judges this way, is God alone, in His *unchanging being and essence*.”⁸⁰

Underlying this actualistic understanding of God’s immutability in incarnation and atonement is an infralapsarian Christology, namely, the conviction that the Word became flesh to be among fallen creatures and make restitution on behalf of the human debtor: “this God who is *the same in every part of His being* is the God attested in Holy Scripture, and decisively with the witness of His appearance and action in the manifestation and revelation of His own Son *amongst fallen men*.”⁸¹ On the basis of this infralapsarian Christology Barth concretely sets forth his first proposition in answer to the question of human corruption:

It is clear that the God who in sheer mercy encounters the man who has become His debtor, as the God who forgives him his sin, is the God who, without being untrue to Himself but supremely true, is gracious to man, because first He is gracious in Himself, in His own inward being, and that as such He is almighty and holy and righteous, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord of His covenant with man.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 542f; ET 487f. Emphasis mine.

⁸¹ Ibid., 542; ET 487. Emphases mine.

⁸² Ibid. Note here that Barth distinguishes between God’s “inward being” and God as “Lord of His covenant with man.” The latter presupposes the former: God is “*first* gracious... in His own inward being,” and then as such God is “the Lord of His covenant with man.” By the same token, incarnation presupposes the *Logos asarkos*; election presupposes the immanent Trinity. Of course, in this very part-volume (IV/1), Barth states that “we must not refer to the second ‘person’ of the Trinity as such, to the eternal Son or the eternal Word of God *in abstracto*, and therefore to the so-called *λόγος ἄσαρκος*” (55; ET 52). He emphasises that the Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, Barth is here making an *epistemological* rather than *ontological* statement: there is no point in regressing to the concept of a *Logos asarkos* above and behind the *Logos incarnandus* when all that we may know of the Son is the one self-revealed in history as Jesus of Nazareth. This does not mean that Barth treats the *Logos asarkos* as *simpliciter* identical with the *Logos incarnandus*. In fact, Barth acknowledges the *Logos asarkos* as “the content of a necessary and important concept in trinitarian doctrine when we have to understand the revelation and dealings of God in the light of their free basis in the inner being and essence of God” (Ibid.). McCormack recognises this too (see McCormack, “Grace and Being,” 193), but he thinks that this is an inconsistency on Barth’s part. On my reading, the “Son of God in Himself” is a concept that Barth presupposes, even though he refuses to probe into it because in *CD IV/1* he is “concerned with the revelation and dealings of God, and particularly with the atonement, with the person and work of the Mediator,” and “it is pointless, as it is impermissible, to return to the inner being and essence of God and especially to the second person of the Trinity as such, in such a way that we ascribe to this person another form than that which God Himself has given in willing to reveal Himself and to act outwards” (55; ET 52). In other words, in a way akin to Kant’s transcendental method of positing God’s existence without claiming any particular knowledge thereof, Barth posits the concept of the *Logos asarkos* as a necessary presupposition of (i.e., logically preceding) God’s election to become incarnate, but refuses

Fallen Humanity: Unaltered Good Nature and Total Corruption of Being

Barth's second proposition is this: "The fact that Jesus Christ died totally for the reconciliation of every man as such, for the man who exists in this way, means decisively that this corruption is both radical and total."⁸³ Here Barth expressly indicates that he is using Kantian language.⁸⁴ While he appeals to Kantian notions in explaining the radicalness and totality of human corruption, his deeply Christocentric understanding of salvation stands in sharp contrast to Kant's idea of a universal moral vocation to restore the good predispositions within all humans.⁸⁵

For Barth, Kant's moral religion would be in agreement with "the Roman-Catholic-Neo-Protestant side" of the debate on human nature.⁸⁶ Barth insists against this view that there is no "relic or core of goodness which persists in man in spite of his sin... The only relic that we can speak of is that of God's good and gracious will operative to man and over him—the being of man before God, as the object of His grace even in the form of judgment."⁸⁷ Barth agrees with Kant that fallen humanity "lives by an 'evil principle,' with a 'bias towards evil,' in the power of a 'radical evil' which shows itself virulent and active in his life..., with which he is not identical, but to which he

to claim knowledge of the pre-incarnate Son above and behind the Word eternally *incarnandus* as revealed in Christ: "The second 'person' of the Godhead in Himself and as such is not God the Reconciler. In Himself and as such He is not revealed to us. In Himself and as such He is not *Deus pro nobis*, either ontologically or epistemologically" (Ibid.). That is, the God made known to humankind is the *Deus revelatus*, *Deus pro nobis*, while the *Deus absconditus*, *Logos asarkos*, God-in-Godself, is transcendently posited as a necessary presupposition of the incarnation, but one cannot claim concrete knowledge thereof. For Kant's transcendental argument for God's existence, see Kant, "The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God," in David Walford, ed., trans., *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 107ff. Also see Clifford Anderson, "A Theology of Experience? Karl Barth and the Transcendental Argument," in B. McCormack and C. Anderson, eds., *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

⁸³ *KD* IV/1, 548; ET 492.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 551; ET 495.

⁸⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. Trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 32ff.

⁸⁶ *KD* IV/1, 548; ET 492.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 549; ET 493.

commits himself and is committed.”⁸⁸ Yet, the fact that Jesus died totally for every human means for Barth that “there is... no ‘nature-reserve’” that fallen humans can restore by the kind of synergism for which Kant, as with Roman Catholicism and Neo-Protestantism, hopes.⁸⁹

On the other hand, Barth also takes issues with the “Augustinian-Reformed” side of the controversy over human nature.⁹⁰ He insists that humankind “has not lost—even in part—the good nature which was created by God, to acquire instead another and evil nature.”⁹¹ Barth is worried that such a view of human fallenness would lead to a kind of dualism whereby sin is given some sort of an ontological status as human *nature*.

To be sure, sinful corruption lies at the “very core of his [the human’s] being—the heart, as the Bible puts it.”⁹² Yet this radical and total corruption of the human being is not as such any part of human *nature*. While the Barth of, say, 1936, would still consider humankind as “by nature sinful,”⁹³ he now contends that “man himself in his nature and determination and attitude and capacity as they are still good is not a quantum which is confronted by his sinfulness as a greater or lesser quantum..., failing to [counterbalance it] according to the pessimistic view of Augustine and the older Protestantism.”⁹⁴

For Barth, this Augustinian-Reformed understanding of fallen human nature is “quite untenable,” as “the Bible accuses man as a sinner from head to foot, but it does not dispute to man his *full and unchanged humanity*, his *nature as God created it good*...”⁹⁵ For Barth, sin as nothingness is completely foreign to the human nature that God created good.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 551; ET 495.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 552; ET 496.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 548; ET 492.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 550; ET 494.

⁹³ *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 6.

⁹⁴ *KD IV/1*, 549; ET 493.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 548; ET 492.

Of course, Barth recognises that Ephesians 2:3 speaks of the fallen human being as “‘by nature’ a ‘child of wrath,’” and that the Heidelberg Catechism, which he regards highly, also describes the inclination of human nature as sinful.⁹⁶ Thus Barth concedes that “it is perhaps permissible to speak of the ‘poisoned’ nature of fallen man” in a certain sense, and yet he stresses: “But in order to put the matter exactly, avoiding that idea of the fatefulness of man’s being in sin—to which even the term ‘poisoned nature’ might give rise—I would prefer, if we are going to use the word ‘poison,’ to describe man as one who poisons himself in his pride.”⁹⁷ In a word, Barth rejects the notion that humankind is by *nature* sinful, fallen, or poisoned.

This does not mean that Barth does not treat human fallenness seriously. In fact, “the seriousness of [humanity’s] situation is much greater than can be expressed by the idea of a setting aside or damaging of his nature which is good.”⁹⁸ The seriousness of the radical and total corruption of fallen humankind, with its “consequent sinful perversion that extends to the whole of his being without exception,”⁹⁹ consists in the fact that “the one whole man whom God created good..., whom He does not cease in the very least to recognise and honour and claim as His covenant-partner, that this man elected and willed and ordained and equipped for the service of God has turned away from Him and is now... corrupt and guilty.”¹⁰⁰

Without ever ceasing to be God’s good creature and covenant-partner elected in Christ, the sinner actually gives in and falls prey to that inner nothingness which is not and has never been and will never be a part of human nature. Thereby sin corrupts the human being to the very core.

