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The Suffering of God with Implications for Human Suffering in the  
Trinitarian Theology of Karl Barth

by

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## Abstract

Twentieth century theologian Karl Barth developed this theology in the shadow of two horrific world wars and at a time when a theological shift occurred in understanding God and suffering. Barth's work has much to offer the twenty-first century pastor and theologian in response to suffering. In this thesis the Trinitarian theology of Karl Barth will be examined concerning the suffering of God at the cross in order to consider how God relates to human suffering in Barth's theology. Chapter one will examine the development of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity and Barth's redeployment of the immanent and economic understanding of the Trinity. The chapter will engage Barth's development of God as the one who loves and establishes fellowship with humanity in his freedom. Barth's Trinitarian development will be compared with a contemporary Trinitarian perspective. Chapter two will explore what transpires within the Godhead during the passion of Christ. It will consider Barth's explanation of the constancy of the Godhead and his emphasis on the unity of will within the Trinity in the passion. Chapter three will explore Barth's Trinitarian understanding of the resurrection of Christ. As the act of self-revelation, Christ's resurrection marks the transition of reconciliation between God and humanity. In the resurrection, Christ's life is made contemporaneous with all time and the hope of the resurrection has implications for the post-Easter Christian community. Chapter four will explore Barth's theological anthropology with particular emphasis on his understanding of the human experience of death and suffering. The thesis will conclude with questions for further inquiry.

**To Jennie Jo**

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## **Introduction**

The twentieth century witnessed unprecedented technical human achievement, but history will also record the last one hundred years as a period of lethal global conflict. The extermination of millions of people in Stalin's Russia, Nazi Germany, and the devastating civil conflicts in the Third World bear witness to the depth of suffering in this period. The study of political science has grappled with this century of conflict, creating a new vocabulary to categorize these events such as "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing."

The devastation of the First World War presented a significant challenge to theologians and pastors. The events of the war contributed to a theological shift in understanding God and suffering. Karl Barth was among the theologians who challenged the Western Christian tradition's position of the *impassibility* of God. Barth spoke of God's suffering at the cross through Christ. The tradition held that suffering within the divinity of God would result in a change in God's essence; a change that would mean a move away from perfection and self-sufficiency.

In this thesis I examine the Trinitarian theology of Karl Barth concerning the suffering of God at the cross, because I want to consider how God relates to human suffering in Barth's theology. I am undertaking this thesis in order to consider the implications for a pastoral response to human atrocity.

### **I. Impassibility in the Western Christian Tradition**

Early Western Christian thinkers were influenced by the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, embracing the impassibility of God.<sup>1</sup> Perfect and self-sustaining, God

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<sup>1</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 249.

could not be conceptualized as restrained or compelled by external forces.

Aristotelian logic required that any notion of change within the “unmoved mover” would necessitate a move away from perfection.<sup>2</sup> Plato similarly asserted that the eternal is unchangeable.<sup>3</sup> According to the early Western Christian position, conceding that God could suffer was paramount to arguing that a force outside of God could alter the nature of God.

The early Christian thinkers defended the impassibility position despite biblical passages attributing emotion to God. Philo of Alexandria offered a solution to interpreting biblical passages that ascribe emotion to God. He argued in *Quod Deus immutabilis sit* (That God is Unchangeable) that emotion attributed to God in the Bible should be understood as metaphor.<sup>4</sup>

Not all early Christian thinkers professed the impassibility of God. Patripassianism maintained that the Son was merely a mode of the Father, meaning that the Father suffered and died in the death of the Son.<sup>5</sup> Noetus of Smyrna taught patripassianism in the second century and the teaching was renewed by Sabellius who spread the teaching to Egypt in the third century. Praxeus in turn exported patripassianism to North Africa. Patripassianism was eventually pronounced heretical.

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<sup>2</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 249.

*Aristotle's Metaphysics XII*, trans and intro W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948)

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, ed and trans J. Warrington (New York: Dutton, 1965)

<sup>4</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 249.

<sup>5</sup> Donald K. McKim. “See, Patripassianism,” *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 204.

Tertullian vigorously opposed patripassianism in *Adverus Praxeas* c. 213 A.D. He challenged the teaching arguing that God was “not confounded but conjoined in one person – Jesus, God and man.”<sup>6</sup>

Tertullian argued that God does not change or suffer as he is eternal and outside time. Although God is impassible, Tertullian argued that humanity experiences God’s goodness as something akin to emotion. For example, the repentant sinner experiences God’s goodness as mercy, while the unrepentant sinner experiences God’s goodness as his anger.<sup>7</sup>

Origen argued that God is impassible in that he does not undergo a change of emotional state. He argued that impassibility does not mean that God is without passionate love. Rather, Origen argued that God comes to humanity because of his consuming, passionate love.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. upheld the impassibility of God. The council characterized opposing arguments against the impassibility of God as “vain babbling.”<sup>8</sup>

Anselm of Canterbury defended the impassibility of God in developing his notion of the Perfect Being. Anselm’s ideas were in a similar vein to Plato’s and Aristotle’s, though he likely did not have access to their material. Anselm conceptualized the Perfect Being as immune from outside influences or forces. He concluded that the immunity of the Perfect Being means God does not feel

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<sup>6</sup> Tertullian as quoted by Hubertus Drobner and Siegfried Schatzmann. *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans S.S. Schutzmann (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 2007), 163-164.

<sup>7</sup> T.G. Weinandy, “See, Impassibility of God.” *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Farmington Hills: Catholic University of America, 2003), 258.

<sup>8</sup> Drobner. *The Fathers of the Church*, 163-164.

emotions like compassion. Therefore, Anselm spoke of God's acts of mercy as manifestations of an inner state of being in God, rather than speaking of God as compassionate.<sup>9</sup>

Influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, St. Thomas Aquinas argued that God was the primary mover who remained unmoved.<sup>10</sup> Aquinas argued that speaking of God's love implies divine vulnerability. To insulate against the notion that God is susceptible to change, Aquinas considered such attributes as an effect, rather than a feeling. In this way, God's mercy towards sinners could be understood as an effect on humanity, rather than an emotion expressed by God.<sup>11</sup>

## **II. Luther and the Suffering of God**

The Reformation produced a significant alteration in the impassibility argument in the Western Christian tradition. Martin Luther's deployment of the *Theologia Crucis* (Theology of the Cross) provided an incentive and a vocabulary for later theologians like Barth to develop an understanding of divine suffering without threatening the collapse of the doctrine of the Trinity. In *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) Luther presented his *Theologia Crucis*, setting the cross at the heart of his theology.<sup>12</sup> It was in this work that the term "crucified God" first appeared – a term that would be recaptured by later theologians.

Luther's understanding of the cross at the centre of theology was a challenge to the theologians of glory who assumed God's revelation is found in

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<sup>9</sup> Brian Leftow, "Anselm's perfect-being theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, eds. B. Davies and B. Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," in *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, ed. Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted (Louisville: John Knox, 1992), 97.

<sup>11</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 250.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's Theologia Crucis*, American University Study Series 7, Theology and Religion 181 (New York: P. Lang, 1995), 42-43.

his glory and majesty, not in the suffering of the cross.<sup>13</sup> Luther accused those who espoused a theology of glory of confusing good and evil. The reformer wrote, “He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly and in general, good to evil.”<sup>14</sup>

Luther’s understanding of *communicatio idiomata* (communication of attributes) was innovative. Luther’s rendering of *communicatio idiomata* suggests that what is attributed to one nature in Christ must be attributed to the whole person of Christ.<sup>15</sup> In considering Christ’s suffering and dying on the cross, Luther argued that the deity did not suffer, but that suffering must be attributed to the whole person. Luther argued that the failure to recognize the attribution of suffering to the whole person of Christ would result in dividing the person of Christ in such a way as to render God separate from the act of the cross necessary for human salvation.<sup>16</sup> Luther illustrated the point arguing that when a person is wounded on the leg, we speak not of just the leg that is wounded but speak of the whole person as wounded.

Dennis Ngien summarizes Luther’s position, arguing

God suffers in the person of Jesus Christ, not in His divine nature but according to His human nature. Yet God and man are so inseparably united in the one person of Christ that the suffering is true of the whole person.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ngien, *The Suffering of God*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. T.F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 44.

<sup>15</sup> Ngien, *The Suffering of God*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> Ngien, *The Suffering of God*, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Ngien, *The Suffering of God*, 73.

Luther argues that suffering belongs to the human nature but is assigned to the whole person of Christ.

Ngien contends that Luther employed a second usage of the doctrine of *communicatio idiomata*. Luther argued that the human property of suffering is communicated to the divine nature. The two natures of Christ cannot be divided because of the unity of the person of Christ. Ngien concludes that the second usage of *communicatio idiomata* allows Luther to properly say that God suffers and dies.<sup>18</sup>

The impassibility position remained normative during the post-Reformation period. It was nearly four hundred years before Luther's explanation of divine suffering was revisited and further developed, for Luther's theology of the cross was out of step with the liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A number of factors contributed to the renewal of Luther's work in the twentieth century. Among these influences was the First World War, raising doubts about the relevance of God in the modern world.

### **III. The Rise of Neo-Orthodoxy**

The battle fields of Europe ignited dissent and inspired the growth of Protest Atheism, a world view in which the existence of God could not be reconciled with radical evil and suffering.<sup>19</sup> McGrath argues that among theologians in the shadow of war "the 'crucified and hidden God' of Calvary assumed a new relevance and urgency."<sup>20</sup> Theologians employed Luther's *Theologia Crucis* in

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<sup>18</sup> Ngien, *The Suffering of God*, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Camus, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno are among the most known protest atheists who argue that radical evil and suffering cannot be reconciled with the existence of God.

<sup>20</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 180.

response to the atheistic challenges. At the same time, theologians challenged the impassibility of God. Pastoral comfort was found in the idea that God suffered for his people and through suffering overcame sin, suffering and death. As Ronald Goetz has noted, the notion that God could suffer was once indefensible in the Western Christian tradition but by the end of the twentieth century the passibility of God had become the “new orthodoxy.”<sup>21</sup>

A significant theological shift occurred during the early twentieth century as liberal theology in the vein of F.D.E. Schleiermacher was challenged by the rise of the *Neo-Orthodoxy* movement.

The pre-eminent theologian Karl Barth challenged the liberal theological tradition of his mentors when he placed the incarnation and atonement at the centre of this theology. Barth began his systematic development with the self-revealing Triune God. He argued, “When we ask, Who is the self-revealing God? The Bible answers us in such a way that we are impelled to consider the three-in-ness of God.”<sup>22</sup> Barth broke with tradition when he began *Church Dogmatics* with the doctrine of the Trinity. Previous theologians began their systematic development with Creation. Barth grounded the doctrine of the Trinity in the self-revelation of God. Revelation is central to understanding God’s coming to humanity and suffering for humanity at cross.

Theologians like Jürgen Moltmann have followed Barth and embraced the suffering of God, though Moltmann has proposed additional considerations to understanding the suffering of God. In his central work in this area, *The Crucified*

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald Goetz, “The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,” *Christian Century* 103, no. 13 (1986), 385.

<sup>22</sup> CD I/1, 348.

God, Moltmann argues not only that God suffered, but that God's suffering was necessary for his completion. Moltmann states, "God and suffering belong together, just as in this life the cry for God and the suffering experienced in pain belong together."<sup>23</sup>

Barth maintained the centrality of the cross as the cornerstone of his theological development. His contribution to Trinitarian theology influenced later theologians like Jürgen Moltmann to reflect further on Trinitarian theology and suffering. Barth forged a distinct Trinitarian explanation of God's experience of suffering and relationship to the human experience of suffering.

#### **IV. Barth for the Twenty-First Century Church**

Barth's work on suffering has been charged as unsympathetic and removed from human experience. The charge that Barth's work is pastorally insignificant fails to withstand thorough examination of his work. His theological contribution offers the twenty-first century church a theological framework for responding to human suffering. Barth is remembered and recognized as a *doctor ecclesiae* who forged his monumental work in the shadow of two world wars. He understood the needs of the church, calling Christians to the centrality of the gospel of Christ. Barth's message to the church remains relevant to the Christian community today.

#### **V. Outline in Brief**

In chapter one I will explore the significance of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity as the starting point for apprehending the suffering of God. Barth addresses the death and resurrection of Jesus as Trinitarian events in which God chose to suffer

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<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1981), 49.

without contradicting himself. Barth reemploys the immanent and economic understanding of the Trinity in expounding the relationship within the Godhead at the cross. In this chapter I will focus on Barth's development of the doctrine of the Trinity in CD I.

In chapter two I will explore Barth's understanding of what transpired within the Godhead during the passion of Christ. I will evaluate Barth's treatment of the Garden of Gethsemane and the cry of dereliction, focusing on how these events inform us about the relationship within the Godhead. The primary text for this chapter will be CD IV.

In chapter three I explore the implications of Barth's Trinitarian understanding of the resurrection of Jesus, and God's embrace of suffering humanity through the resurrection. Barth grounds the transition of the act and being of the crucified Christ toward humanity in the resurrection. In this chapter I examine Barth's 1924 monograph *The Resurrection of the Dead*, and his later developments in *Church Dogmatics*.

Having examined Barth's Trinitarian understanding of the cross and resurrection, in chapter four I will examine the relationship between the suffering of God and the suffering of humanity. I will explore Barth's theological anthropology to determine his understanding of the human experience of death and suffering. The primary texts for this chapter will be taken from CD III/1 and CD III/2, with additional material from Barth's sermons in the anthology, *Deliverance to the Captives*.

## Chapter 1

### The Significance of Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity

#### I. The Doctrine of the Trinity

In developing his doctrine of the Trinity near the beginning of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth was making a polemical statement. The theologian was making a break from Liberal theology that had emerged in the shadow of the Enlightenment. Barth's position was in fact, a restatement of the orthodox position, but with an emphasis on grounding the doctrine in God's self-revelation.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the starting point for apprehending the suffering of God in Barth's theology. God in his self-revelation is triune. As such he is triune as well in his action towards humanity and in his relation to the human condition that includes the experience of suffering.

God reveals himself as triune in his essence and in his work. The cross and resurrection are triune events in which God freely suffers for humanity without setting himself against himself. God does not leave us to our own demise, but makes the human situation his own without diminishing himself and without giving himself away.<sup>1</sup> An exploration of Barth's understanding of God's suffering in relation to human suffering must engage the doctrine of the Trinity. For this reason, this chapter begins with an exploration of the Doctrine of the Trinity as first stated in *Church Dogmatics I/2*.

The revelation of God is the foundational and ever present theme of Barth's theological development. The prolegomena to *Church Dogmatics* discusses the Word of God, prompting the necessary explanation of the revelation

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<sup>1</sup> CD, IV/1, 158-59.

of the Word. The self-revealing Word of God is triune and his revelation grounds and governs the doctrine of the Trinity. For this reason, Barth uniquely places his Trinitarian development toward the beginning of his dogmatic development rather than later in his theological exploration, as many theologians do.

### **I.1 The Context of Barth's Trinitarian Development**

Barth outlines the doctrine of the Trinity in book one of *Church Dogmatics*, providing a foundation expounded in the later volumes.<sup>2</sup> Barth rejects the idea that God can be apprehended through naturalistic human knowing. Instead he argues that God engages humanity through his self-revelation. Alan Torrance captures this significant distinction when he states, "God's self-revelation does not direct us above to the 'spiritual beyond', but to the Thou who comes to us as the suffering servant."<sup>3</sup> God initiates his self-revelation in which he comes to humanity as the Triune God. In his self-revelation, God reveals no less than himself to humanity. Revelation does not point to something other or in addition to the self-revealer; i.e., God is simultaneously the author *and* the content of revelation.

Barth devotes five sections to the doctrine of the Trinity in book I of *Church Dogmatics*. In the first section Barth proposes three questions regarding God in his self-revelation. Who is God in his revelation? What does he do? What does he effect? Barth answers that God is the self-revealing God who reveals

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<sup>2</sup> Iain Taylor in his defence of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity argues for consistency throughout *Church Dogmatics*, refuting any notion of significant differences or contradictions in the doctrine. The primary criticisms pertain to Barth's caution in using the term "persons" in CD I, but a freer use of "persons" in later volumes, particularly CD II/1. Taylor suggests Barth may have had different audiences in mind for the various volumes, but demonstrated consistent theological development.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Torrance, "The Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000), 74.

himself as Lord. Barth argues that God is the self-revealed, the event of revelation and the effect of revelation on humanity. He is this in unity, but also in the variety of his modes of being. In summary Barth answers, God is *revealer, revelation, and revealedness*.<sup>4</sup>

In the subsection entitled, *The Root of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Barth argues that the statement, “God reveals Himself as the Lord” is the root of the doctrine.<sup>5</sup> He contends that Scripture bears witness to the act of revelation. He carefully distinguishes Holy Scripture and Church proclamation from the Word of God which is God himself. He argues that in the concept of revelation, form and content cannot be distinguished from one another. In the event of revelation, he insists, there is no “second inquiry as to what its content might be;”<sup>6</sup> i.e., the gift can only be the giver.

A significant challenge of Trinitarian theology is to explore the doctrine without misrepresenting it. The language of theology is the language of the church, not the language of revelation. It is limited and restrained in engaging the Divine. Recognizing this challenge, Barth proceeds with two guiding statements that provide contextual boundaries in considering revelation as the root of the doctrine of the Trinity. First, he argues that statements about the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be read as identical to statements of revelation.<sup>7</sup> He maintains that doctrine is the work of the Church. This statement is important in distinguishing the doctrine from revelation itself. The doctrine of the Trinity is not the content of

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<sup>4</sup> CD, I/1, 339ff.

<sup>5</sup> CD, I/1, 353.

<sup>6</sup> CD, I/1, 351.

<sup>7</sup> CD, I/1, 354.

the event of revelation nor does the Trinity exist for the sake of revelation. Alan Torrance strongly states that Barth does not prioritize human knowledge of God, but stresses that “knowledge of God is proper to God alone.”<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Barth states that the propositions about the Trinity of God are indirectly identical with the propositions about revelation.<sup>9</sup> In stating this second guideline, Barth is negating the claim that the doctrine of the Trinity is merely the interpretation of revelation. He counters that the doctrine of the Trinity is the “decisive part of the doctrine of God.”<sup>10</sup> Barth argues that if the Trinity were merely an interpretation, we would be left with an entity distinct from God himself.

Before moving on to the development of the content of the doctrine of the Trinity, Barth addresses one further consideration in *Vestigium Trinitatis*. Barth states, “[T]he Biblical concept of revelation is itself the root of the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>11</sup> Nowhere else is the Trinity rooted. Barth rejects the use of analogies to explain, probe or derive the doctrine of the Trinity. He is suspicious of previous analogies derived from nature, culture, history, religion and psychology.<sup>12</sup> Barth argues that the church fathers used analogies to explain the doctrine rather than as proof for the Trinity. Reflecting on their work, Barth insists that analogy was an expression of God’s engagement with the world and in this erroneous approach, revelation occurred in the realm of human reason. He observes,

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<sup>8</sup> Torrance, “The Trinity,” 77.

<sup>9</sup> CD, I/1, 355.

<sup>10</sup> CD, I/1, 358.

<sup>11</sup> CD, I/1, 384.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 15.

The case then was not that men wished to explain the Trinity by the world, but on the contrary that they wished to explain the world by the Trinity in order to be able to speak of the Trinity in this world. It was a matter not of apologetics but of polemics, not of proving the possibility of revelation in the world of human reason, but of fixing the actual possibilities of this world of human reason as the scene of revelation.<sup>13</sup>

Barth argues that the church fathers did not conceive of the Trinity as located in analogy, but rather that the Trinity was capable of reflecting itself within nature, though the natural cannot itself generate a reflection of the triune God.<sup>14</sup> The difficulty in speaking of the Trinity is the risk of creating an explanation or analogy apart from revelation. In other words, analogy can direct us away from revelation.

We find ourselves constrained in speaking of the Trinity. Barth contends that revelation may be interpreted, but revelation does not submit to illustration.<sup>15</sup> Barth's concern is that illustration illuminates an object outside of revelation. The object then becomes a second root for the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>16</sup> Barth emphatically argues that the root of the doctrine of the Trinity is singularly the self-revelation of God.

## **I.2 Modes of Being over Persons of the Trinity**

Barth's concern pertains to the theological work of developing the doctrine of the Trinity. The concern can be applied further to the task of this thesis in exploring how the triune God acts toward human suffering. Barth stands against the risk of tritheistic interpretations by recognizing the limits of illustration and by

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<sup>13</sup> CD, I/1, 392.

<sup>14</sup> CD, I/1, 392.

<sup>15</sup> CD, I/1, 386.

<sup>16</sup> CD, I/1, 388-89.

challenging language used in speaking of the doctrine of the Trinity, in particular the use of the language of “persons.”

Barth’s primary explanation in *Church Dogmatics* for moving away from the language of “persons” is contained in the subsection entitled *Three-in-Oneness*. Barth speaks of the unity of the Godhead, suggesting that God is Lord in threefold repetition. Writing in German, Barth uses the word *Seinsweise*, which has been translated in the English version as “modes of being.” Barth’s concern is that the use of “persons” could be understood in the modern psychological sense of personality. He argues this would diminish the understanding of unity within the Godhead, creating a trithesitic rendering of the doctrine of God.

Critics have challenged Barth’s choice to use “mode of being,” charging him with modalism. Jürgen Moltmann contends that Barth’s hesitancy in using “persons” has led to a blurring of distinction within the Godhead. Moltmann embraces the distinctions and the familial language of the Trinity. He understands the death of Christ on the cross as a division within the Father and Son relationship, arguing that the Father loses his fatherhood in the death of the Son.<sup>17</sup> The distinct interaction of the persons of the Trinity is a necessary feature in Moltmann’s approach. Geoffrey Bromiley, translator of *Church Dogmatics*, acknowledges Barth’s choice of language invites criticism, but correctly argues that accusing Barth of modalism is “absurd.”<sup>18</sup> Barth rejected the criticism of modalism, arguing that the modes of being are not attributes.

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<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (1974; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993),

<sup>18</sup> Bromiley, *Karl Barth*, 16.

There is no attribute, no act of God, which would not in like manner be the attribute, the act of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Of course, knowledge of the revelation of God means knowledge of various definite attributes which we cannot reduce to a common denominator, but which we can also thereafter make clear God's existence as Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

The language of "modes of being" presents God in unity and distinction. The distinction is in the relations of Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

Lawrence Porter argues that the decision by Barth and Karl Rahner not to use the language of "persons" has adversely affected how the Trinity has been understood.<sup>21</sup> He acknowledges that Barth was countering the Liberal protestant tradition and that Barth was reengaging the language of the early church fathers.<sup>22</sup> Although Porter understands Barth's decision to reengage the language of the church fathers, he argues that the omission of the use of "persons" negatively threatens the understanding of God as a relational being. Disagreeing with Porter, Iain Taylor defends Barth's restatement of the classic position. Taylor writes that Barth does not "omit any idea of relationality within the one Godhead."<sup>23</sup> Barth reengages the language of "persons" in later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*, but Taylor argues that Barth is consistent in his use of the term.

Barth foresaw the risk of using the language of "persons" in stating the doctrine of the Trinity. He was concerned that models of human relations would

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Modalism encompasses the idea that there is a God beyond the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit successively.

<sup>19</sup> CD, I/1, 415.

<sup>20</sup> Bromiley, *Karl Barth*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Porter, "On Keeping the 'Persons' in the Trinity," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 530-48.

<sup>22</sup> Porter, "On Keeping," 536,539.

<sup>23</sup> Iain Taylor, "In Defense of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no.1 (March 2003): 40.

occupy the centre of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>24</sup> Barth was no modalist, though his articulation of “modes of being” drew criticism as noted above. He consistently maintained unity in distinction within the Godhead and preserved revelation as the singular root of the doctrine of the Trinity.

### **I.3 God the Creator and Eternal Father**

Barth proposes that God the Father in his work towards us is God our Creator.<sup>25</sup>

The Father who is our Creator is the Lord of our existence. Our existence sits under the judgement of God’s will. His Lordship is known to us through his self-revelation and his Lordship nullifies the notion that we are the Lord of our own existence.<sup>26</sup>

Barth argues that it is in the frailty of humanity and negation in death that the Father is known as the Lord of human existence. Barth writes, “He whom Jesus reveals as the Father is known absolutely in the death of man, and at the end of his existence.”<sup>27</sup> Barth contends that God’s power over human death and life is God’s Lordship over human existence.

God the Father is the Creator, Lord of our existence, and his fatherhood is eternal. The fatherhood of God is not a result of his self-revelation nor does he become Father through his relationships to us. Barth denies that the fatherhood of God is an analogy derived from human relationships.<sup>28</sup> God in his work is the Father, and antecedently in himself is Father.<sup>29</sup> Barth again stresses the unity of

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<sup>24</sup> Torrance, “The Trinity,” 80.

<sup>25</sup> CD, I/1, 447.

<sup>26</sup> CD, I/1, 444.

<sup>27</sup> CD, I/1, 445.

<sup>28</sup> CD, I/1, 449.

<sup>29</sup> CD, I/1, 450.

the Godhead, stating that the essence of God is single and undivided. He writes, “Three-in-Oneness does not mean side-by-sidedness of three parts acting in three functions.”<sup>30</sup> Side-by-sidedness of three parts would result in modalism. At the same time, Barth argues that what is said of the operation of one mode of being may not necessarily be said of another. In particular he is thinking of the experience of the Incarnation in which the Son was conceived, born, died and rose again. This cannot be said of the operation of God the Father.

#### **I.4 God the Reconciler and Eternal Son**

Barth affirms that in Jesus Christ God reveals himself as Lord. The work of Christ is reconciliation, but Barth refrains from developing this doctrine until volume IV. Barth affirms that Jesus’ divinity is essential to his act of revealing the Father as Lord, as only God can reveal himself.<sup>31</sup> The divinity of Christ is not an interpretation or assumption.

God establishes his relationships with humanity through his sonship. Barth insists that God’s self-revelation through Jesus Christ includes the revelation of God’s will and operation to humanity. God seeks us, and we let ourselves be found.<sup>32</sup> We come to know our need to be found not from within ourselves or through nature, but through God. Our need to be found is known only as God *finds* us. We know our own rebellion only in the revelation through the Word of God. Barth states,

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<sup>30</sup> CD, I/1, 452-53.

<sup>31</sup> CD, I/1, 465.

<sup>32</sup> CD, I/1, 466.

Only in Him who acts on us as Reconciler through cross and resurrection could we recognize the Creator, and only in the Creator who remains the Lord of our existence in spite of our enmity could we recognize the Reconciler.<sup>33</sup>

It is no small fact that God establishes a relationship with humanity as our reconciler. The infinite Creator desires relationship with the finite creature. This is established by none other than the self-revealing God.