Sin not only consists in the *acts* of humankind; it extends to every part of the human

⁹⁶ Ibid., 550; ET 494.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 549; ET 493.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 548; ET 492.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 549f; ET 493f.

being-in-act, as it were: “He sins, but more than that, he is a sinner.”¹⁰¹ In this sense Barth would describe humanity’s fall with the term “original sin.”¹⁰² On his view, the *peccatum originale* should not be taken as the hereditary sin of which the Early Church speaks. “‘Hereditary sin’ has a hopelessly naturalistic, deterministic and even fatalistic ring.”¹⁰³ What the term “original sin” should convey is rather “the original and radical and therefore the comprehensive and total *act* of man, with the imprisonment of his existence in that circle of evil being and evil activity.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, by “original sin” Barth means that fallen humans are corrupt not only in their sinful acts, but also in their very being—extensively and radically so. (As we shall see, this has profound implications for Barth’s understanding of the sinlessness of Christ’s *act* as well as Christ’s human *nature*).

This is the point where Barth’s infralapsarian Christology comes into play: Christ reveals human corruption to be original and radical, since the incarnation is God’s act to eradicate this sinful origin in order to bestow upon humankind the true origin to which God has elected all humans from eternity. Barth comments that Christ took the place of a human being “to set aside this false beginning and origin in order that he may be born again from above by the Spirit, in order that by that new beginning and origin he may be a new man.”¹⁰⁵ That is, the Son of God became incarnate *in order to* take care of the problem of sin. Barth’s Christology is, again, clearly infralapsarian here.

Romans 11:32—An Infralapsarian Exegesis

Barth’s third proposition in answer to the question of human corruption is especially dense and complex. Here he cites Romans 11:32 to offer an actualistic account of a

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 551; ET 495.

¹⁰² Ibid., 557; ET 500.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 558; ET 501.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 557; ET 500.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 552; ET 496.

basically infralapsarian formulation of double predestination on the basis of his infralapsarian Christology. The proposition is this: “The fact that God willed to have mercy and did have mercy on all men in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, means that ‘He hath concluded them all in disobedience.’”¹⁰⁶

Recall that in *Romans II* and *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth would appeal to Romans 11:32 to describe reprobation as the divine conclusion of all in disobedience (see Chapters 3 and 4). This is no longer the case in *CD IV/1*, where reprobation is the wrathful, punitive No of God vicariously suffered by Christ for the eternal sublation of sin with the election and justification of all, while the divine conclusion of all in disobedience is a description of humankind’s fall into the *status corruptionis*. To be sure, this divine “concluding” does imply that God placed sinners under the verdict of divine reprobation, but these two concepts are not identical as such. Barth explains: “‘Concluded’ means that He has placed them under an authoritative verdict and sentence which cannot be questioned or disputed, let alone resisted, with all the consequences which that involves.”¹⁰⁷

According to Romans 11:32, this divine “concluding” serves the purpose of God’s mercy. Barth interprets the teleological language of this biblical verse in a nuanced, actualistic way: “This presupposition [of divine concluding] *corresponds* to the mercy of God.”¹⁰⁸ With this actualistic interpretation, Barth’s aim is to avoid attributing sin to God’s Being-in-act. On one hand, he would insist, as he did in *CD III/3* (see Chapter 8), that humanity’s fall into sin is completely under God’s sovereign ruling. On the other hand, he would refuse to describe God as having caused humankind’s sin in any sort of way. Humanity’s fall is indeed *opus Dei* in a certain sense, but it is absolutely *alienum* to God. As *opus Dei* it somehow corresponds to God’s inward Being, but by no means does

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 558; ET 501.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

this mean that there is a dark, evil, or capricious side of God to which humanity's fall corresponds. Rather, as a negative "presupposition" of election-in-Christ as the *Aufhebung* of reprobation, humanity's fall corresponds to God's act of mercy in Christ, and only by corresponding to this act does the divine concluding also, *secundum quid*, correspond to the mercy of God's immutable and never-capricious Being.

Additionally, as George Hunsinger points out, Barth assigns to the word "all" in Romans 11:32 an exegetical importance that sets him quite apart from the entire Western (Latin) theological tradition.¹⁰⁹ Barth comments, with reference to Romans 9:15: "Those on whom He willed to have mercy and did have mercy are the very ones that He had concluded or placed under this verdict. In both cases the reference is to all men."¹¹⁰ These are the two "unities" wherein "all men stand according to the order and will of God."¹¹¹

The definitive unity is the actual union of all humans with Christ. In one sense, this union has been objectively accomplished from all eternity. In another sense, human actions in the here-and-now as characterised by pride and disobedience still do not correspond perfectly to Christ's eternal act of humility and obedience in the incarnation.

There is thus an eschatological aspect to Barth's actualistic understanding of the unity of all humans *in Christo*. Therefore, he would comment that "the unity of the divine mercy" is one that "embraces them [all humans] *prospectively*, in their *future being*."¹¹² This unity of the divine mercy, though futuristic in the here-and-now, "is shown to them as the Son of God *has come* to them in the far country."¹¹³ That is, the eschatological aspect of divine mercy has its objective basis in what Christ has eternally and actually accomplished: the future tense corresponds perfectly to the perfect tense.

¹⁰⁹ See George Hunsinger, "A Tale of Two Simultaneities," in John McDowell and Mike Higton, eds., *Conversing with Barth* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 77.

¹¹⁰ *KD* IV/1, 558; ET 501.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.* Emphases mine.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

By contrast, the divine “concluding” as “the unity into which God has fused them [all humans] and as which He sees and addresses and treats them” is one that “embraces them retrospectively, in their past being.”¹¹⁴ As real as the disobedience of all humans may appear in the here-and-now, it has no ontological status. It belongs to “man’s past, with the being which lies behind him.”¹¹⁵

That is, the state of disobedience into which God concluded all humans has been eternally sublated in and by Jesus Christ. Therefore, even the perfect tense is insufficient to describe this past unity. It can only be described properly in the “pluperfect tense”: “The kingdom of darkness is the conclusion in disobedience, the unity into which the divine verdict *had* previously fused all men.”¹¹⁶ With reference to the definitive unity of God’s will for all humans *in Christo*, the kingdom of darkness pertains to an eternal past already negated and was never real in any ontological sense.

Now, underlying this entire actualistic interpretation of divine mercy and concluding in Romans 11:32 is a basically infralapsarian understanding of both predestination and incarnation, which for Barth are inseparable because predestination is *in Christo*. Barth sees God’s electing grace in Christ, “*the* mercy of God,” as presupposing the divine concluding of all in the state of disobedience: “Those on whom He willed to have mercy and did have mercy are the very ones that He had concluded or placed under this verdict.”¹¹⁷ That is, the object of God’s gracious election is *homo lapsus*.

Furthermore, the incarnation is for the salvation of all from the “state and being of disobedience,” which “is the unity of their being in the far country in which God has sought them in His Son to call and bring them home.”¹¹⁸ Combining this infralapsarian Christology and doctrine of predestination, Barth contends that “the one who was set

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 559; ET 502.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 558; ET 501.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

aside in Jesus Christ [i.e., elected in Christ] and who is defined and claimed and described as such in the divine verdict *is the man of sin.*”¹¹⁹ It is on the basis of this “purified infralapsarianism,” as I suggest it be so-called, that Barth proceeds to make his third key point with regard to the “fall of the man of sin”: “To the contradiction of the being of the man of sin as such—and here we see the real paradox and absurdity of his being—there is added the contradiction of his being as one who is still alive, although he was put to death once and for all and *actually* died on the cross of Golgotha.”¹²⁰

History of Christ and Fallen World-History

Moving on, Barth concludes his exegesis of Romans 11:32 by turning to a discussion of Adam and the history of fallenness, or the fallenness of Adamic history. Noteworthy here is the fact that Barth does not use the word *Historie* to denote the “godless” (illusorily so—the history of God’s covenant-partner cannot possibly be God-less!) history of the world. Recall from previous chapters that in *CD I/1* Barth distinguishes between *Geschichte* and *Historie*: the former denotes revelational history as God’s act, while the latter is plain history as understood by historians with their naturalistic assumptions—“*bloss historisch.*” In *CD IV/1* Barth no longer uses the binary concept of *Geschichte-versus-Historie*, but he still uses the word *Geschichte* with more or less the same meaning, even though his understanding of God’s Being-in-act has undergone significant maturation. It is thus surprising that instead of referring to the apparently and illusorily godless history of the world and the naturalistic literary genre associated therewith as *Historie*, Barth chooses the word *Geschichte*.