Barth argues that the act of reconciliation is separate from the act of creation. Reconciliation is the act of what Barth calls the *second mode* of God's existence or the Son.<sup>34</sup> Although the means of reconciliation is different from creation, the source is the same. Barth argues there is no room for subordination between God the Father and God the Son within the Trinitarian relationship.

Barth then develops his thought concerning the eternal Son. Jesus Christ as Son of the Father reveals the Father and reconciles humanity to the Father. Jesus does not become the Son in the event of revelation but is the Son eternally. In other words, he is the Son antecedently in himself. This important statement denies the reduction of the sonship to an attribute of God (e.g., God loves only when he acts upon sinners.)

Reflecting on the Nicene Creed, Barth asks "how do we understand the eternal Son as begotten by God the Father?" Barth recognizes the unity between Father and Son, and the uniqueness of the Son as the one who reveals the Father. There is no second or *other* beside the Son in the act of revelation. The sonship is eternal and not a result of creation. Barth speaks of the unity and distinction between the modes of being. He engages the scriptural analogy of light to

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<sup>33</sup> CD, I/1, 472.

<sup>34</sup> CD, I/1, 469.

interpret this relation. Barth speaks of Jesus as the light of lights, and makes two assertions. First, light is both the source and the beam from the source. In revelation there is the speaker and the spoken. In the same way, the essence and work of God are identical but distinct. Second, the distinction is within God, and reflected in his essence and his work.<sup>35</sup>

### **I.5 God the Redeemer and Eternal Spirit**

Barth continues to follow the creed, affirming the Father and Son are of one essence. He interprets this as threefold protection against the Arian view of the Son as a “demigod from below” or as a subordinate to the Father in the Godhead. He also denies the argument that each mode of being retains a unique essence from the rest.

Finally, Barth affirms that “through Him all things were made.” Barth argues that this confirms one essence with the Father. The statement also confirms the unity of the essence and work within the Godhead. Barth contends further that the statement implies that Christ came to his own, not as a stranger, but as Lord over our existence.

Barth turns his attention to an explanation of the Holy Spirit. God is revealed through the Holy Spirit as Redeemer. In the Old Testament and New Testament the Holy Spirit is God himself present to the creature.<sup>36</sup> Barth states

[T]he Holy Spirit is according to the evidence of Scripture no less and nothing else than God Himself – distinct from Him whom Jesus calls his Father, distinct also from Jesus Himself, but, no less than the Father and no less than Jesus, God Himself, altogether God.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> CD, I/1, 489.

<sup>36</sup> CD, I/1, 515-16.

<sup>37</sup> CD, I/1, 526.

In this statement Barth reaffirms the point he has made throughout the development of his doctrine of the Trinity; namely the Triune God is distinct and unified as one essence in three modes of being. He reveals himself in his work as he is in his essence.

The Spirit fulfills three functions for humanity in the act of revelation. First, the Holy Spirit guarantees humanity's participation in revelation. The Holy Spirit is the "ground of the confidence with which man may regard the revelation as meant for him."<sup>38</sup> Second, the Holy Spirit guides humanity in a way that we cannot guide ourselves. Barth reminds his readers that the Spirit remains *other* in this act of guidance to humanity. Third, the Holy Spirit empowers humanity to be able to speak of Christ in the call of the church to serve the world. God's self-revelation leaves us rich in him and poor in ourselves.<sup>39</sup>

In his second section on the Holy Spirit, Barth explores the Eternal Spirit following the Nicene confession. Barth argues that the Holy Spirit is the communion between the Father and the Son.<sup>40</sup> Barth stresses the divinity of the Spirit, proclaiming that the Holy Spirit proceeds from God as God. The self-revelation of the triune God is an invitation to humanity not only to know about God, but to participate within the divine life of God.<sup>41</sup> God's eternal essence is revealed in his work. Put another way, God's eternal being is his becoming for humanity.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> CD, I/1, 519.

<sup>39</sup> CD, I/1, 521.

<sup>40</sup> CD, I/1, 537.

<sup>41</sup> Torrance, "The Trinity," 89.

<sup>42</sup> Torrance, "The Trinity," 86.

## **II. The Reality of God**

Barth explores who God is in seeking and creating fellowship with humanity in Book Two of *Church Dogmatics* under the title “The Reality of God.” This section of *CD* is divided into three subsections; the “Being of God in Act,” the “Being of God as the One Who Loves,” and the “Being of God in Freedom.” In these three sub-sections Barth argues that God creates fellowship with humanity in which God contends with the anguish of his people.

### **II.1 The Being of God in Act**

Barth contemplates the statement, “God is.” He argues that who God is in himself God is in his work; therefore it is necessary to consider God’s action and work revealed in God’s Word.<sup>43</sup> In starting here, Barth rejects any attempt to derive the doctrine of the Trinity from human logic. He points to the previous attempts to apprehend the doctrine of the Trinity this way and notes that this practice has allowed anti-Christian philosophy to invade the dogma of the Trinity.<sup>44</sup> Instead, Barth states that God gives himself wholly in the act of revelation, though again, God does not give himself away. God has not withheld himself from humanity, nor does God require humanity to complete him. God is no less God without humanity.<sup>45</sup>

As the content of his Word, God’s revelation is act and event. This act and event is the coming, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. On the basis of this revelation we can say God is event, act and life.<sup>46</sup> Alan Torrance argues that Barth

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<sup>43</sup> CD, II/1, 260.

<sup>44</sup> CD, II/1, 261.

<sup>45</sup> CD, II/1, 261.

<sup>46</sup> CD, II/1, 264.

distances himself from process theology, and opposes the idealistic view of self-realization.<sup>47</sup> Barth argues the divine transcends the natural and spiritual, yet also overlaps and comprehends both.<sup>48</sup> In this way, God is Lord and eternally complete in event, act and life in relation to humanity. God's movement in self-revelation is not the result of human self-movement.<sup>49</sup>

Barth concludes the subsection stating that God's self-movement means we cannot compare our situation with his. Barth writes,

If we have life on the basis of His creation and in hope on the ground of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our quality of life can never be confused with His, or compared or contrasted with it as commensurate. The validity of every further statement about God, as a statement about the living God, depends on the avoidance of this confusion, or this comparison and contrast, between His life and ours.<sup>50</sup>

We must affirm that he is Lord in revelation and we are not. The implication for understanding the passible God is that we cannot confuse his cross with our own. While he embraces our agony and takes our condition upon himself at the cross, he is not reduced to less than God, but remains Lord *in* and *of* his self-identification with us.

## **II.2 The Being of God as the One Who Loves**

God is the author of his fellowship with humanity. He wills to be ours and for us to be his.<sup>51</sup> God is no less God without us, as he possesses complete fellowship within himself.

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<sup>47</sup> Torrance, "The Trinity," 86.

<sup>48</sup> CD, II/1, 266.

<sup>49</sup> CD, II/1, 270.

<sup>50</sup> CD, II/1, 272.

<sup>51</sup> CD, II/1, 274.

God is ever faithful in his will to be in fellowship with us. The blessing of his Godhead overflows as blessing on us. Barth argues that we may feel periods that *seem* “doubtful, dark and incomprehensible,” but God’s will to be in fellowship with us is never in doubt.<sup>52</sup> Barth asserts that we learn “ever and again” what it means that God seeks fellowship with us.<sup>53</sup>

Barth maintains that it is more correct to speak of God’s loving, rather than speaking of him as love, though he notes that to say God is love reflects 1 John 4. He amplifies his contention, arguing that it can be said that God is love, but it cannot be said that love is God without interpreting it through God’s act. Barth elaborates his point through four statements.

First, “God’s loving is concerned with a seeking and creation of fellowship for its own sake.”<sup>54</sup> God is the one who loves and does so by giving himself to us. Through his Son, his love is everything for us.

Second, “God’s loving is concerned with a seeking and creation of fellowship without any reference to an existing aptitude or worthiness on the part of the loved.”<sup>55</sup> We are loved by God despite our unworthiness of his love. We neither condition nor alter this love. God’s fellowship with humanity is initiated and completed by God.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> CD, II/1, 274.

<sup>53</sup> CD, II/1, 274-75.

<sup>54</sup> CD, II/1, 276.

<sup>55</sup> CD, II/1, 278.

<sup>56</sup> CD, II/1, 278.

Third, “God’s loving is an end in itself.”<sup>57</sup> His purposes are towards this end. Barth states, “God loves because he loves.”<sup>58</sup> Barth argues that God does not love humanity because he wills to, but that God wills for the sake of his love.

Fourth, “God’s loving is necessary, for it is the being, the essence and the nature of God.”<sup>59</sup> His loving is free from the object of his love, meaning it is not dependent or regulated by humanity. He is the one who loves with or without us. Yet he has given himself to us, and his love for us is an eternal love. We are taken up into the fellowship of his eternal love.<sup>60</sup>

In summary, God has fellowship within himself. His eternal loving is not conditioned or dependent on humanity, yet his love goes out to and reaches us, drawing us into his fellowship. In the triune God’s engagement with the suffering world, God maintains his freedom. His love is not altered by the suffering of the world, nor does his act of loving hold him hostage to the world. Barth’s exploration of God’s freedom properly follows his discussion of God’s loving.

### **II.3 The Being of God in Freedom**

Barth begins the section with the argument that God’s life and loving are distinct from humanity because God lives and loves in his sovereignty.<sup>61</sup>

Barth clarifies the meaning of God’s freedom. Negatively, freedom is the absence of limits, restrictions and conditions. Positively, freedom is self-grounded being; i.e., to be self-determined and self-moved.<sup>62</sup> Barth stresses the point that in

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<sup>57</sup> CD, II/1, 279.

<sup>58</sup> CD, II/1, 279.

<sup>59</sup> CD, II/1, 279.

<sup>60</sup> CD, II/1, 280.

<sup>61</sup> CD, II/1, 300.

<sup>62</sup> CD, II/1, 303.

freedom, the Triune is Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer distinct from humanity, yet in relationship with humanity.<sup>63</sup>

Having provided this definition, Barth argues that God is free within his immanent Trinity. He is free to achieve “a uniquely inward and genuine immanence of His being.”<sup>64</sup> God is not moved by outward forces or objects nor is he limited by anything outside himself.

In his freedom, God establishes communion and fellowship with humanity. God wills and sustains life and can draw nearer to the created than it can be to itself. Barth declares that God’s fellowship with humanity in this way is “His freedom in immanence.”<sup>65</sup>

God is free then to indwell the creature. He contends that this is reality and not to be understood analogically.<sup>66</sup> In this movement God shows himself in this reality to be God and not an idol. Barth argues that God is free to rule over the world or to serve it. In the course of serving the world God, according to Barth, is free to “die the death which symbolizes the end of all things earthly, in utter abandonment and darkness.”<sup>67</sup>

### **III. The Significance of the Essence and Work of the Trinity**

As noted above, Barth affirms that the Triune God is distinct in three modes of being but unified in one essence. God’s immanent, eternal self has been revealed to humanity in his work. In this way, Barth has re-employed the traditional immanent and economic distinctions within the Trinity.

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<sup>63</sup> CD, II/1, 304.

<sup>64</sup> CD, II/1, 313.

<sup>65</sup> CD, II/1, 314.

<sup>66</sup> CD, II/1, 314.

<sup>67</sup> CD, II/2, 315.

God does not withhold himself from humanity but reveals himself wholly to the world. While God's immanent Trinity is the content of his economic Trinity or work in the world, Barth argues that God's work is not exactly equivalent to God's essence. It is within this Trinitarian framework that Barth speaks of God's suffering for the world.

Paul S. Fiddes, professor of Systematic Theology at Oxford, offers a critique of Barth's position. Fiddes' criticism illustrates the importance of Trinitarian thinking in engaging the nature of God's suffering. He presents an alternative that makes him a useful conversation partner in exploring the distinctions in Barth's work. Fiddes agrees with Barth that God's suffering is a free determination made within God. Fiddes also agrees with Barth that God's choice to be for humanity was an eternal choice. But from there, the two part theological paths.

Fiddes argues that Barth cannot successfully reconcile the idea that God's choice to be for humanity was an eternal choice and at the same time argue that God is impassible in the essence of the inner Godhead but fully available to suffering and death in God's work. Fiddes contends that Barth's position creates a gulf between God's essence and his work that Barth is unable to close.<sup>68</sup> Fiddes suggests the eternal *yes* to humanity included God's choice to suffer and invited pain into the deepest parts of Trinitarian life.<sup>69</sup>

Fiddes argues that God's eternal choice to be for humanity means that God immerses himself in suffering. He insists that God's choosing to engage suffering

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<sup>68</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 116.

<sup>69</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 118.

humanity necessitates change in God, meaning suffering contributes to God's being.<sup>70</sup>

According to Fiddes, God makes relationship with humanity necessary for his own completion. Fiddes' position is counter to Barth's assertion that God did not need to be for humanity. Fiddes argues that Barth cannot maintain that God does not need humanity and at the same time argue that God's "free choice takes place in the same act of being in which he determines to be God in the mode of Son as well as Father."<sup>71</sup>

In Fiddes' view, Barth constructs the foundation for considering God's suffering in relationship with humanity but fails to advance adequately the position. Fiddes suggests that a logical step from Barth's position is to affirm that suffering changes the sufferer and that God "chooses to be completed through the world, to be fulfilled through giving himself away in suffering."<sup>72</sup> Fiddes argues that Barth did not speak of God's completion through the world in order to protect the possibility of God's freedom not to have chosen humanity and the way of the cross.<sup>73</sup> Fiddes states that Barth maintains that God in his freedom could have not been for humanity in order to prevent a correlation between humanity and God that would allow humanity to know God apart from God's self-revelation.<sup>74</sup> Barth's argument that God could have not been for humanity also prevents the notion that humanity is necessary for God's determination. Fiddes argues that

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<sup>70</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*. 68.