In *CD IV/1* Barth distinguishes between two kinds of *Geschichte* that are inseparable albeit with abiding distinction. The first is Adamic history—humanity’s history of

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 559; ET 502.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 560; ET 502f.

fallenness—which Barth always identifies clearly either by the context, or by the term “world-history” (*Weltgeschichte*). This *Weltgeschichte* is distinct from and yet inseparable from the *Geschichte* of Christ, which Barth defines as the history-of-obedience of the Son of God.

For the Barth of *CD IV/1*, there is no history that falls outside of God’s *Geschichte* in Christ, thus Adamic history has no independent status. The *Weltgeschichte* of Adam’s fall took place because God has rejected it absolutely in Christ’s *Geschichte*, and in rejecting Adamic history Christ took it upon himself in order to sublimate it. There could have been no *Weltgeschichte* without the Christ-*Geschichte*: *Weltgeschichte* is, so to say, the negative presupposition of the Christ-*Geschichte* (here again we have a reference to Barth’s infralapsarian Christology).

Barth begins his discussion of humanity’s fallenness as *Weltgeschichte* by commenting that in Romans 11:32, “when the word ‘all’ is used... it is very much to the point to think of what we mean by the word ‘history.’”¹²¹ That is to say, “world-history is concluded in disobedience.”¹²² World-history as such is “apart from the will and Word and work of God.”¹²³ To be sure, “this does not mean that it is outside the divine control, that it is abandoned to chance, or fate..., or indeed that it stands under the dominion of the devil... The history of the world which God made in Jesus Christ, and with a view to Him, cannot cease to have its centre and goal in Him.”¹²⁴ Yet, this “goal” is God’s Yes as *Aufhebung* of God’s No to “the history which is grounded and determined and characterized by... corruption.”¹²⁵ World-history as such, then, is “grounded on the ignoring and rejection of the will and Word and work of God and determined [that is,

¹²¹ Ibid., 563; ET 505.

¹²² Ibid., 564; ET 506. Translation mine. In many instances, Bromiley’s English translation renders “*Weltgeschichte*” as either “history of the world” or simply “history” without the predicate, which tends to blur the distinction between Adamic history and the history of Christ.

¹²³ Ibid., 563; ET 505.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 564; ET 506.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

constituted] in this way, by this ignoring and rejection.”¹²⁶

Already here the basically infralapsarian character of Barth’s Christological understanding of double predestination is clear: God’s Yes in Christ to world-history is not just a Yes, but a Yes presupposing a No, and this No is to the fallenness and corruption of Adamic history. That is, election presupposes the fall; the object of election is *homo lapsus*. As Barth now sees it—a view of history that was still quite implicit in *CD* II/2—by the act of election-in-Christ God participates in humankind’s history of fallenness so that world-history may in turn participate in God through Christ.

In a move somewhat reminiscent of Kant, Barth identifies world-history and all humans therein, “concluded in disobedience,” as Adam: “The Bible gives to this history and to all men in this sense the general title of Adam.”¹²⁷ Barth clarifies that “the meaning of Adam is simply man, and as the bearer of this name which denotes the being and essence of all other men, Adam appears in the Genesis story as the man who owes his existence directly to the creative will and Word and act of God without any human intervention, the man who is to that extent the first man.”¹²⁸

Here we see that Barth does not deny the real existence of Adam as the first human directly created by God. Yet, Barth would not use the term “historical Adam” to denote this first human, because the genre of historiography deals with natural events, but the creation of Adam was supernatural. Thus Barth resorts to the category of saga, a genre that may be used to properly narrate God’s participation in the creaturely realm.

It must be noted that by using the term “saga” Barth is not claiming that the creation story is a figment of the imagination or that what is narrated in Genesis 1-2 did not really happen. Barth is aware that “saga” is generally understood as the literary “form which, using intuition and imagination, has to take up historical narration at the point where

¹²⁶ Ibid., 563; ET 505.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 565; ET 507.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 566; ET 507f.

events are no longer susceptible as such to historical proof.”¹²⁹ As Barth sees it, this general description applies to the biblical saga as well, but he emphasises that “within this *genre* biblical saga is a special instance which cannot be compared with others but has to be seen and understood in and for itself.”¹³⁰ Biblical saga is special because therein “intuition and imagination are used but in order to give prophetic witness to *what has taken place* by virtue of the Word of God in the (historical or pre-historical) sphere where there can be no historical proof.”¹³¹

The creation of Adam, then, pertains to the pre-historical “sphere of biblical saga.”¹³² It was in this sphere, too, that “there took place the fall, the fall of the first man.”¹³³ According to Barth, “the biblical saga tells us that world-history began with the pride and fall of man.”¹³⁴ Recall that world-history, as he defines it, is the sphere and genre that ignores and rejects the will and Word and work of God. For Barth, “it is the name of Adam the transgressor which God gives to world-history as a whole.”¹³⁵

If world-history is Adamic history as such—as fallen history and the history of fallenness—then in world-history “there never was a golden age... The first man was immediately the first sinner.”¹³⁶ Here Barth identifies Adam, the first human, as “*primus inter pares*” (first among equals). However, this does not imply for Barth a doctrine of inherited sin.¹³⁷ Adam “has not poisoned us or passed on a disease. What we do after him is not done according to an example which irresistibly overthrows us, or in an imitation of his act which is ordained for all his successors. No one has to be Adam. We are so freely

¹²⁹ Ibid., 567; ET 508.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 568; ET 509.

¹³⁷ For a succinct discussion of this topic, see John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 73.

and on our own responsibility.”¹³⁸

Now, if the relationship between Adam and all other humans is not “one which is pragmatically grounded and demonstrable, nor is it one which can be explained in terms of a transmission between him and us,” then how is this relationship to be understood?¹³⁹ Again Barth’s answer, as always, is that this relationship must and can only be understood in light of Christ, the Word of God. “It is the Word of God which gives this name and title [Adam] to mankind and the history of man,” since “it is God’s Word which fuses all men into unity with this man as *primus inter pares*.”¹⁴⁰ The Word of God forbids us to “dream of any golden age in the past or any real progress within Adamic mankind and history or any future state of historical perfection,” because the only hope of humankind is in “the atonement which has taken place in Jesus Christ.”¹⁴¹

More concretely, Barth proposes to turn to Romans 5:12-21 in order to understand why and to what extent all humankind has been concluded in the disobedience of Adamic history.¹⁴² This is the biblical passage setting forth the famous Pauline dialectic of Christ and Adam. As Barth understands this passage, “Jesus Christ takes the first place as the original, and Adam the second place as ‘the figure of him that was to come.’”¹⁴³ For this reason, Barth contends that Paul “knew Jesus Christ first and then Adam.”¹⁴⁴

The Christ-Adam dialectic in *CD IV/1* is again to be understood in terms of the Hegelian logic of *Aufhebung*. The one end of the dialectic “does not balance” the other.¹⁴⁵ Adam “has no independent existence,” but exists only as, “as it were, the negative side of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴⁶ Adamic history as a history of rejecting God has no autonomous status;

¹³⁸ *KD IV/1*, 568; ET 509.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 569; ET 510.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 571; ET 512.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 571f; ET 512f.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 572; ET 513.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

it owes its existence to the No of God that has rejected it. Christ is the Yes of God as the (divine) rejection of (human) rejection, and it is in the history of Christ as such that Adamic world-history has been allowed to exist in order to be sublated.

Here we may note again that Barth's interpretation of the Christ-Adam relation is basically infralapsarian in both the Christological and predestinarian senses: election-in-Christ presupposes Adamic fallenness just as the incarnation is Christ's participation in fallen world-history drawing Adam's fallen race into *participatio Christi*.

The Christ-Adam Dialectic: Election and the Trinity in Recent Debates

At this juncture we might note that there are varying interpretations of Barth when it comes to his Christology in *CD IV/1*. Bruce McCormack contends that in *CD IV/1* Barth formulates a "historicised Christology" in which Barth replaces the Chalcedonian "category of 'nature with the category of 'history' and then integrating 'history' into his concept of 'person.'"¹⁴⁷ McCormack has convinced me to the extent that the Christology of *CD IV/1* is developed in a much more actualistic and historical direction than *I/2* (the first part-volume wherein Barth sets forth his Christology in the *CD*).

However, I am not sure how this would imply that the Christology of *IV/1* is "historicised" in such a way that Barth discards the Chalcedonian category of "nature." For one thing, I feel that McCormack's assertion that Barth has "replaced" the Chalcedonian category of "nature" with the category of "history" is in need of more argumentation in light of how Barth explicitly uses the term "nature" with reference to an enhypostatic-anhypostatic Christology on numerous occasions in *CD* §57-59. On this note, I also find Paul Jones's contention that Barth "effectively discards the language of 'nature' in his mature Christology" to be somewhat exaggerated, notwithstanding his otherwise

¹⁴⁷ McCormack, "Karl Barth's Historicized Christology," 222. Also see Nimmo, "Karl Barth and the *concursum Dei*."

thorough and convincing arguments.¹⁴⁸ I will devote the next section to discussing Jones's important contribution to our understanding of Christ's humanity in Barth's Christology.

For now, suffice it to say that Barth *does* use the language of "nature" in *CD IV/1*, and as we have seen, he defines human nature in a meaningful, albeit not entirely Chalcedonian, way: God created human nature to be good and it remains good in the *status corruptionis*, as sin is an alien element that never becomes a part of what God has created.

With this definition of human nature in mind, Barth states that Christ as very God assumes human nature in order to be the sinless bearer of our "flesh." (I will say more about Barth's understanding of Christ's sinlessness in the next section). He writes:

Who the one true God is, and what He is, i.e., what is His being as God, and therefore His deity, His 'divine nature,' which is also the *divine nature of Jesus Christ* if He is very God—all this we have to discover from the fact that as such He is very man and a *partaker of human nature*, from His becoming man, from His incarnation and from what He has done and suffered in the flesh. For—to put it more pointedly, the mirror in which it can be known (and is known) that He is God, and of the divine nature, is His becoming flesh and His existence in the flesh.¹⁴⁹

Again: "[The assumption of *forma servi*] corresponds to and is grounded in His *divine nature*."¹⁵⁰ In a brief exegesis of John 1:14 ("the Word became flesh..."), Barth comments that "'flesh' is the concrete *form* of *human nature* and the being of man in his world under the sign of the fall of Adam—the being of man as corrupted and therefore destroyed, as unreconciled with God and therefore lost."¹⁵¹ That is to say, "flesh" denotes human nature, which is in and of itself God's good creation, under the sign of Adam's fall that is alien to this nature. Again, recall that for Barth the human *being* is in the condition

¹⁴⁸ Paul Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 28.

¹⁴⁹ *KD IV/1*, 193; ET 177. Emphases mine.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 198; ET 182. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 180; ET 165. Emphasis mine.

of corruption, but human *nature* remains good.

In any case, in light of these passages and foregoing discussions on the Christ-Adam dialectic, I think McCormack's thesis helps us to appreciate that in *CD IV/1* Barth adds to the Chalcedonian category of "nature" a highly actualistic and historical nuance, but I wonder if it is not a bit of an exaggeration to say that this category is "replaced" by that of history. Of course, Barth's understanding of human nature is quite different from that of the Early Church, which does not shy away from speaking of human nature as fallen. Yet, I do not think a minimalist understanding of the limits of Chalcedon would preclude Barth's reinterpretation of the category of nature. Therefore, instead of contending for a "historicised Christology" in *CD IV/1*, I wonder if it would not be more helpful to say that Barth sets forth a historicised understanding of the Chalcedonian category of "nature," which he does not *replace* but *complements* and even *reinterprets* with the category of history.

Furthermore, McCormack's proposal of a "historicised Christology" in *CD IV/1* as one possible way of reading the Christ-Adam dialectic goes hand in hand with his understanding of the logical relation between incarnation and the Trinity.¹⁵² Quite impressively, by the way, as early as the 1980s Paul Fiddes had already pointed out the problem of the relations between immanent and economic Trinity in Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election (*CD II/2*), and had already discussed it with reference to the histories of Christ and Adam (*IV/1*).¹⁵³ For Barth, in God's act of election Jesus Christ is at once the electing God and elected human, and in this divine act the Son of God *is* incarnate. According to McCormack, if Barth were always consistent with the theological ontology developed in *CD II/2*, then he would not have, as he did at times,

¹⁵² More recently McCormack defended this interpretation in "Election and Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger," cited earlier in this chapter. In an earlier work he directed his arguments against van Driel: "Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. van Driel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 45ff.

¹⁵³ Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 115ff.

posited a *Logos asarkos* as the necessary presupposition of (i.e., logically preceding) God's election to become incarnate. McCormack is worried that regressing to the notion of a *Logos asarkos* above and behind the *Logos incarnandus* self-revealed in Jesus Christ would constitute metaphysical speculation. On McCormack's interpretation of Barth's mature theological ontology, the *Logos asarkos* is eternally and necessarily the *Logos incarnandus*, as there is no God-in-Godself logically prior to the God *incarnandus* and *incarnatus* as self-revealed in Jesus Christ. On this view, election-incarnation constitutes God's Triune Being; the Trinity is a function of and logically (but not chronologically, of course) presupposes God's decision to be incarnate.

When this scheme is applied to *CD IV/1*, McCormack would say that human history in Christ participates in God's very Being as what God eternally is. This would raise some difficult questions when we take into account what Barth has said about history: as we have just seen, in the history of Christ wherein Adamic history has been rejected, Adamic history is the sinful history of humanity's rejection of God. I am thus interested to see how McCormack would explain whether or not this would give to Adamic history, with all its corruption and prideful fallenness, an ontological status with its locus in the very Being of God.

Regardless of how McCormack might answer the question—I think he might appeal to his understanding of Barth's notion of the *kenosis* as one by addition and not subtraction to circumvent this potential theological problem¹⁵⁴—in his interpretation of the Christology of *CD IV/1* as “historicised,” no room is left for any supralapsarian reading. According to this “historicised Christology,” the incarnation is necessarily bound up with fallen history, thus a supralapsarian Christology claiming that God would have become incarnate regardless of humanity's fallenness is completely ruled out.

¹⁵⁴ See Bruce McCormack, “Karl Barth's Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): 243ff.

This means that predestinarian supralapsarianism is also excluded in McCormack's interpretation of Barth. Barth describes election in terms of God's faithfulness to God's covenant-partner in Christ, who as electing God is himself also God's very covenant-partner elected from all eternity. According to McCormack's understanding of Barth, God's electing grace could not have been apart from or without regard to the fallen Adamic history that has been taken up into Christ and in which Christ participates. Thus McCormack rightly identifies "the object of God's electing grace" as "the sinful human," as we saw in Chapter 2.¹⁵⁵

Speaking of Christ as the object of double predestination in Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election, McCormack stresses that "God's eternal will is for fellowship with fallen, sinful human beings."¹⁵⁶ That is, the *obiectum praedestinationis* is necessarily *homo lapsus*—this is the basic conviction of infralapsarianism.

The other way of reading Barth is to take him as positing a pre-incarnate Trinity and thus a *Logos asarkos* as the necessary presupposition of (i.e., logically preceding) election and incarnation. On this view, God is in and of Godself Triune and by a free decision became the electing God *incarnandus* without ceasing to be the same *Logos asarkos*. God-in-Godself, in God's "inward being" (a term that Barth himself uses, as we saw earlier), does not participate in history, nor history in God-in-Godself.¹⁵⁷ Humanity, which for the Barth of *CD IV/1* is in one sense synonymous with world-history, is what God has assumed by the eternal act of election, and this act presupposes the Trinity of God's inward Being.

¹⁵⁵ Bruce McCormack, *Justification in Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 191. Italics original.

¹⁵⁶ Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 198.

¹⁵⁷ "The second 'person' of the Godhead in Himself and as such is not God the Reconciler. In Himself and as such He is not revealed to us. In Himself and as such He is not *Deus pro nobis*, either ontologically or epistemologically." See *KD IV/1*, 54; ET 52.

Arguments for this view have been advanced notably by Paul Molnar, Edwin van Driel, and George Hunsinger, among others.¹⁵⁸ This is not the place for me to express how I think Barth should be understood—I have done that in two earlier footnotes in this chapter. My intention now is to engage this reading of Barth with my understanding of his Christological doctrine of election—especially the nuanced version set forth in *CD* IV/1—as basically infralapsarian.