<sup>71</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*. 117.

<sup>72</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*. 69.

<sup>73</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 119.

<sup>74</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 121.

God in his freedom makes humanity necessary for his self-completion, even to the point of *befalling* to the unpredictability of suffering.<sup>75</sup>

### **III.1 Responding to Fiddes' Proposal**

As I have shown above, Fiddes argues that Barth's position should be advanced further. In response I will engage Fiddes' understanding of God's freedom to suffer and explore the differences between Fiddes' proposal and Barth's position. Exploring Fiddes' proposal emphasizes the function of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity in understanding God's choice to engage suffering.

Fiddes is reluctant to follow Barth's engagement of the immanent and economic Trinity. His reluctance is due to his belief that Barth creates an unbridgeable gap between the immanent and economic Trinity. In other words, Fiddes believes Barth creates a gulf between God's work in the world and the being of God within himself.<sup>76</sup>

Fiddes argues that talk about the Trinity arises from human experience with God in contrast to Barth's proposal that emphasizes knowledge of the Trinity from God's work of self-revelation. Fiddes states that "man and his salvation are from the very beginning included within our thought of God as Trinity."<sup>77</sup> The Son cannot be separated from the Reconciler. Fiddes follows Karl Rahner's statement that economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity

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<sup>75</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, "Creation Out of Love," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 189.

<sup>76</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 122.

<sup>77</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 122.

is the economic Trinity. Fiddes suggests that projecting the immanent Trinity as self-sufficient and without humanity's participation is "sheer speculation."<sup>78</sup>

Barth argues however, that God does not withhold himself from humanity. The content of the immanent Trinity, of God's essence, is his work. Maintaining the immanent Trinity, as Paul Molnar argues, is necessary to God's freedom and human freedom. When God's essence is collapsed into his work, his life becomes infused into humanity's with the result that God has ceased to be God and humanity has ceased to be human; i.e., a hybrid results. Molnar argues that this leads to pantheism and suggests that beginning theology with human experience results in a God who needs humanity.<sup>79</sup> This is precisely Fiddes' path.

Fiddes agrees with Barth that God's choice to be for humanity was an eternal decision. Fiddes argues *contra* Barth that this choice invites suffering into the deepest part of God because it includes the decision to suffer the cross. Fiddes contends that God's eternal choice for humanity creates a desire in God for humanity that is equivalent to God's will.<sup>80</sup> Fiddes states, "His desire *is* his will."<sup>81</sup> God's choosing to be for humanity means that there could be no other possibility in God's love for humanity. Fiddes argues that God's self-revelation as

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<sup>78</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 120.

<sup>79</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 313.

<sup>80</sup> Here Fiddes agrees with Barth that "God's being is...his willed decision." (CD II/1, 271-72.) Fiddes expresses the point arguing, "God freely determines the kind of God that God wills to be." (Fiddes, *Creation*, 181.)

<sup>81</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 74.

In his later essay, *Creation Out of Love*, Fiddes argues that *desire* expresses a dimension of will or a *settled quality* of God's will.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit reflects his decision to be for humanity without the possibility that God could have not been for humanity.<sup>82</sup>

According to Fiddes, God created out of love, establishing a need within himself that requires satisfaction.<sup>83</sup> God chooses humanity to satisfy the need and to complete him. Fiddes argues that God does not need humanity because of an intrinsic necessity within his nature, but because God freely chooses to be in need of humanity.<sup>84</sup> While Fiddes applauds Process Theology for the treatment of God's relationship with the world, he argues that the position wrongly limits God's love in process and does not adequately reflect the dynamics of love.<sup>85</sup> Fiddes desires to maintain God's freedom to love without limiting it by grounding God's choice in isolation from the world as he believes Barth does. Fiddes also does not wish to subject God's freedom to process.

Fiddes' approach risks making God an eternal victim, powerless against suffering and at the mercy of humanity.<sup>86</sup> Fiddes denounces the notion that God controls the extent of suffering he experiences.<sup>87</sup> He acknowledges the risk undertaken by God, but argues that there is no greater power in the universe than the empathetic love that God displayed through the cross and resurrection.<sup>88</sup> In Fiddes' proposal, God's suffering is necessary in order to demonstrate empathy towards his people. Fiddes denies that God is a masochist, but his formula implies

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<sup>82</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 74.

<sup>83</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, "Creation Out of Love," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 169.

<sup>84</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 74.

<sup>85</sup> Fiddes, "Creation," 179.

Process theology maintains that God needs the world and that his essence changes through his interaction with the world. Barth opposes Process Theology throughout *Church Dogmatics*.

<sup>86</sup> Fiddes, "Creation," 184.

<sup>87</sup> Fiddes, "Creation," 188.

<sup>88</sup> Fiddes, "Creation," 189-90.

that God's giving of himself to the unpredictability of unlimited suffering at the hands of humanity is the mark of God's love. According to Fiddes, God's love is inseparable from his suffering, meaning God needs to suffer to be completed.

As presented above, Barth argues that the content of God's essence is the same as his work, but God has not collapsed himself into his work. Barth does not present two Trinities, but balances unity in distinction and distinction in unity. In this formula God's freedom is distinct from the world and creation.<sup>89</sup>

David Lauber argues that the immanent and economic aspects of the Trinity must be held in balance with one another in theology. A one-sided emphasis on the immanent renders God a distant observer who does not enter the human condition for human reconciliation. When the economic sphere is one-sidedly emphasized, God becomes "a mythical character caught up in the vagaries of historical existence."<sup>90</sup> Barth holds the immanent and economic in tension.

Barth includes God's freedom to be for humanity within the essence of God. Affirming Barth's position, Lauber argues that the eternal obedience of the Son means that God's act for humanity is not arbitrary.<sup>91</sup> The freedom to act for humanity is grounded in God's eternal decision for humanity.<sup>92</sup> The passion occurs in the necessity of the eternal love of God. The decision is also God's free choice because it is rooted in sheer grace.<sup>93</sup> God does not require the passion to complete himself. Barth argues,

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<sup>89</sup> David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 131.

<sup>90</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 134-35.

<sup>91</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 124.

<sup>92</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 125.

<sup>93</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 125.

God's loving is necessary, for it is the being, the essence and the nature of God. But for this very reason it is also free from every necessity in respect of its object.<sup>94</sup>

God's loving is who he is in his nature. His loving towards humanity is not required to complete himself.

Lauber makes clear the implications for God's immutable essence when he writes,

We must recognize that Barth upholds the doctrine of divine immutability by insisting that the incarnation, in which God becomes that which he had not previously been, has been accounted for in God's unalterable being, which God determined for himself. There is no change in God in the event of the incarnation. Immutability, however, along with infinity, impassibility and transcendence, is subordinate to or determined by God's freedom and God's love.<sup>95</sup>

God remains Triune love in the incarnation, but the dereliction, resurrection and ascension are genuine new developments in God's life. These new developments in God's life through the incarnation do not change God's being. Movement within the life of God occurs according to his freedom and love. In contrast, Fiddes argues that through God's creative love, God becomes a fellow victim requiring human participation for his own completion.

It is clear that these two theologians conceptualize the function of God's freedom differently. Fiddes follows Barth arguing that God's being for humanity is an overflow of his being for himself.<sup>96</sup> Fiddes moves beyond Barth's position in arguing that God freely desires to need humanity for his own completion. Fiddes argues that we cannot look behind this decision to ask why God chose to need

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<sup>94</sup> CD, II/1, 280.

<sup>95</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 124.

<sup>96</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 69-70.

humanity. He also argues that framing God's will as *desire* to be in need means that we cannot say with Barth that God need not have been for humanity. To maintain the position that God in his freedom desires to need humanity for his completion, Fiddes contends that there can be no point when "the reality external to God began."<sup>97</sup> In other words, God and the material universe coexist eternally for the good pleasure of God.<sup>98</sup> Fiddes' position denies God's Lordship.

According to Barth, God is free to choose, but choice does not define his freedom. As noted above, God's freedom according to Barth is his self-determination grounded in his own being. Freedom means nothing impedes God from acting in accord with his nature. Nothing is added to God's essence through humanity. Fiddes makes much of the statement that God need not have chosen humanity. He asks, "What possible meaning could there be to say 'he need not have done so?'"<sup>99</sup> Fiddes suggest Barth himself is impatient with entertaining the question when the Swiss theologian writes, "We can only say that he has actually done so, and that this decision and act invalidate all questions whether He might not have acted otherwise."<sup>100</sup> There is no impatience in this statement. In saying that God need not have been for humanity, Barth is stating that no force or object outside God moves him. There is little reason to speculate on any other possible outcome because in his freedom of love, he *is* for us for his own glory.

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<sup>97</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 75.

<sup>98</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 75.

<sup>99</sup> Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 119.

<sup>100</sup> CD, IV/1, 80.

#### **IV Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored Barth's introduction of the doctrine of the Trinity, and highlighted the important features that distinguish his theological development. Contrasting Barth's position with Paul Fiddes' draws attention to the significance of the Barth's reengagement of the immanent and economic elements of the doctrine of the Trinity. The comparison also reflects how contemporary Trinitarian development interacts with Barth and how this interaction has created distinctive notions of the significance of God's act towards humanity. In the next chapter I will explore the significance of events of Gethsemane and Good Friday within the Godhead and the implications for the human experience of anguish.

## Chapter 2

### **The Passion of Christ and the Triune God**

The Triune God makes the plight of humanity his own through the act of the Son. Barth describes this act as the way of the Son of God into the far country. He presents the Doctrine of Reconciliation in one of the most important volumes of *Church Dogmatics*. The Son obeys the Father, humbly entering human history, suffering and dying. In this act, God reconciles humanity to himself, drawing humanity into his Triune life.

In this chapter I examine Barth's theological development around the passion with particular interest in the suffering of Christ in relation to the Godhead and the implications for humanity. I examine Barth's treatment of the Garden of Gethsemane and the cry of dereliction, focusing on Barth's Trinitarian understanding of the passion. The Doctrine of Reconciliation presented in *CD IV* will serve as the primary text for this chapter. I reserve treatment of the resurrection for the next chapter.

#### **I. The Passion as the History of God**

Barth uniquely articulates his Christology. Historically Christology presented the person of Christ apart from his work. Barth states that the division is inconsistent with the biblical witness. He argues Christ reveals himself as reconciler and the fulfilment of the covenant. This must inform what is said about Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CD, IV/1, 125-26.

Christ's atoning act cannot be separated from who he is. Barth argues, "To say atonement is to say Jesus Christ. To speak of it is to speak of His history."<sup>2</sup> Barth contends that the atonement is God's history, that noetically it is the history about Jesus Christ, and ontically Jesus' own history.<sup>3</sup>

Barth opposes the prevailing theological direction by affirming the passion as God's own history. Barth laments, "Evangelical theology almost all along the line, certainly in all its representative forms and tendencies, had become religionistic, anthropocentric, and in this sense humanistic."<sup>4</sup> He argues that piety became the object of theological pursuit. He warns that God "was in danger of being reduced, along with this history and this dialogue, to a pious notion – to a mystical expression and symbol of a current alternating between man and his own depths."<sup>5</sup> The history of God in the self-offering of Jesus means God has found humanity and humanity God.<sup>6</sup>

The Triune God does not leave humanity to its own fate, but "enters the far country."<sup>7</sup> God makes humanity's situation his own without forfeiting his divinity in this act. He retains the power to make the final pronouncement on human history.<sup>8</sup> Barth argues that "God gives himself, but He does not give Himself away."<sup>9</sup> Barth states that in this history of God, the Triune God never ceases to be God. He contends that the New Testament church operated in the

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<sup>2</sup> CD, IV/1,158.

<sup>3</sup> CD, IV/1,185.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Barth, *Humanity*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> CD, IV/1,185.

<sup>7</sup> CD, IV/1,158.

<sup>8</sup> CD, IV/1,160.

<sup>9</sup> CD, IV/1, 185.

knowledge and with the presumption that the fullness of the Godhead dwelled within Jesus.<sup>10</sup> God-for-humanity is revealed in the person of Jesus. Barth argues,

Who He is and what He is in His deity, He proves and reveals not in a vacuum as a divine being-for-Himself, but precisely and authentically in the fact that He exists, speaks, and acts as the *partner* of man, though of course as the absolute superior partner. He who does *that* is the living God. And the freedom in which He does *that* is His deity.<sup>11</sup>

God's deity is not imprisoned in himself. His act is determined in the freedom of his love and his deity "encloses humanity in itself."<sup>12</sup>

### **I.1 The Humanity of God**

God is for humanity, but Barth argues that the theology of his day presented "a God absolutely unique in His revelation to man and the world, overpoweringly lofty and distant, strange, yes even wholly other."<sup>13</sup> The humanity of God, Barth argues, rightly means God turning towards humanity. "It represents God's existence, intercession and activity for man, the intercourse God holds with him, and the free grace in which He wills to be and is nothing other than the God of man."<sup>14</sup> Jesus' action towards humanity is an act of obedience on the part of the Son to the Father. Jesus wills to be obedient. Barth states that Jesus is the "suffering servant who wills this profoundly unsatisfactory being, who cannot will anything other in the obedience in which He shows Himself the Son of God."<sup>15</sup> Barth contends that the Synoptic Gospels demonstrate that suffering is the

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<sup>10</sup> CD, IV/1, 160.