In adopting this interpretation of Barth on election and Trinity, one would be tempted to resort to a supralapsarian view of his Christological doctrine of election in order to steer away from some theological difficulties. According to Barth, election is God’s eternal covenantal act to be *for* and *with* God’s covenant-partner by the act of incarnation. In this act God becomes what the covenant-partner is, namely, human, without ceasing to be God. By this act, then, God actually takes humanity into what becomes of the life of the Triune God. Now, if the covenant-partner to whom God has pledged faithfulness, the *obiectum praedestinationis*, is sinful human—*homo lapsus*—would this not imply that by the incarnation God actually takes sin into God’s very own Being? Does the incarnation not make the Son of God a sinner and a reprobate?¹⁵⁹

I wonder whether van Driel’s proposal of a supralapsarian reading of Barth is partly driven by the concern to avoid ascribing sin to the Son of God and thus to what becomes of the life of the Triune God (I have explained van Driel’s supralapsarian interpretation of Barth in Chapter 2). Van Driel contends that “we have on Barth’s side... the decree of election, which is not part of God’s nature, but dependent on the divine will, and

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Paul Molnar, “The Trinity, Election and God’s Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin Hector,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 (2006): 294ff; Edwin van Driel, “Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ,” *Scottish Journal of Systematic Theology* 60 (2007): 45ff; George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 179ff.

¹⁵⁹ I am indebted to Professor Paul Fiddes for putting this question to me and encouraging me to think it through.

contingent, since God could have been God without being the God of election.”¹⁶⁰ So far so good—by this manoeuvre van Driel (as well as Molnar and Hunsinger for that matter) would avoid attributing sin to God’s nature in a way that McCormack’s reading of Barth might. Yet, as if worried that election might be described as an act of taking sin into God’s nature, van Driel asserts that in Barth’s theology “the ontological and epistemic principles that govern divine revelation are not a result of sin, but given with the nature of Creator and creation. Incarnation, as the necessary means of divine self-disclosure, is therefore a supralapsarian event...”¹⁶¹ That is, the incarnation was God’s act of revealing Godself to humankind regardless of sin, and thus the humanity that God has taken unto Godself is unfallen. In this way, van Driel’s supralapsarian interpretation of Barth can avoid attributing sin to God’s Being in any way.

However, as I have argued, Barth clearly indicates that God’s covenant-partner is *sinful human*, and that the incarnation—as depicted in *CD IV/1*—is God’s act of assuming humanity *in Adam*. The Adamic history that the Son of God has assumed by the incarnation began with the fall, and in it there is no “golden age” whatsoever. As I argued in Chapter 2, the mainstream understanding of Barth is such that both election and incarnation presuppose the fallenness of humanity. Therefore, as much as van Driel may succeed in rescuing Barth, as it were, from ascribing sin to God’s Being, his interpretation contradicts what Barth expressly states and how the majority of mainstream scholars understand Barth’s view of election, incarnation, and the fall.

It was none other than Hunsinger who, as if in dialogue with van Driel, states that in Barth’s theology, election (and thus the incarnation) “presupposes the creation and fall of the world.”¹⁶² So how might Hunsinger avoid describing Barth’s view of the incarnation

¹⁶⁰ Van Driel, “Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ,” 53.

¹⁶¹ Edwin van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 77.

¹⁶² Hunsinger, “Election and Trinity,” 193.

as an act whereby God takes sin into the Triune Being? The key here is to recognise the *abiding distinction* between the deity and humanity of Christ, and thus between the Son of God in Godself and the human Jesus. Hunsinger writes: “When Barth states that Jesus Christ is ‘the subject of election’ he is not speaking without qualification (*simpliciter*) but only in a certain respect (*secundum quid*).”¹⁶³

What Hunsinger means to say might be summarised by a statement that Barth himself makes in *CD II/2*: “as the Son of the Father He [Jesus Christ] has no need of any special election.”¹⁶⁴ Christ is electing God as Son of God, and elected human as Jesus of Nazareth. These two are not *simpliciter* identical. They are one and inseparable for sure, but there is an abiding distinction between Christ’s deity and humanity such that strictly speaking the one elected is not the Son of God but Jesus the human being in whom all humans participate.

Hunsinger explains this notion of abiding distinction:

The *logos asarkos* is not eliminated upon becoming *ensarkos*. On the contrary, as intimated by the doctrine of the extra Calvinisticum, the Logos subsists in two modes (*asarkos* in eternity/*ensarkos* in history) simultaneously (through a pattern of unity-in-distinction). It is one and the same unabridged Logos in two simultaneous modes of existence—*totus/totus*, primary and secondary objectivity. The *logos asarkos* becomes the *logos ensarkos* without ceasing to be the eternal *logos asarkos* in God’s relationship in and for himself to all eternity.¹⁶⁵

In this way, when Christ assumes human nature and takes up Adamic history into his own person, the Son *qua* Son and therewith the inner Being of the Triune God remains unchanged and untainted by fallen world-history. This is how I think Hunsinger might safeguard his reading of Barth from attributing human fallenness to God’s Being.

At this juncture I might add that for Barth the human nature Christ has assumed is not in and of itself fallen. Contra the contention that Barth holds to a “fallenness view” of

¹⁶³ Ibid., 182.

¹⁶⁴ *KD II/2*, 110; ET 103. Emphases mine.

¹⁶⁵ Hunsinger, “Election and Trinity,” 194.

Christ's humanity,¹⁶⁶ he insists that Christ's humanity is in and of itself sinless. The incarnation is such that Christ assumed sinless human *nature* and participates in Adamic *history*, the sinful *condition* of all other human beings, uniting them to his own humanity, thereby taking on the sin of all. Barth makes this point crystal clear in his discussion of the Christ-Adam relation in *CD IV/1*: "This other [Jesus], too, came directly from God, not as a creature only, but as the Son of God and Himself God by nature. He, too, was a sinner and debtor, but as the sinless and guiltless bearer of the sins of others, the sins of all other men."¹⁶⁷ In other words, human fallenness was transferred to Christ's humanity by means of the union between him and the rest of the human race.

In view of the sinlessness of Christ's own humanity, then, we can see that Hunsinger's understanding of the logical relationship between election and the Trinity in Barth's theology, with its underlying infralapsarianism, is safeguarded from describing the humanity of Christ as in itself fallen, much less ascribing sin to the Being of the Triune God.

While I am convinced by Hunsinger's interpretation, Fiddes's critical analysis from the 1980s serves as a reminder that the Trinity-election debate in recent Barth scholarship reflects at least a certain tension in Barth's own theology. Fiddes seems to be more in line with Hunsinger in stating that for Barth, "God in himself is holy mystery, but we can be confident that the being of God *corresponds* to his self-revelation," as "there is an 'analogy of relations' between the Triune God in essence and the Triune God as revealed."¹⁶⁸ On this reading of Barth, however, Fiddes comments that "there is... bound to be a gap between the immanent and the economic Trinity since this leaves room for

¹⁶⁶ For example, Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90ff.

¹⁶⁷ *KD IV/1*, 571; ET 512.

¹⁶⁸ Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 116.

God's freedom to reveal himself as a work of sheer grace."¹⁶⁹ At this juncture, Fiddes's criticism appears to be similar to McCormack's concern that when Barth posits the *Logos asarkos* as a logical presupposition of election-incarnation, Barth is contradicting his own Christocentric ontology by engaging in metaphysical speculation of a God back behind the God self-revealed in Christ. Fiddes comments that Barth's treatment of the immanent and economic Trinity "drives too great a wedge between the being of God in himself and his acts in the world."¹⁷⁰ This seems to be precisely what McCormack calls "an inconsistency in Barth's thought," against which he tries to "register a critical correction."¹⁷¹ Whether this is such an "inconsistency" that needs to be corrected or a theological tension that Barth intentionally leaves unresolved is a topic worth exploring, but what appears to me to be the consensus now is that he does posit the *Logos asarkos* as the logical presupposition of election-incarnation.

Christ's Sinlessness and Human Nature: In Dialogue with Paul Dafydd Jones

We now return to the topic of Christ's sinlessness. My understanding of Barth's notion of the sinlessness of Christ's humanity, as stated in the foregoing discussions, is, of course, not the only possible interpretation. Paul Jones's treatment of this topic in his brilliant book, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, offers a different perspective. The book itself is one of the most thorough studies to date of the development of Christology in the *Church Dogmatics*. In what follows I shall show that although I read Barth differently than Jones when it comes to the question of how Barth treats the Chalcedonian category of "nature" (*physis*), he and I nonetheless share the same understanding that in Barth's mature theology Christ's person cannot be discussed without soteriological reference (i.e., Barth's Christology is infralapsarian), and that

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷¹ McCormack, "Grace and Being," 193.

election goes hand in hand with God's rejection of sin (i.e., Barth's doctrine of election is basically infralapsarian).