<sup>11</sup> Barth, *Humanity*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Barth, *Humanity*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Barth, *Humanity*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Barth, *Humanity*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> CD, IV/1, 164.

central theme of the story of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The identity of the suffering servant is not haphazardly assigned to Christ, but is the free and obedient will of Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

Barth argues that Jesus born a Jew is central to his identity as the suffering servant. Failing to maintain Jesus' distinction as a Jew renders the Church's doctrines of incarnation and atonement abstract and meaningless.<sup>18</sup> Barth states that the world is brought into God's dealing with Israel through Christ. He argues that Christ's universality is revealed in the particularity of Jesus' place in God's history with Israel.<sup>19</sup> Neglecting Jesus' central connection to the Old Testament and God's history with Israel welcomes the error of Docetism, which Barth declares is the "old enemy."<sup>20</sup>

Christ stands in solidarity with the people of the Old Testament who lived with the sentence and judgement of God before them as the prophets continually reminded the people.<sup>21</sup> The Old Testament speaks of the people in a state of perishing before God. The New Testament speaks of the Son of Man entering the state of perishing with and for the people of Israel. Barth contends that the Son incarnate exists as one of the people of the Old Testament. He says of Jesus' relationship to the people of the Old Testament,

He does not suffer any suffering, but their suffering; the suffering of children chastised by their Father. He does not suffer any death, but the death to which the history of Israel moves relentlessly forward.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> CD, IV/1, 165.

<sup>17</sup> CD, IV/1, 166.

<sup>18</sup> CD, IV/1, 166.

<sup>19</sup> CD, IV/1, 167.

<sup>20</sup> CD, IV/1, 168.

<sup>21</sup> CD, IV/1, 173.

<sup>22</sup> CD, IV/1, 175.

Barth argues that Jesus does not merely bear suffering and death in solidarity with the people of Israel but allows the divine sentence to be fulfilled on him.<sup>23</sup> The people of Israel suffered and died in the accounts of the Old Testament, but it is in the New Testament that suffering becomes the work of God himself.<sup>24</sup> Barth argues that in entering the human plight, Christ takes on the consequence of human sin.

## II. Barth on Constancy and Immutability

What happened within the Godhead when Christ was sacrificed for humanity?

What does this mean for understanding the immutability of God?

Barth's primary remarks on immutability are present in CD II although he revisits the issue in later volumes. He insists that the classic view of the immutability of God is greatly influenced by Hellenistic thought rather than properly informed by Scripture. Barth opposes the approach that begins with the concept of immutability and in turn applies God to the concept.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, Barth challenges Polanus' exposition of immutability that presents God as *immobile*. He argues that this concept excludes the possibility of a relationship between God and any reality outside of God.<sup>26</sup> He states that the pure *immobile* of

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<sup>23</sup> CD, IV/1, 175.

<sup>24</sup> CD, IV/1, 175.

<sup>25</sup> CD, II/1, 493.

<sup>26</sup> Richard A. Muller in arguing for a Neo-Classical Theism argues that Barth has overstated the implications of the use of *immobile*. Muller argues there is an implied ontological component in Barth's argument that draws him closer to the classical view than perhaps Barth would be comfortable with. See Richard A. Muller, "Incarnation, immutability and the case for classical theism." *WTJ* 45 (1983): 22-40

God “means death, and if death is God then God is dead. There is then no hope for humanity.”<sup>27</sup>

Barth is concerned that the Hellenistic view of immutability has resulted in a theology that distances the Godhead from humanity. He argues that this rendering of immutability has plagued Protestant Christianity including Reformers and Liberals. Barth opposes an unrestrained mutability of God, but proposes “the kind of immutability which does not prevent Him from humbling Himself and therefore doing what He willed to do and actually did do in Jesus Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

Barth reinterprets immutability by speaking of God’s *constancy*. He contends that constancy means God is not subject to alteration and is never other than himself. God’s inner and outer life is never in conflict and his acts are never estranged from who he is.<sup>29</sup> Barth writes,

God is constant and God is omnipotent. Again, by constancy we denote first the perfect freedom of God and by omnipotence the perfect love in which He is free.<sup>30</sup>

Barth argues that constancy and omnipotence must be considered both inter-dependently and independently of one another. God’s constancy never encroaches on his freedom.

Barth argues that the doctrine of God must be informed by God’s self-revelation. God reveals himself as immutable. Barth states that a true

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<sup>27</sup> CD, II/1, 494.

<sup>28</sup> CD, IV/1, 85.

<sup>29</sup> CD, II/1, 491.

<sup>30</sup> CD, II/1, 490.

understanding of immutability is defined by God's constancy. Therefore he describes God's immutability as

the constancy of His knowing, willing and acting and therefore of His person. It is the continuity, undivertability and indefatigableness in which God both is Himself and also performs His work maintaining it as such and continually making it His work. It is the self-assurance in which God moves in Himself and in all His works and in which He is rich in Himself and in all His works without either losing Himself or (for fear of this loss) having to petrify in Himself and renounce His movement and His riches.<sup>31</sup>

God's immutability does not limit his activity nor does it imprison him in any way.

Barth goes on to argue that there is a *holy mutability* of God.<sup>32</sup> He begins defining the *holy mutability* of God by declaring the Lordship of God over all times and ages. He argues that *holy mutability* means that God remains constant in changing the heart of his people. For example, in the Old Testament when God altered the heart of the people of Israel towards himself, the change within the people corresponded to God's essence. When the people of Israel were unfaithful, it was not an act of God's *holy mutability* but the people's *unholy mutability*.<sup>33</sup> In spite of the unfaithfulness of his people, God remains consistent and constant in his Lordship and action towards his people.

Barth disagrees with the Platonic understanding of God's activity because it describes God as "basically without life, word or act."<sup>34</sup> Barth asserts that God's action is perceived as mechanical in the Platonic view. He argues instead, that

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<sup>31</sup> CD, II/1, 495.

<sup>32</sup> CD, II/1, 496.

<sup>33</sup> CD, II/1, 496.

<sup>34</sup> CD, II/1, 496.

biblical thinking about God's immutability affirms God's mobility and elasticity and upholds God's perseverance.<sup>35</sup> Barth affirms God's mobility and perseverance as God moves in the hearts of his people, remaining constant in his Lordship over all ages.

Barth continues to develop the notion of God's constancy by exploring the Old Testament passages that speak of God's repentance.<sup>36</sup> Barth argues that interpreting passages regarding God's repentance as merely figurative is unwise because such an interpretation cannot reveal truth.<sup>37</sup> Instead, Barth explains that the Old Testament passages that speak of God's repentance should be understood as "a function of His love active in freedom."<sup>38</sup> He states that God's love active in freedom is evident in the order in which God displays his repentance; i.e., in his freedom God chides his people and then redeems them. In the first aspect of God's repentance, he "goes back on warnings and even judgements which have already fallen."<sup>39</sup> The prophets proclaim the judgement of God that the people may repent and claim the promises of God. Barth argues that the second aspect of God's repentance is that he never repents of being the One who he is. Barth illustrates his point arguing that even as God repents of helping Israel, he remains

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<sup>35</sup> CD, II/1, 496.

<sup>36</sup> By passages that convey God's repentance, Barth is referencing passages that speak of God grieving his judgement on Israel or relenting on his acts of judgement when the people of Israel repent; i.e., Jer. 26:2-3, 13,19; 36:3; 42:10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2.

<sup>37</sup> CD, II/1, 498.

<sup>38</sup> CD, II/1, 498.

<sup>39</sup> CD, II/1, 498.

Israel's Helper.<sup>40</sup> Barth contends that in these acts, God's essence remains constant.

In summary, Barth applied the term constancy to redefine immutability understood in the freedom and love of God. The one true God reveals himself through his act at the cross taking on the human plight for humanity. Barth declares,

God is 'immutably' the One whose reality is seen in His condescension in Jesus Christ, in His self-offering and self-concealment, in His self-emptying and self-humiliation. He is not a God who is what He is in a majesty behind this condescension, behind the cross on Golgotha. On the contrary, the cross on Golgotha is itself the divine majesty...that God on high is the One who was able and willing and in fact did condescend so completely to us in His Son. This free love is the one true God Himself.<sup>41</sup>

God's immutability does not prevent him, in his freedom and love, from coming to humanity so completely in Christ. At the cross humanity is confronted by the reality of God. The cross of Christ is not required to complete or satisfy a deficiency within the Godhead. Barth writes, "he could have remained satisfied with Himself and with the impassible glory and blessedness of His own inner life. But He did not do so."<sup>42</sup>

### **III. God for Us**

The immutability of God understood as his constancy does not prevent the Triune God from being for humanity in his freedom and love. Barth argues that humanity desires to be its own judge, a desire that is the root of sin. A world given to its

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<sup>40</sup> CD, II/1, 498.

<sup>41</sup> CD, II/1, 517.

<sup>42</sup> CD, II/2, 166.

desire to be its own judge is “an unreconciled world, and therefore a suffering world, a world given up to destruction.”<sup>43</sup> Barth then asks, how is God for us?

Barth affirms the Triune God’s solidarity with the world.<sup>44</sup> Christ humbled himself to the human state in order to change this state.<sup>45</sup> The Triune God invites humanity to participate in the inner life of the Godhead, in the very history of the Triune God.

The invitation into the inner life of the Godhead is through the work of Christ for us. Jesus “for us” rightly means that God acts for us in reconciliation and redemption and accomplishes this without our effort. Barth argues that the Son does this as the Judge, judged in our place. Jesus as judge means the end of humanity’s “dream of divine likeness.”<sup>46</sup> The result is that humanity is no longer owner or co-sharer of sin.<sup>47</sup> The death of this dream and the death of humanity as sinner results in “immeasurable liberation and hope.”<sup>48</sup>

### **III.1 Punishment, Wrath and Atonement**

Barth argues that it can be rightly said that Christ fulfills the judgement by suffering the punishment which humanity has brought upon itself. He contends that the New Testament does not expressly promote the idea of punishment nor does it flatly ignore it. Barth argues that humanity’s sinful turning from God is followed by God’s annihilating turning from humanity, which is humanity’s

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<sup>43</sup> CD, IV/1, 220.

<sup>44</sup> CD, IV/1, 215.

<sup>45</sup> CD, IV/1, 216.

<sup>46</sup> CD, IV/1, 233.

<sup>47</sup> CD, IV/1, 238.

<sup>48</sup> CD, IV/1, 233.

punishment. Barth argues that in turning from God, humanity is turning from God's love. God's resisted love "works itself out as death-dealing wrath."<sup>49</sup> When Jesus follows the way of sinful humanity to the "outer darkness," it can be properly said that Jesus suffered humanity's punishment.<sup>50</sup>

Barth challenges two aspects of the older presentations of the doctrine of atonement in the tradition of Anselm of Canterbury that place prominence on Christ suffering humanity's punishment. First, Barth rejects a strong version of substitution that includes humanity's exception from suffering. Barth contends that the New Testament statements on the passion of Christ do not reflect humanity's exception from suffering. Barth acknowledges that Christ suffers humanity's punishment but argues that this should not obscure the "decisive thing," that is that Jesus made an end to humanity as sinners and sin itself by going to death as the One who took humanity's place. Jesus cancelled the sin, accusation, condemnation and perdition, which humanity is unwilling and unable to do.<sup>51</sup>

Second, Barth qualifies the notion that Christ's suffering and death satisfies God's wrath. He argues that the need for satisfaction does not encompass a desire for vengeance and retribution on the part of God. Rather, Barth states that "the radical nature of divine love" satisfies itself in the outworking of God's

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<sup>49</sup> CD, IV/1, 253.

<sup>50</sup> CD, IV/1, 253.

Frank Hasel has argued that Barth has been misunderstood by English speaking students on the atonement because of translation problems from the German. Hasel argues that according to Barth, Christ's "substitutionary death" in the traditional sense is not valid. Christ's death is not a reaction to "historical human sin" but ordained from eternity.

See Frank Hasel, "Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* on the Atonement: Some Translational Problems," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29, no.3 (Autumn 1991): 205-211.

<sup>51</sup> CD, IV/1, 253-54.

wrath against sin.<sup>52</sup> Barth maintains that God made an end to sin in the death of Christ. The Cross was satisfactory or sufficient in ending sin and restoring order between God and humanity.<sup>53</sup> Barth's qualified use of the term satisfaction does not negate the point that the passion satisfies God's wrath in the sense that Jesus is the Judge, judged in our place.

Barth refutes the idea that through the suffering of Christ the wrath of God is transformed to love or that God moves from wrath to a counter position of love. Rather, Barth argues that the wrath of God is an element of God's love, not in tension with love. David Lauber contends that Barth is stronger on this point in CD IV than in the Doctrine of God in CD II.<sup>54</sup> Lauber argues that in CD II, Barth risks separating God's mercy from God's righteousness in suggesting that God's righteousness is *satisfied* through the atonement. Lauber argues Barth stops short of suggesting that God's disposition turns from wrath to love, noting that Barth demonstrates an increased guardedness against this notion in CD IV.<sup>55</sup>

Lauber contends that Barth's use of "punishment" should be considered in two ways. First, punishment describes the gravity of Christ's suffering and death. Second, by punishment Barth maintains that sin is not deflected but removed and destroyed.<sup>56</sup> The atonement is motivated by love and is not the work of a

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<sup>52</sup> CD, IV/1, 254.