While Jones's reading of Barth's notion of Christ's sinlessness is thorough and convincing in most parts, I feel that one of his basic assertions is somewhat overstated, namely, that Barth "effectively discards the language of 'nature' in his mature Christology."¹⁷² Here Jones is in agreement with McCormack's assessment of Hunsinger's description of Barth's mature Christology as "basically Chalcedonian": they are of the opinion that the term "Chalcedonian" might not be entirely helpful in describing Barth's mature Christology because he has discarded the Chalcedonian category of "nature."

I have already shown earlier that McCormack has yet to explain what Barth means when he uses the word "nature" to describe Christ's divine and human agencies on a number of occasions in *CD IV/1*. While McCormack's proposal of understanding Barth's mature Christology as "historicised" is concerned with *CD IV/1*, Jones, recognising Barth's occasional use of the word "nature" in this part-volume, goes even further than McCormack, claiming that "*Natur* and *Wesen* take up no meaningful role in *Church Dogmatics I/2* and thereafter."¹⁷³ This enables Jones to uphold his thesis regarding Barth's disposal of the Chalcedonian category of nature while liberally quoting passages wherein Barth explicitly uses the term *Natur* or *Wesen*.¹⁷⁴

I feel that this strategy needs to be defended with more efforts with regard to Barth's meaningful discourse on human nature in *CD IV/1*, which I have just discussed. Jones's chapter on *CD IV/1*, like McCormack's essay on Barth's "historicised Christology," focuses on §59. Of course, this is completely warranted, since §59 is *the* paragraph in which Barth sets forth his actualistic-historical rendition of the incarnation under the

¹⁷² Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 28.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

rubric of “The Obedience of the Son of God.” However, as Jones astutely observes, “no single paragraph, chapter or part volume conveys the essence of Barth’s Christology. Conversely, every paragraph chapter and part volume of *Dogmatics* conveys some part of Barth’s Christology.”¹⁷⁵ In light of this insight, I think Jones might have considered modifying his thesis regarding Barth’s use of the term “nature,” had he paid closer attention to the Christology that underlies §60, “The Pride and Fall of Man.”

As I have shown, in §60, “human nature” is a meaningful and significant term. For Barth, God created human nature to be good, and it remains good despite humankind’s fall into corruption. Whatever is corrupt and sinful about the human being does not pertain and is absolutely alien to its *nature*, since sin as a form of nothingness can never be a part of the good human nature that God created.

When Barth says that Christ took on human nature, then, it could not have been sinful nature. As I pointed out towards the end of the last section, Christ assumed human nature that is in and of itself sinless, but in the very mean time, by taking on human nature he participates in the corrupted condition of Adamic history. The sin of all humankind is, to use Barth’s own language adopted in *CD* II/2, *transferred* to Christ by means of *participatio*.

Of course, I am not contending that Barth’s use of the term “nature” is thoroughly in line with the Chalcedon tradition, but I am merely trying to show that he does offer meaningful discourse in using the language of nature. I feel that Jones’s study on Christ’s humanity in Barth’s Christology could have paid more attention to this discourse in *CD* §60.

Without appreciating Barth’s use of the category of nature as a means of drawing a distinction between humanity as *created* and as *fallen*, one result is that Jones interprets

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

Barth's formulation of Christ's sinlessness as consisting in *act* alone and not in essence or nature. Of course, Jones would not describe Barth as saying that Christ took on sinful human nature either—Jones thinks that Barth has effectively discarded the category of nature and whenever Barth uses this term it does not take on any meaningful role. Thus Jones sees the following passage as Barth's own definitive word on Christ's sinlessness: "Jesus' 'sinlessness was therefore not his condition, but rather the act of his being in which he fought off temptation in his condition, which is ours, in the flesh' (IV/1, pp. 258-9 rev.)."¹⁷⁶

On Jones's reading, Barth replaces the category of nature with the historical category of "condition," and Christ's sinlessness does not consist in his condition but the act of his being. I basically agree with Jones's interpretation (namely, that Christ did not enter a sinless human condition, and that Christ's sinlessness primarily consists in the act of his being), except I do not think Barth has dispensed with the category of nature, and I think Barth would also affirm the sinlessness of Christ's human nature, even though Jones is certainly right in pointing out that in the passage he quoted, Barth's emphasis is on Christ's concretely active and actual sinlessness.

In light of Barth's treatment of the category of human nature in *CD IV/1*, it would be difficult to argue that he has completely discarded the category of nature. In fact, in the same passage from which Jones retrieves the quote above, Barth states that Jesus Christ "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."¹⁷⁷ Note, again, that Barth does not speak of human nature itself as fallen, but the nature (which, as we have seen, was created good and always remains good) of humankind in the condition and under the sway of fallenness—"the nature of man *as he comes from the fall*." Because the human being

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 176.

¹⁷⁷ *KD IV/1*, 285; ET 258.

whose nature remains good is in the historical condition of corruption, Barth states that Christ's "sinlessness was not therefore His condition."

As we have seen, in *CD IV/1* Barth distinguishes between "condition" and "nature." Humankind is in the condition of corruption—that is what "flesh" denotes for Barth—but human nature has remained good even in the condition of fallenness. This condition, moreover, must not be thought of as original sin *inherited* from Adam: as we have seen, Barth rejects the traditional notion of hereditary sin. For this reason, Christ's entry into the condition of human "flesh" does not entail that he inherited original sin from Adam. Rather, Christ has taken on the condition of corruption in the sense of "placing Himself in the series of men who rebelled against God," the "series" of which Adam is, as we have seen, "*primus inter pares*," the "series" in which each member becomes and *is* Adam "freely and on our own responsibility."¹⁷⁸ That is, to be in the Adamic condition of corruption does not necessarily entail being sinful in act or being.

In this light, what Barth is really saying in the passage quoted by Jones, then, is that the human condition in which Christ participates is the condition of fallenness, while Barth's emphasis is that by Christ's human act of obedience that perfectly corresponds to the inner-Trinitarian relation of the Son's obedience to the Father, Christ overcomes sin in the flesh. It is not merely a passive sinlessness—Barth would indeed affirm that Christ is without original sin in his human agency since for Barth original sin describes something that each human person actively chooses—but an active and actual obedience. That is, Christ is indeed sinless in his human nature, but what is of central soteriological significance is his act of perfect obedience as the Son of God and as Jesus of Nazareth.

In a word, I agree in most part with Jones's reading with regard to the actuality of Christ's sinlessness, and the one point on which my reading of *CD IV/1* differs from his is

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 568; ET 509f.

Barth's notion of the sinlessness of Christ's *human nature*: I do not think Barth has discarded the category of nature.

Despite this difference, however, Jones's interpretation of Barth's notion of Christ's sinlessness lends support to my contention for an infralapsarian reading of Barth. That is, regardless of how Barth treats the category of human nature in his Christology in the *Church Dogmatics*, there is no question that in the act of incarnation Christ takes on the sin of all humanity one way or another. In either case, humanity's sin is presupposed in the divine act of incarnation. Thus Jones comments on the Christology of *CD I/2*: "It follows that Christ's person must not be described without reference to his action and its salvific consequences."¹⁷⁹ When Barth revises his doctrine of election in light of this infralapsarian Christology in 1936-42, the result is a basically infralapsarian doctrine of election. Thus Jones: "...the description of Christ as 'electing God' adverts Barth's remarkable understanding of the atonement... God's elective action, in Christ, goes hand in hand with God's rejection of humanity's sinful waywardness."¹⁸⁰

In *CD IV/1*, where Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election takes on deeply historical-actualistic nuances, the *Geschichte* of Christ becomes even more deeply entangled with the sinful *Weltgeschichte* of Adam. On this point, Jones's summary serves as a nice conclusion to my exposition of the *Geschichte* of "purified infralapsarianism" (namely, the object of election-in-Christ is *homo lapsus*) of *CD IV/1* in this chapter:

IV/1 provides an extensive articulation of [Christ's reconciling life-unto-death as the way of covenant fulfilment]. Christ's 'history must be a history of suffering (*Leidensgeschichte*)' (IV/1, p. 175) in which he accepts and enacts the transition from election to rejection. In order that humanity's complicity with sin and death be permanently undercut, rendered part and parcel of a superseded and 'old' humanity, God wills that Jesus Christ's reiteration of God's No against sin and death merge into his *bearing* God's No, suffering the punishment of sinful humankind. Christ therefore constitutes himself as the object of this punishment; his death completes a history in which he absorbs both the waywardness of humankind and

¹⁷⁹ Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 43.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

its rejection. Only in this way is the human made new.¹⁸¹

Conclusion

In previous chapters I have repeatedly argued that since the development of a Christocentric doctrine of election in 1936-42, Barth has held to a Christological-predestinarian “purified infralapsarianism” in which the incarnation presupposes humanity’s sin and the object of election is sinful human. However, we had not yet come to see how Barth defines “sin” and “fallen humanity” concretely until this chapter.