<sup>53</sup> CD, IV/1, 254-55.

<sup>54</sup> David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 35.

<sup>55</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 34.

bloodthirsty God. The goal of the passion of Christ, argues Lauber, is the reconciliation and redemption of humanity.<sup>57</sup>

#### **IV. Elements of the Passion of Christ**

The passion of Christ means the reconciliation of humanity to God. What does the passion mean for the inter-relationship within the Godhead? What does the death of Jesus mean for the Triune God and how might this inform how we understand the human experience of suffering?

Barth grounds his exploration of the passion in CD IV in four judicially based themes. First, Jesus takes humanity's place as judge in contrast to humanity's desire to be judge. Second, Jesus takes humanity's place as the judged. Third, Jesus was judged in humanity's place. Fourth, Jesus acted justly in humanity's place.<sup>58</sup> The divine judgement of Christ includes perishing, destruction and the fall into nothingness and hell.<sup>59</sup>

The earthly life of the Judge judged in our place was defined by suffering. Barth argues in *Credo*, his lectures on the Apostles' Creed, "If there is any aim discernable in this life [of Christ], any business that is manifestly engaged in carrying out, it is this: the Son of Man must suffer."<sup>60</sup> Barth states without Christ's suffering, there is no discernable progress in the life of Christ. Jesus is rejected by the fickle crowds, betrayed by one disciple and denied by another.

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<sup>57</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 35.

<sup>58</sup> CD, IV/ 1, 222.

See also Lauber, *Descent*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Karl Barth, *Credo: A presentation on the chief problems of the dogmatics with reference to the Apostles' Creed*, trans. J. Strathearn McNab (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 77.

When Barth says there is discernable progress, he means that the earthly ministry of Christ points to his approaching suffering and death.<sup>61</sup>

The history of the passion is unique. The journey to Golgotha is unlike any other expression of suffering. The uniqueness of this act is not found in the manner or severity of the physical suffering. Barth notes that many have suffered longer and more grievously.<sup>62</sup> His intention is not to minimize their suffering, but to demonstrate that the uniqueness of the passion is found in the identity of the one who suffered. Barth writes, “In this humiliation God is supremely God, that in this death He is supremely alive, that He has maintained and revealed His deity in the passion of this man as His eternal Son.”<sup>63</sup> Barth argues more bluntly that the passion of the man Jesus is the very passion of God himself.<sup>64</sup> Barth states,

In this suffering and dying of God Himself in His Son, there took place the reconciliation with God, the conversion to Him of the world which is out of harmony with Him, contradicting and opposing Him. The world itself is not capable of this reconciliation.<sup>65</sup>

In what sense is the passion of Christ the act of God? The suffering and dying of the Son is salvific. The act of the Son is God’s reconciliation of humanity to himself.

Jesus bears the divine curse in his self-surrender to the state and fate of humanity.<sup>66</sup> Barth argues that apart from this act, humanity would be oblivious to its own sin and judgement. Barth argues that the suffering and death of Jesus

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<sup>61</sup> Barth, *Credo*, 76-77.

<sup>62</sup> CD, IV/1, 246.

<sup>63</sup> CD, IV/1, 247.

<sup>64</sup> CD, IV/1, 246.

<sup>65</sup> CD, IV/1, 250-51.

<sup>66</sup> Barth, *Credo*, 88.

means the end of us as sinners. God has negated us as sinners.<sup>67</sup> Barth argues that this *no* of God is a *yes* to man, determined and pronounced in eternity.<sup>68</sup> Barth writes,

The power of evil had to break on Jesus, its work of death had to be done on Him, so that being done on Him it might be done once and for all, for all men, for the liberation of all men.<sup>69</sup>

In suffering and dying Jesus announces humanity's state by taking that state upon himself for our liberation. This is the act of the Judge, judged in our place.

## **V. Passion and the Triune Life of God**

In this chapter I have examined Barth's assertion that God embraces suffering and death through the Son. The passion is an act in the history of the Triune, and humanity participates in this history. God is for humanity as the Judge, judged in our place. Through this act, God reconciles humanity to himself. I will examine the passion through Barth's doctrine of the Trinity in an effort to understand what transpires within the Godhead at the cross. Barth's treatment of the Garden of Gethsemane reveals his Trinitarian understanding of the passion of Christ.

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<sup>67</sup> CD, IV/1, 253-54.

<sup>68</sup> CD, IV/1, 257.

Kevin Hector examines the tension between the concept of God's freedom and the concept of the eternal Trinity. Hector presents the contrasting views of Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar. McCormack and Molnar agree that God's immanent Triunity is known through God's economic Triunity. Molnar argues that this concept of God's Triunity guarantees God's freedom. Molnar rejects McCormack's argument that God was eternally toward incarnation and for us. Hector argues that Barth is closer to McCormack, but argues that God's self-determination and Triunity are eternally and theologically simultaneous. Hector's proposal means humanity is necessary to God, a position Barth wishes to avoid. See Kevin W. Hector, "God's Triunity and Self-determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar." *IJST* 7, no. 3 (July 2005), 246-261.

<sup>69</sup> CD, IV/1, 272.

## V.1 Barth on Gethsemane

Gethsemane is Christ's entrance into the passion experience. The Garden of Gethsemane is a "historical complement" to the eternal decision within God to reconcile the world.<sup>70</sup> Barth argues in the Doctrine of Reconciliation in CD IV/1, that Gethsemane is a decisive moment in the gospel record, revealing the unity of the Godhead.

Barth links his exegesis of the Gethsemane experience with the wilderness temptation narratives. Jesus' *no* to the temptation in the wilderness necessarily resulted in his *yes* to the passion. Barth frames the temptation as the beginning of Christ's engagement with the kingdom of darkness. Barth writes,

His way will never be at a safe distance from the kingdom of darkness but will always be along its frontier and finally within that kingdom. But already at the outset it brings Him into confrontation and encounter with it.<sup>71</sup>

Barth reminds readers that the wilderness was associated with the underworld, intensifying Christ's conflict with the kingdom of darkness. Jesus chose this confrontation.

The wilderness temptation strikes at the very mission and person of Jesus. Barth argues that had Jesus used his power to provide food, he would have rejected his role as the one who fasts for sinners. Barth notes that Jesus acted for

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<sup>70</sup> CD, IV/1, 239.

<sup>71</sup> CD, IV/1, 260.

all people in refusing to use his power to serve himself, standing in contrast to human pride.<sup>72</sup>

Barth argues that the request that Jesus bow his knee on the mountain top was not a grand public confrontation or spectacle, but would have allowed Jesus to exit his true mission by granting satanic lordship over the earth and giving the devil the final word.<sup>73</sup>

The third temptation according to the Lucan account is Satan's invitation to Jesus to throw himself off the temple in Jerusalem allowing the angels to receive him. Barth states that this is the most astonishing temptation because of the dignity of the temple setting and because the temptation is an invitation to Jesus to commit an act demonstrating total confidence in God. Jesus did take such a leap of faith in obeying the Father's will in enduring the cross. Barth argues had Jesus leapt from the temple, He would have done so of his own will making use of the Father for his own favour.<sup>74</sup> Jesus' rebuke of Satan reveals the unity of the Godhead.

Barth contends that Jesus could have abandoned the world, but instead resisted the wilderness temptation, affirming his movement towards the crucifixion. Barth makes clear that Jesus *could* have accepted the wilderness invitation. Likewise Jesus *could* have avoided the cross. The devil's invitation was a true temptation. Jesus could have chosen otherwise, but the will of the Son was one with the will of the Father. Barth notes that the account in Luke reports

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<sup>72</sup> CD, IV/1, 262-63.

<sup>73</sup> CD, IV/1, 263.

<sup>74</sup> CD, IV/1, 263.

that the devil departed until “the decisive moment.” Barth interprets this to mean until the passion event.

Barth argues that the conflict between God’s righteousness and the unreconciled world in the wilderness kingdom of demons is a “prefiguring of the passion.” God’s righteousness is known through the acts of Jesus in the wilderness temptation, just as Christ’s passion also reveals God’s righteousness. Barth argues that Satan’s departure and the arrival of ministering angels at the end of the temptation is complemented by the resurrection following the passion of Christ.<sup>75</sup>

The Gethsemane experience is a lonely one for Jesus. Christ acknowledges his troubled soul, not to the Father but to the disciples that they might pray with him. Instead, Jesus finds himself alone as the disciples sleep a stone’s throw away.<sup>76</sup>

Barth explores the content and purpose of Jesus’ prayer. He notes that the garden experience is a one-way conversation with Christ speaking to God. Barth discerns between the *wish* of Jesus and the *will* of Jesus. Jesus clearly wishes that the cup of wrath pass by him, but Barth argues that this cannot be equated with the will of Jesus. The will of the Father and Son must be one, and Barth stresses this unity without dismissing the severity of Christ’s distress evident in Jesus’

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<sup>75</sup> CD, IV/1, 264.

<sup>76</sup> CD, IV/1, 267.

desire that the cup pass. Jesus makes no demands, but prays in humility and obedience.<sup>77</sup>

Barth states that in this prayer, Jesus “renewed, confirmed and put into effect, His freedom to finish His work.”<sup>78</sup> Jesus executes divine judgement, but takes the punishment upon himself in his death.<sup>79</sup> David Lauber argues that this death is no common death, but the eternal death under the full gravity of sin.<sup>80</sup> The burden of our sin weighs unrelieved on Jesus. The future reality and meaning of the resurrection is out of view for Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

## **V.2 Gethsemane and the Triune God**

Barth maintains the unity of the Godhead in his understanding of the events in Gethsemane. As shown above, Barth interprets Jesus’ request of the Father to remove the cup as a wish rather than the will of Christ. Barth argues that the will of the Father and the Son must be one. The unity between Father and Son is reflected in Jesus’ descent into sorrow. Barth states that the Son’s request to remove the cup was a pause and trembling in the soul of Jesus and in the bosom of the Father.<sup>81</sup> Barth is careful to emphasize the unity between Father and Son.

Jürgen Moltmann presents another view that contrasts Barth’s emphasis on the unity of the Godhead in the passion events. Moltmann presents a different interpretation of Gethsemane from that of Barth. Moltmann focuses on the

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<sup>77</sup> CD, IV/1, 270.

<sup>78</sup> CD, IV/1, 271.

<sup>79</sup> CD, IV/1, 271.

<sup>80</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 78.

<sup>81</sup> CD, IV/1, 265.

conflict between the Father and Son. He conveys a sense of hesitancy and fear in Jesus when he argues that the disciples accompany Jesus in the garden because the Son does not want to be alone with the Father.<sup>82</sup> Moltmann interprets Jesus' prayer to remove the cup as a demand from the Son on the Father. He contends that Jesus' prayer reveals that Christ's will is counter to the will of the Father. Eventually the Son chooses to suppress his will and surrenders to the will of the Father. The Father's silence in the garden marks the beginning of the Father's forsaking and abandoning of the Son.

The difference in interpretation of the Gethsemane events reflects the important differences between how Barth and Moltmann articulate the doctrine of the Trinity. Moltmann does not uphold Barth's distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. He argues that the cross is the foundation of knowledge of the Trinity and that one cannot conceive of the Trinity apart from the economy of salvation at the cross.<sup>83</sup> He states that the distinction of the immanent Trinity becomes an "impenetrable obscurity."<sup>84</sup>

Moltmann goes further by arguing that the Triune God is conditioned by the world. He argues that God's involvement in the world constitutes the Trinity. He contends that the created world is inherent in the Father's love for the Son.<sup>85</sup> As Paul Molnar correctly argues, Moltmann's panentheism does not allow for an

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<sup>82</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. M. Kohl (1980; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 76.

<sup>83</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 160.

<sup>84</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 161.

<sup>85</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 108.

articulation of an immanent Trinity through which God exists apart from humanity.<sup>86</sup>

According to Moltmann, the inclusion of humanity in God's love requires that God suffers for humanity. If God is conditioned by humanity, God's divine freedom is at risk. However Molnar's view has merit, in that without the distinction of the immanent Trinity, it is difficult to maintain God's freedom and subsequently human freedom.<sup>87</sup>

Barth however, maintains God's divine freedom and the unity of the Godhead. Barth argues,

In divine freedom He accepts and chooses and goes the way which in the same divine freedom the Father has appointed for Him. But the divine freedom of the Father who orders and the Son who obeys is the freedom of the love in which God willed to take to Himself in this total way, by His own interposition. This is the twofold but single will of God as it has taken place in the existence of Jesus Christ in that antithesis of exaltation and abasement.<sup>88</sup>

The despair of Gethsemane and the way of the cross is the freely chosen will of the Father and Son.

### **V.3 Barth on the Cry of Dereliction**

Barth maintains this unity when he addresses the cry of dereliction at Golgotha.

Five important observations can be drawn from Barth's treatment of the cry of dereliction.

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<sup>86</sup> Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 199.

<sup>87</sup> Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, 198.

<sup>88</sup> CD, IV/2, 351.

First, the cry from the cross is rightly the cry of humanity. Barth remarks, “how close was this frightful possibility. It might have been that God turned away His face finally from us.”<sup>89</sup> It is our sin that separates us from God and Jesus’ cry expresses this separation.