Here I use the word “concrete” in a technical sense: for Barth, to know something concretely is to understand it Christologically. Christological understanding consists in knowledge *of* and knowledge *in light of* the *history* of Jesus Christ. This emphasis on history, though already present in *Gottes Gnadenwahl* and *CD II/2*, is given especial prominence in *CD IV/1*.

It is not hard to see that by giving such weight to the category of *Geschichte* in this part-volume Barth is engaging in polemical dialogue with Rudolf Bultmann who had by then come to dominate the field of New Testament studies. In fact, of all his theological dialogue partners Barth names none but Bultmann in the foreword to *CD IV/1*: “The present situation in theology and also the peculiar themes of this book mean that throughout I have found myself in an intensive, although for the most part quiet, debate with Rudolf Bultmann.”¹⁸²

With the category of *Geschichte* Barth rejects Bultmann’s attempt to uncover the *kerygma* of the New Testament by stripping it of the elements of ancient myth. This is in many ways an extension of Barth’s theological struggles against David Strauss and

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁸² *KD IV/1*, Vorwort; ET ix.

Ludwig Feuerbach. For Barth, revelation is not given in the form of myth, as myths are aimed at conveying timeless truths with which human beings in time have nothing to do; nor is revelation given in the form of historiography because God's act in history is beyond historical proof. Revelation has to be the *Geschichte* of Jesus Christ who is very God and very human, participating in our history so that our history may participate in his.

As I have argued in this chapter, Barth's notion of the history of Christ presupposes human sin. Christ's history is the history of the way of the Son of God into the far country; it is the history of the Word's becoming flesh; it is the history of the Son's participation in world-history. As we have seen, world-history began with Adam's fall; without the fall there would have been no *Weltgeschichte*. World-history *is* the history of human fallenness and the fallen history of humanity, and it could not have been otherwise.

So, could there have been a different *Geschichte* of Christ, a different history of the incarnation, in which Christ participates in an Adamic history that is unfallen? That is, had humankind not fallen into the *status corruptionis*, would the Word still have become human, without at once becoming "flesh" also? For the Barth of *CD II/2*, this is a question that is, in the words of George Hunsinger, "speculative and unanswerable."¹⁸³ Yet, for the Barth of *CD IV/1*, the answer is quite simply: No. This is not to say that God *could not have* decided to become incarnate even if humanity had not fallen into sin—God certainly has the freedom to do so (recall that infralapsarian Christology, without denying that God *could have* become incarnate regardless of sin, refuses to claim to know *that* or *why* God *would have* done so). This is only to say that God has elected only one *Geschichte* of Christ, and by God's decision an incarnation regardless of sin has been excluded, because God has decided that Christ's history should be one to which fallen *Weltgeschichte* is united (recall that both supra- and infralapsarian Christology are concerned with the

¹⁸³ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 204.

logical order between God's decisions to become incarnate and to overcome sin).

Thanks to recent studies on the category of history in *CD IV/1* to which Bruce McCormack, Paul Jones, and others have called attention, in this chapter we have come to recognise further developments in Barth's lapsarian thinking in the early 1950s: by his emphasis on history Barth has become more infralapsarian in his Christological doctrine of election than he had been in 1936-42. While the Barth of, say, *CD II/2* would have left room for the possibility of a pre-lapsarian incarnation, in *CD IV/1* Christ's history is so covenantally bound to the history of sinful humanity that the proposition "God became human" is inseparable with the statement, "the Word became flesh." The incarnation *is* the history of the electing God's entrance into the history of God's fallen covenant-partner, in order to sublate the latter's history of fallenness *for the sake of* and *in* the election of all in Christ.

On this note we come to a fitting end to this dissertation. Of course, a discussion of sin and divine reprobation could never have been the last word in Barth's theological discourse, and to end my dissertation on Barth with a chapter on sin seems to do him injustice. Yet, bear in mind that part of Barth's theological agenda has been to expose what he thinks to be nineteenth-century Protestant Theology's optimism of human nature and to treat sin seriously. To investigate into the development of Barth's lapsarian thinking is precisely to look into how he understands the notion of sin (in light of God's sovereign grace in Jesus Christ!) in various phases of his theology. It is thus appropriate to end this dissertation with a chapter on Barth's doctrine of sin set forth in a part-volume wherein his theology has arguably developed into full maturity.

My conclusion for this chapter is quite simple: in this (arguably) final phase of Barth's theological development, his understanding of the *Geschichte* of election-in-Christ is more infralapsarian than ever before, as this *Geschichte* cannot be

otherwise than Christ's participation in the *Weltgeschichte* of God's covenant-partner who is radically and totally fallen in historical actuality. Christ the electing God has said No to Adam's sin, but, as Barth sees it, this No as revealed in the concrete history of Christ's death and resurrection is not the final word out of the caprice of a tyrannical god, but the non-capricious No of the electing God that serves the purpose of and sublated in the Yes pronounced in God's unchanging love-in-freedom.

Conclusion

Recapitulating the Arguments

A conclusion is now in order, and I begin by briefly reprising the main arguments of this dissertation. First, I have argued that despite his avowed sympathy for supralapsarianism, Barth's Christocentric doctrine of election developed in 1936-42 is in fact basically infralapsarian in both the Christological and predestinarian senses, in that he sees the incarnation as the electing God's act of negating humanity's sin in Christ for the election of all humankind in Christ. That is, from 1936 onward, Barth has understood election-in-Christ as an absolute, non-capricious *Aufhebung* (the Hegelian understanding of dialectical progress or *Bildung* in which the new annuls the old in form, but in a sense preserves the rationality of the old) of reprobation: reprobation as manifested in Christ's death and resurrection is God's negation of humankind's sin that negates God, and this negation of negation is for the purpose of the election of fallen humankind to which God has pledged covenant-faithfulness in Christ. On Barth's view, both the incarnation and double predestination presuppose humankind's fall; the one elected in Christ is not the neutral human, but sinful human. In both the Christological and predestinarian senses, then, Barth is basically on the infralapsarian side.

I suggest that Barth's Christological doctrine of election be described as *basically* rather than *simply* infralapsarian, because (1) with regard to the teleological primacy of election-in-Christ, Barth is closer to the majority of supralapsarians, even though there are cases (e.g. John Owen) in which infralapsarians have adopted the same teleological priority; and (2) even with regard to the *obiectum praedestinationis*, Barth is not straightforwardly infralapsarian, because Barth identifies Christ, is without sin in himself and took on the sin of all humanity by *participatio*, as the proper object of election, and

sinful humanity is elected not directly, but *in* and *with* Christ. That is, the *obiectum praedestinationis* in Barth's theology is *homo lapsus*, but not *simpliciter* so.

We might attach the adjective “purified,” a term that Barth himself coins, to his lapsarian position, in order to stress that he has replaced some fundamental assumptions of Reformed orthodoxy with his own versions of Christocentrism—I use the plural here because we have seen that his Christocentrism has continued to develop after the Christological revision of the doctrine of election from 1936-42. In addition to labelling Barth's Christological doctrine of election as “purified infralapsarianism,” I have suggested that in the predestinarian sense it might also be called “basically infralapsarian” when we give to supra- and infralapsarianism the minimalist definitions outlined Chapter 1 in terms of the *obiectum praedestinationis* (object of predestination) as either fallen or unfallen humanity.

My second thesis has been that in Barth's early theology, Christology and predestination began as two separate doctrines, but as predestination, which was inconsistently supralapsarian in the first phase of the development, gradually came to merge with Christology, which carried infralapsarian tendencies in *Romans* II and became consistently infralapsarian in the Göttingen-Münster period, Barth's doctrine of predestination became more and more infralapsarian, and then after the Christocentric revision of the doctrine of election in 1936-42 Barth became basically infralapsarian in both Christology and predestination. Additionally, I have shown that Barth's “purified infralapsarianism,” as I suggest it be called, continued to develop after 1942, and in the highly actualised version of *CD* IV/1, his Christological doctrine of election became even more infralapsarian, leaving no room for either the notion of unfallen humanity as the object of God's electing grace, or the speculation that God would have become incarnate regardless of humanity's fall.