Second, the Son has taken the cry of God-forsakenness upon himself. Barth argues that the election of Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world means Christ’s engagement with God-forsakenness. Barth states, “No man but Jesus has ever known the true breadth and depth, the true essence and darkness of human misery.”<sup>90</sup> He argues that our experience of this suffering touches only the edge of the shadow of the cross. The cry of dereliction is as a “distant recollection,” for we cannot know the depth of dereliction.<sup>91</sup> As noted above, apart from the act of the self-revealing God, we would not be aware of our own peril.

Third, the cry from the cross means our inclusion in the history of the inner life of the Godhead.<sup>92</sup> Barth declares the unity of the Godhead from all eternity and then states, “but the self-humiliation of God in His Son is genuine and actual, and therefore is no reservation in respect of His solidarity with us.”<sup>93</sup> Barth states that Christ takes the cry of dereliction upon himself, and “cries with man in his need.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> CD, IV/1, 306.

<sup>90</sup> CD, IV/2, 437.

<sup>91</sup> CD, IV/2, 487.

<sup>92</sup> CD, IV/1, 215.

<sup>93</sup> CD, IV/1, 215.

<sup>94</sup> CD, IV/1, 215.

Fourth, the cry of dereliction is central to Christ's descent into hell. Barth argues that the Son is elected to be the *Rejected*. He writes,

In our flesh, according to His human nature, as the Son of David, He must be the Rejected. He must be delivered up by His people to the heathen, descending into hell, where He can only cry: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'<sup>95</sup>

The cry of dereliction reveals the Son's way into darkness for the reconciliation of humanity to God. Barth agrees with Calvin that the cry of dereliction signifies Christ's descent into hell.<sup>96</sup> He writes in *The Faith of the Church*, "The descent into hell is, so to speak, the inward explanation of what is outwardly happening in his death and tomb."<sup>97</sup>

Fifth, the cry of dereliction occurs in the unity of the Godhead, and is the shared will of the Father and Son. Barth notes that the dereliction, death and burial of Christ appears as a contradiction, but is in fact the freely chosen act of the Triune God.<sup>98</sup> Barth writes, "In the deepest darkness of Golgotha He enters supremely into the glory of the unity of the Son with the Father."<sup>99</sup> As Christ gives voice to the cry of dereliction, he remains the One directly loved by God, which is revealed in the resurrection.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> CD, II/2, 365.

<sup>96</sup> Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, ed. J.L. Leuba, trans. G. Vahanian (London: Collins, 1964), 81.

Lauber argues that Barth does not interpret the descent into hell as a separate event in the passion. Lauber also determines that Barth does not consider 1 Peter 3:18-22 (Christ's teaching to the spirits in prison) as reference to the descent into hell. See Lauber 77-82.

<sup>97</sup> Barth, *Faith*, 81.

<sup>98</sup> CD, IV/1, 458.

<sup>99</sup> CD, IV/2, 252.

<sup>100</sup> CD, IV/2, 252.

In contrast, Moltmann argues that the cry of dereliction is evidence of the fracturing of the relationship between the Father and Son. He argues similar to Barth that the Father and Son are united in will at the cross; however Moltmann presents deeply fractured relationships within the Trinity at the cross. Moltmann contends that at the cross the Father becomes sonless and the Son becomes Fatherless.<sup>101</sup> Moltmann finds evidence of this division in the cry of dereliction when Jesus calls out ‘My God’ rather than addressing God as Father.<sup>102</sup> Moltmann argues that the fracturing of the relationship between the Father and Son “constitutes the very life of the Trinity.”<sup>103</sup> He continues, arguing that the love that binds the Father and Son is *transformed* into a dividing curse at the cross. Moltmann contends that at the moment when the relationship between Father and Son fractures, there is a “profound community of will” bound together by the Holy Spirit.<sup>104</sup>

Despite Moltmann’s assertion of a “community of will,” the fracture within the Trinity that at the same time constitutes the Trinity, amounts to God giving himself away. As argued above, asserting that humanity is necessary to God erodes his divine freedom. Furthermore, Moltmann’s proposal that the

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<sup>101</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (1974; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 243.

<sup>102</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 78.

<sup>103</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 80.

<sup>104</sup> Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 82.

Lauber argues that Moltmann is inconsistent in speaking of a “community of will” within the Trinity in *Crucified God*, and when he speaks about Jesus’ experience in Gethsemane in the *Trinity and the Kingdom*. Lauber argues that the Gethsemane account in *Trinity and the Kingdom* is described as a submission of will on the part of Jesus in an act of desperation. I however, understand Moltmann to mean that while the Son submits to the will of the Father in Gethsemane, the will of the Father and Son progress to a harmonious “community of will” culminating at the cross, even as the relationship between the Father and Son fractures at Calvary according to Moltmann. See Lauber, *Descent*, 119-120.

relationship between Father and Son fractures risks dividing the essence of the Trinity, venturing towards a tritheistic Trinitarian model.<sup>105</sup>

In his proposal, Moltmann also argues that each member of the Trinity suffers at the cross in unique way. I agree with Lauber among others that Moltmann presents an anthropomorphic view of God when he argues that the unique experiences of suffering at the cross among the members of the Trinity constitute the Trinity.<sup>106</sup> Barth avoids this criticism by retaining the immanent and economic distinctions within the Trinity and by arguing that the suffering at the cross is humanity's suffering, alien to the divinity of God. Barth affirms the need to speak of God's suffering and moves beyond the traditional view of *apatheia*, but cautiously avoids speaking of suffering within the immanent Trinity. In this way, Barth rejects Moltmann's problematic view that the Trinity is conditioned by suffering.<sup>107</sup>

## **VI. The Death of Christ and the Triune God**

The self-revealing God is at the centre of the passion. In the passion event, God reveals who he is from all eternity. Barth's understanding of the passion and death of Christ and the meaning for the Triunity is illuminated in the statement, "God gives himself, but He does not give Himself away."<sup>108</sup> The self-giving of God includes the giving of the Son. Barth argues that the death of Christ is the

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<sup>105</sup> Here I agree with John Thompson who argues that Moltmann borders on tritheism in over-emphasizing three divine subjects within the Trinity at the risk of overshadowing the unity of wills within in the Trinity at the cross.

John Thompson. *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 51.

<sup>106</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 138-9. Lauber shares this criticism of Moltmann with John Thompson.

<sup>107</sup> Lauber, *Descent*, 139.

<sup>108</sup> CD, IV/1, 185.

consummation of the incarnation.<sup>109</sup> Jesus' death means the "complete humiliation of God."<sup>110</sup>

In his lectures on the Scottish Confession, Barth asks, "Where does God remain, and what still remains His, as God, when God's Son has been slain on Calvary?"<sup>111</sup> Barth replies that in the death of the Son, God remains God and it is as God that he is able to make this sacrifice.<sup>112</sup> Barth then states,

It is because Jesus Christ is God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, that death cannot hold Him and that death can only be a gateway to life. Corresponding to the humiliation of the Son of God in His death we have the exaltation of the Son of Man through His power as Son of God, a power not diminished, let alone destroyed, by His humiliation.<sup>113</sup>

Barth proclaims that the answer to the impossibility of the Son of God's death is the resurrection.<sup>114</sup> God in his humanity endures Golgotha in unity with us. We are included in his resurrection. The Father and Son are eternally one essence with the Holy Spirit and death cannot have the final word.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Barth contends that Christology must be informed by Christ's atoning work. He argues that God reveals himself as reconciler and as the fulfilment of the covenant. God does not leave humanity to its own fate, but takes on the plight of humanity to change that state.

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<sup>109</sup> Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation* (London: Hodder, 1955), 83.

<sup>110</sup> Barth, *Knowledge*, 83.

<sup>111</sup> Barth, *Knowledge*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> Barth, *Knowledge*, 85.

<sup>113</sup> Barth, *Knowledge*, 86.

<sup>114</sup> Barth, *Knowledge*, 87.

The work of Christ means the suffering of the Son of God. Barth argues that God is not imprisoned by his divinity nor limited by his immutability. Barth prefers to speak of the constancy of God, reflecting the Scriptural witness.

Barth confirms that the suffering of the Son is God's suffering, yet he is cautious in speaking of suffering and the immanent Godhead. He states that the answer to the impossibility of the death of the Son is the resurrection.

## Chapter 3

### The Resurrection of Christ and the Triune God

In this chapter I will explore Barth's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus in my continuing pursuit of a Trinitarian understanding of the cross of Christ for human suffering. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of Christian faith. The primary position for Barth's theological development is expressed in the confession "Jesus is Risen." Barth understands God's self-revelation to be grounded in the resurrection of Christ. Not only is the resurrection essential to revelation, Barth also grounds the transition of the act and being of the Crucified Christ toward humanity in the resurrection of Jesus. The passion *and* the resurrection of Christ have implications for God's embrace of suffering humanity.

Barth engages a Trinitarian understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. He argues that the Father raised the Son. He then argues that through the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, Jesus is present to humanity across space and time. Barth contends that this transition from the Christological sphere to the human sphere occurs by the power of the Spirit in the resurrection. In this way, the risen Christ comes to all humanity in its suffering state.

In this chapter I will explore Barth's development of the doctrine of the resurrection over a number of years beginning with his 1924 monograph, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, through to the Doctrine of Reconciliation in *CD*. Barth's work on the doctrine over this period is a consistent development of his

early work presented in *The Resurrection of the Dead*, rather than a dramatic shift in position or thought.

I will begin this chapter by noting several important features in Barth's development. I will then briefly engage Barth's thoughts in *The Resurrection of the Dead*, and aspects of the doctrine of the resurrection in CD III/2, "Jesus, Lord of Time." A significant focus of the chapter will explore Barth's development of the resurrection in CD IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. I will examine the particular use of Trinitarian structure in Barth's development of thought on the resurrection to illuminate further Barth's understanding of the Trinity. Passages of importance include CD IV/1, "The Verdict of the Father," CD IV/2, "The Direction of the Son," and CD IV/3, "The Promise of the Spirit." Barth provides particular insight into the function of the Holy Spirit in the latter section.<sup>1</sup>

R. Dale Dawson explores further some Trinitarian implications of Barth's doctrine of the resurrection. In the latter portion of this chapter, I will engage Dawson's Trinitarian proposal for the purpose of developing a perspective on the resurrection of Jesus with implications for responding to human suffering.

## **I. Considerations**

The doctrine of the resurrection is an essential feature of Barth's theology, but the function of the doctrine has received only light treatment.<sup>2</sup> Dawson convincingly demonstrates this point in a review of literature that concludes that more scholarly

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<sup>1</sup> Barth developed some aspects of his pneumatology in CD IV/3, but his intention fully to develop the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit CD V was never actualized.

<sup>2</sup> Dale Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 11-12.

focus has been placed on Barth's early development rather than his later work on the resurrection in CD IV.<sup>3</sup>

As noted above, I concur with Dawson's conclusion that Barth's later work on the resurrection represents a consistent development of his earlier proposal in *The Resurrection of the Dead*.<sup>4</sup> The passages in CD that discuss the resurrection provide clarity and maturity.

### **I.1 Revelation and Transition as a Function of the Resurrection**

There are two aspects of Barth's doctrine of the resurrection that will assist our exploration of Barth's work in this chapter.

First, Barth argues that the work of reconciliation is revealed by God to humanity in the resurrection of Jesus. Barth contends that without the illuminating act of the resurrection, the reconciling work of Christ would have "remained shut up in Him."<sup>5</sup> Without the resurrection the alteration in the relationship between humanity and God through the cross would have been hidden from the disciples and the world. Barth contends that Christ's work, being and action were not

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<sup>3</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 12ff.

<sup>4</sup> Dawson argues that early readers of Barth maintained that the theologian's development moved from a dialectical theology to an analogical theology. Dawson argues that this view gave way to Bruce McCormack's proposal that Barth's mature theology is a "critical realistic dialectical theology." [Dawson, *Resurrection*, 25] Dawson argues that Barth's development of the doctrine of the resurrection does not conform to any tidy models of interpretation that have been developed to this point.

<sup>5</sup> CD, IV/3, 282.

augmented by the resurrection, but without the resurrection humanity would be in no position to know Christ as Reconciler.<sup>6</sup>

The second aspect of Barth's work on the resurrection to note is another aspect of God's self-revelation. In the resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit that is the Spirit of Christ, the being and act of the crucified Lord comes to all humanity. It is through the resurrection of Jesus that we can say that humanity is *in Christ*.<sup>7</sup> Put another way, the being and action of Jesus Christ in his life and death becomes truth in our reality through the event of His resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

Below I will explore the resurrection of Jesus as the movement of Christ to humanity. This movement has implications for understanding the relationship between Christ's suffering and our suffering.

## **II. The Resurrection of the Dead**

In the 1924 monograph *The Resurrection of the Dead*, Barth expounds 1 Corinthians with particular focus on chapter 15. The issue of the resurrection was of critical concern for Paul. Barth contends that some in the Corinthian church were affirming the resurrection of Christ, but with no relation to their own bodily resurrection.<sup>9</sup> Barth argues that Paul regards the bodily resurrection of the dead as

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<sup>6</sup> CD, IV/3, 282.

<sup>7</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> CD, IV/3, 284.