Further Reflections

It is worthwhile to consider again a question that I continually asked in this dissertation: Who cares if Barth is supra- or infralapsarian in his Christology and doctrine of election? I have continually emphasised that the lapsarian problem is by no means a vainly scholastic inquiry detached from the life of the Church. As Barth himself sees it, the lapsarian problem is most crucial because it seeks to come to terms with the perplexing reality of humankind's fallenness in light of God's universal sovereignty and immutable holiness—he expressly states that this is the primary theological problem that *Gottes Gnadenwahl* tackles—even though he takes issues with the ways in which the answers have been formulated and the problem has sometimes been framed in classical Reformed theology, as he understood (and often misunderstood) it.

In this dissertation I have pointed out some doctrinal implications of Barth's lapsarian thinking, such as his attitude of defiance towards the theodicy problem. In fact, the implications of what I suggest we call Barth's "purified infralapsarianism" go beyond doctrinal theology.

For example, Barth's lapsarian thinking in his public theology has already been documented in the secondary literature. In a book on the topic of culture and common grace, Richard Mouw observes that Barth has developed his lapsarian position in such a way that "created humanness... [cannot] be understood apart from redemption."¹

While Mouw does not take note of Barth's misnomers of supra- and infralapsarianism, we might briefly compare Barth to the supralapsarian Neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper to appreciate two notably different approaches to the notion of common grace and consequently to political theology.

¹ Richard Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 69.

Two guiding principles in Kuyper's public theology are the notions of "sphere sovereignty" and "antithesis": the former is a creation-based view of human society while the latter springs forth from a soteriological view of this world as *de facto* fallen. Simply stated, "sphere sovereignty" is the idea that each "sphere" or sector of creaturely life and society has its own principles, orders, functions, responsibilities, and authority, such that no sphere may claim sovereignty over another. On this view, theology is only one of the sciences and in principle it has no authority over, say, physics, biology, or politics. These sciences pertain to different spheres: for example, theology belongs to the sphere of the Church while politics to that of the state, and these two spheres are distinct. Kuyper's notion of sphere sovereignty is creation-based in that it reflects God's creation of everything "after its own kind," and it is not predicated upon human fallenness or redemption.

Lest this idea of sphere sovereignty be misunderstood as endorsing a kind of natural theology whereby each sphere may function in accordance with the created order without Christ's redemptive lordship, Kuyper emphasises another important notion known as "antithesis." In a nutshell, this is the idea that in this fallen world there are "two kinds of consciousness—that of the regenerate and the unregenerate; and these two cannot be identical."² For this reason, a Christian scientist or, say, politician, would stand in fundamental antithesis against a non-Christian one.

It is interesting to see how these two guiding principles are applied to Kuyper's understanding of state and government. He believes that the state must submit to the lordship of Christ who is sovereign over all, and a state led by politicians of unregenerate consciousness cannot possibly recognise God as King. It is precisely for this reason that he campaigned to become Prime Minister of the Netherlands in 1901-05.

² Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 133.

However, with his supralapsarian convictions, Kuyper does not see the role of government as necessitated by humankind's state of fallenness. Mouw comments:

What we experience as the state under fallen conditions is a manifestation of something that was already implicit in the original creation design. Even if the Fall had not occurred, Kuyper argues in his Stone Lecture on politics, there would have developed a need for government—not in the form of coercive nation-states, but as “one organic world-empire, with God as its King; exactly what is prophesied for the future which awaits us, when all sin shall have disappeared.”³

Here we can see that according to Kuyper there is a will of God for creation logically (though not chronologically, of course) preceding and thus independent of God's redemptive will in Christ. For Kuyper, Christ's redemptive work is in line with and serves the purpose of God's pre-lapsarian mandate for creation. The correlation of this understanding to Kuyper's supralapsarianism has been well documented.⁴ It is not hard to see that on the supralapsarian view, God's ultimate purpose for creation in the decree of double predestination is irrespective of humankind's fall, while the infralapsarian view insists that double predestination, also understood as God's highest purpose, presupposes human fallenness. On Kuyper's supralapsarian understanding, there is a will of God for creation that is apart from and logically prior to God's will in the redemptive work of Christ. With a supralapsarian conviction, Kuyper believes that God's will revealed in the work of creation, which for him is knowable and known to all humankind by means of common grace and general revelation, is without regard to the matter-of-fact that the world is fallen.

There are of course points of similarity between Barth and Kuyper. However, Barth's political theology is strikingly different from that of Kuyper on one crucial point:

³ Richard Mouw, “Some Reflections on Sphere Sovereignty,” in Luis Lugo, ed., *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 96. See Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 92.

⁴ See, for instance, John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 459.

Kuyper's understanding of sphere sovereignty, as I have shown above, is based on a supralapsarian distinction between creation and redemption, and therewith common grace and special grace, but Barth makes no such distinction.

It has been observed that Barth's political theology is part and parcel of his rejection of what he calls natural theology.⁵ Kuyper also rejects natural theology, but for Kuyper, natural theology is only *de facto* unviable on the premise that the world is fallen. For Barth, natural theology is *de jure* untenable, because there is no will of God for this world apart from Christ. Furthermore, Barth not only rejects Roman Catholic versions of natural theology, but also in his famous *Nein!* to Emil Brunner, he denies traditional Calvinist distinctions between common and special grace, or general and special revelation.

To be sure, when Barth debated Brunner and drafted the Barmen Declaration in the first half of the 1930s, he still posited a pre-lapsarian state in which humankind existed in immediacy to God, but this *Ursprung* is pre-temporal and pre-historical. While Barth posited the *Ursprung*, he denied the possibility of any knowledge thereof—we saw this in Chapter 5. Barth writes in his polemical response to Brunner: "...man is of himself unable to find access to the revelation of God. Just because Christ is born, we have to regard the world as lost in the sight of God."⁶

Here Barth's infralapsarian Christology is obvious: the event of the incarnation reveals the world to be fallen. This is in line with the Anselm book and *CD I/1*, in which the Word of God is by definition addressed to fallen humanity. There is no pre-lapsarian revelation apart from the Word of God in Jesus Christ.

What might Barth's infralapsarian Christology from his Bonn years imply for his political theology during the rise of the Third Reich? For one thing, note that the Barmen Declaration is a thoroughly *theological* one. Unlike Kuyper, Barth does not think of

⁵ For example, George Hunsinger, "Barth, Barmen, and the Confessing Church Today," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 80.

⁶ Karl Barth, *No! Answer to Emil Brunner* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 116.

politics as a science belonging to a sphere separate from that to which theology belongs. To be sure, for Barth, there is an abiding distinction between theology and politics, but Barth is of the conviction that the Church's political stance and actions must remain faithful to and be guided by the Word of God, thus politics must be a *theological* science. So how is Barth's conviction to be understood in light of his lapsarian thinking? Here I throw out this question without trying to answer it—I am just giving an example to show that Barth's lapsarian thinking has far-reaching implications for his thought, life, and actions in each stage of his theological development.

God's Non-Capricious No

The example above shows that the lapsarian problem plays an important role in Barth's thought, life, and actions in his career as a theologian. While nineteenth-century dogmatics has generally deemed the Lapsarian Controversy to be speculatively metaphysical, Barth is convinced that "we are not in any position to dismiss the seventeenth-century problem as superfluous, or to abandon the problem to merely capricious solution."⁷ Rather, Barth believes that seventeenth-century lapsarianism would "shed light upon the path which we have to tread."⁸

As Barth sees it, answering the lapsarian problem is worthwhile and necessary, but the solutions formulated by seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy inevitably posit a God above and behind the God self-revealed in Jesus Christ. Whether he is right on Reformed orthodoxy is open to question—I have shown that he has misunderstood much of classical supra- and infralapsarianism and has not been familiar with the kind of Christocentric formulations found in the likes of Thomas Goodwin and John Owen.

Whatever the case, Barth's own theological intention in developing a "purified"

⁷ *KD* II/2, 136; ET 127.

⁸ *Ibid.*

version of the lapsarian doctrine is clear: he wants to make sure that the electing God of whom his theology speaks is none other than Jesus Christ, the Word of God revealed, and that God's act of double predestination, including reprobation, is not out of the "caprice of a tyrant," but perfectly corresponds to the Being of the God who is always in the free act of love. In Jesus Christ God is immutably God, and Christ is the unchangeable *decretum absolutum Dei* in whom God's non-capricious No against sin eternally negates the nothingness that threatens God's covenant-partner, so that God's Yes to all in Christ is the final and definitive Word whereby all of history is determined in and by the history of Christ.

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