Also see Dawson, *Resurrection*, 110-11.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.J. Stenning (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 116.

essential teaching, and that the apostle feared that the entire gospel was at risk of corruption.<sup>10</sup>

Barth introduces his discussion of the resurrection through his thoughts on the dialectical tension between time and eternity.<sup>11</sup> The eternity of God does not mean the extension of time beyond world time. Barth argues that the eternal God frames time. Barth contends that Paul's use of "last things" does not mean end times, but the end of all things.<sup>12</sup> The resurrection of the dead is a critical event in the end of all things. Barth understands the resurrection of the dead in Paul to be the last word on history and the first word on a new history.<sup>13</sup>

## II.1 Sin and Death

Barth argues sin is not merely an appendage to humanity, but rules *over* humanity.<sup>14</sup> Sin means death for humanity, but the resurrection means the abolition of death.<sup>15</sup> Barth states that by death, Paul means that all things are under the rule of death. Death is the forfeiting of all possibility and human

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<sup>10</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> T.F. Torrance views this monograph as being consistent with Barth's revised work, *Romans*, featuring the dialectical tension between time and eternity. Dialectical theology denies that there is a *natural* point of contact between God and humanity. Instead, dialectical theology states that God reveals himself through the *no* of the cross and the *yes* of the resurrection. McCormack agrees with Torrance that there is a time-eternity dialectical tension, but argues there is a noticeable shift from the "process eschatology" (the gradual arrival of the Kingdom of God in human history) in *Romans I*, to a "consistent eschatology" in which the eternity of God remains the absolute future of human time. Dawson argues that Torrance and McCormack do not adequately account for the importance of the resurrection in Barth's eschatology. Dawson argues that Barth uses a highly refined "dialectical method of witness" that originates in the singular revelation event and moves outward to humanity. See Dawson, *Resurrection*, 31-2.

David Ford, "See, Karl Barth," *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 30-33.

<sup>12</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 158.

<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 169.

meaningfulness.<sup>16</sup> The highest act of Christ's sovereignty is the abolition of death, but Christ's power remains in conflict with penultimate powers until "God is all in all" in the completion of the establishment of the Kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup>

Barth argues that if the resurrection pertains to Christ alone but leaves humanity to the grave, then the resurrection of Jesus is an offence.<sup>18</sup> Should the resurrection have no implications for humanity, death remains victorious. Barth however, proclaims that the bodily resurrection of Jesus means humanity will also be resurrected. The resurrection means not only the extension of the life of the soul, but the reconstitution of the body.<sup>19</sup> Christ's victory over death through his resurrection leads Barth to describe the current state of humanity as "the dead living."<sup>20</sup>

In the resurrection Jesus has crossed the time-eternity boundary, altering the course of creation, resulting in humanity being dead and at the same time alive.<sup>21</sup> In other words, as we face the reality of death, we have hope in the reality of our future resurrection.

Barth emphasizes the reality of the bodily resurrection. He challenges the body-spirit divide that views humanity as the domain of the body but God as the domain of spirit. Barth declares that God is the Lord of the body. He states, "We are waiting for our body's redemption; if the body is not redeemed to obedience,

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<sup>16</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 169-70.

<sup>18</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 108.

<sup>21</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 47.

to health, to life, then there is no God.”<sup>22</sup> Faith requires such a profession. Barth adds,

He who recognizes himself in Adam and Christ no longer, in fact asks; with what body shall we come again? As if it were a marvellous fairy-tale which he must ‘believe.’ He knows that what is in question is this body (but the resurrection of this body), and gives God the honour in fear and trembling, but also in hope.<sup>23</sup>

Human hope is grounded not in the finite world, but in God whom the resurrection of Jesus reveals as the end and also the beginning. Through Christ death is abolished. This is the hope of humanity.

## **II.2 Implications for Responding to Suffering**

Barth’s 1924 monograph has implications for considering a Christian response to human suffering. His commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 invites consideration of the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus for our own life, death, and beyond.

Barth states that sin is not a minor irritant for humanity, but that sin envelops humanity resulting in death. Death and its resulting meaningless is not the natural conclusion for humanity, but stands opposed to God. In the resurrection of Jesus, God abolishes death, giving hope to those in the midst of suffering.

Barth affirms the bodily resurrection of Jesus, taking place in space and time, just as the life and death of Jesus are historical events. In the face of our own suffering, decline and decay, Christ’s resurrection means we have hope that

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<sup>22</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 197.

<sup>23</sup> Barth, *Resurrection Dead*, 102.

our body will be reconstituted for “obedience, health and life.” As we move towards our own death, we have hope because in Christ’s resurrection, the power of death has been abolished.

### **III. Jesus, Lord of Time**

Barth continues to develop his doctrine of the resurrection in a substantial way in CD III/2, under the subsection “Jesus, Lord of Time.” Barth’s central point on the resurrection in this section is that Jesus’ earthly life is made contemporaneous with all times through the resurrection.<sup>24</sup>

Barth conceptualizes the life of Christ on earth as “perfect time.” Jesus’ life consisted of a past, present and future as does all human life, but as the representative for humanity, his life is also the beginning, middle and end of all times.<sup>25</sup> Jesus’ life history as “perfect time” is not bound to the finiteness of human time, but transcends time. God is the god of all eternity. By eternity, Barth means “the simultaneity of present, past and future.”<sup>26</sup>

What effect does the resurrection of Jesus have on time and eternity? Barth speaks of Christ moving across the time-eternity divide in *The Resurrection of the Dead*. In CD III/2, Barth argues that Jesus not only moves across this divide through the resurrection, but that the life history of Christ becomes

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<sup>24</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 65.

<sup>25</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> CD, III/2, 438.

contemporaneous with all other human life. God is present to every other human and time through the resurrection.<sup>27</sup>

Citing Hebrews 13:8, Barth argues that God belongs to all time simultaneously.<sup>28</sup> More precisely, Jesus is the “acting subject of time.”<sup>29</sup> Barth insists that Christ moves toward humanity, not the reverse.<sup>30</sup>

### **III.1 The Covenant and the Hope**

The disciples understood Jesus to be “the reality of the divine covenant.”<sup>31</sup> Barth states,

The acts of Jesus, and His resurrection as the crown of all His acts, was the disclosure or revelation of the reality, so long concealed, of the covenant between God and this people; the declaration of the election of this lost people.<sup>32</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus reveals what has been concealed and that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise of redemption to Abraham.<sup>33</sup>

As Jesus’ resurrection discloses reality once concealed, his resurrection reveals him as the “presence of our future.”<sup>34</sup> Barth describes the future as Jesus’ “own person and work, in a new mode and form.”<sup>35</sup> The *person* of Jesus is the eschatological hope of humanity. Barth argues that the New Testament community does not find its hope in abstract blessings or in abstract last things,

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<sup>27</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 68.

<sup>28</sup> CD, III/2, 466.

<sup>29</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 76.

<sup>30</sup> CD, III/2, 467.

<sup>31</sup> CD, III/2, 476.

<sup>32</sup> CD, III/2, 475.

<sup>33</sup> CD, III/2, 476.

<sup>34</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 78.

<sup>35</sup> CD, III/2, 486.

but in hope in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup> Barth argues that before the resurrection of Jesus, the kingdom of God had come among the apostles as “present reality, but not in revelation.”<sup>37</sup> He contends that in the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles witness the kingdom come with power.<sup>38</sup>

### **III.2 The Bodily Resurrection Affirmed**

Barth defends the bodily resurrection of Christ as taking place in history. Barth rejects Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologizing of Easter.<sup>39</sup> He argues, “The Easter story is differentiated from myth, both formally and materially, by the fact that it is all about a real man of flesh and blood.”<sup>40</sup> Although the gospel accounts of Christ’s resurrection differ in detail, they stand in unity in substance.

Jesus came to the disciples, as he comes to all humanity in all times. The disciples had lost Jesus to death, but Christ found them as the Resurrected One.<sup>41</sup>

### **III.3 Implications for Responding to Suffering**

God is the god of all time, including the time and space we occupy. God is not distant from the sufferer, as Christ contemporaneous with our own time and experience of suffering. The suffering of Christ is not distant from our own suffering. This is not to say that our suffering is the same as Christ’s, for his passion is unique in its redemptive purpose. The sin he bore was foreign to

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<sup>36</sup> CD, III/2, 490.

<sup>37</sup> CD, III/2, 498.

<sup>38</sup> CD, III/2, 499.

<sup>39</sup> CD, III/2, 445.

<sup>40</sup> CD, III/2, 452.

<sup>41</sup> CD, III/2, 453.

himself. Christ bore the penalty of our sin. Our suffering does not reconcile us to God. Although Christ's life history including his suffering is made contemporaneous with our time, his crucifixion and death are not ongoing. His death occurred once and is not reoccurring. The resurrection announces the finality of this death and Christ's victory over death. Our hope is in the resurrected Jesus who moved across the divide between life and death and has returned again to his people.

#### **IV. The Verdict of the Father**

Barth develops the doctrine of the resurrection in three places within CD IV, *Doctrine of Reconciliation*. He argues that the resurrection of Jesus cannot be understood apart from the doctrine of reconciliation. The first section in CD IV in which Barth addresses the resurrection at length is CD IV/1, "The Verdict of the Father." Essential to understanding this section is Barth's assertion that Jesus' resurrection is a separate event from the crucifixion, yet also one with Christ's death.

Barth begins by asking how there can be a "beyond" concerning the finality of the crucifixion and how we can know that it has implications for us in our time. How can a single event in history continue to have implications for humanity today?<sup>42</sup> Barth addresses these questions by arguing that if there is any "beyond," it must fulfill five conditions. He argues in true Barthinian form that these conditions not only illuminate the resurrection reality, but are in fact derived

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<sup>42</sup> CD, IV/1, 287.

from the event itself. Capturing the same point from another angle, Barth argues that the “beyond” cannot be reached through human “invention or intuition.”<sup>43</sup>

Rather, the resurrection is solely an act of the self-revealing God.

Barth discloses the five conditions as follows;

i. The “beyond” must be as equally effective and sovereign as the act of crucifixion and death.<sup>44</sup> The resurrection is a new event that illuminates the meaning of the cross. It is the exclusive act of God and does not require the will or participation of humanity.<sup>45</sup> Barth compares the resurrection to the act of creation that required no human action. As an event of revelation free from human willing, Barth contends that the resurrection was an act of “distinct character to the first community...underlying their whole knowledge of Jesus Christ.”<sup>46</sup>

ii. The resurrection is a distinct new act, not the “noetic converse” of the event of the cross.<sup>47</sup> Neither the cross nor the resurrection overtake one another, or cancel the other out. In other words, the resurrection does not cancel out Christ’s death, but confirms it. Barth argues further that the resurrection provides no addition to the reconciling act of God, but without the revealing work of the resurrection, the reconciliation would have remained hidden in the inner life of God. In the

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<sup>43</sup> CD, IV/1, 296.

<sup>44</sup> CD, IV/1, 297.

<sup>45</sup> CD, IV/1, 300.

<sup>46</sup> CD, IV/1, 302.

<sup>47</sup> CD, IV/1, 304.

resurrection God justifies himself, by which Barth means God reveals and gives “force and effect to His faithfulness and love.”<sup>48</sup>

Barth concludes his discussion on the second condition of the resurrection by stating that the verdict of the Father is that the resurrection is the “fulfillment and proclamation of God’s decision concerning the event of the cross.”<sup>49</sup>

iii. The resurrection stands in a relationship of substance to the crucifixion. Barth argues that the cross and resurrection together are the effective and expressive reconciling will of God. Barth reaffirms that the resurrection makes the life of Christ from birth to crucifixion contemporaneous with all times. The act of the cross is then universal for all humankind, in which humanity’s situation has been altered. The universality of the cross does not imply that all are obedient to God or nor does it imply universal salvation.<sup>50</sup>

iv. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are separate events that occurred in time and space. Barth distinguishes the cross as “work” and the resurrection as “revelation.” The event of the cross is an end, and the resurrection event is a new beginning.<sup>51</sup> Barth warns readers to avoid the error of approaching the resurrection as an event conforming to the tools of modern historical study. He

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<sup>48</sup> CD, IV/1, 308.

Paul Molnar has questioned why Barth is reluctant in speaking of Christ’s own activity in his resurrection. Molnar argues that such an assertion would put Barth in the company of the others such as Calvin, Cyril of Alexandria and Athanasius. Dawson argues that Barth could have further developed the idea that in the Son’s passivity, he receives grace from the Father on our behalf. See Paul Molnar. Review of *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, by R. Dale Dawson. *IJST* vol. 11, no. 2, 240-43. Also see Dawson, *Resurrection*, 123.

<sup>49</sup> CD, IV/1, 309.

<sup>50</sup> CD, IV/1, 317.

<sup>51</sup> CD, IV/1, 334.

argues that while the crucifixion included human involvement and is verifiable through the tools of the study of history, the resurrection did not include human involvement. The disciples witnessed the resurrected Christ, but did not witness the actual resurrecting of Christ from the dead. Barth also opposes the erroneous view that the resurrection occurred outside of time and space, thereby degrading the resurrection to saga or legend.<sup>52</sup> Barth states,

it must not be overlooked that in this event we have to do on the one hand with the *telos*, the culminating point of the previous recorded concrete history of the life and suffering and death of Jesus Christ which attained its end with His resurrection, and on the other hand with the beginning of the equally concrete history of faith in Him, of the existence of the community which receives and proclaims His Word, Himself as the living Word of God.<sup>53</sup>

The resurrection in time and space prepares the foundation for the community of Christians that follow the event.

v. The resurrection is the beginning of Christ's *parousia* to be completed at the end of all time. Christ is present with us through the activity of the Holy Spirit in our time and history.<sup>54</sup> God's effective presence in this time is in unity with the previous events of his death and resurrection. Barth argues that the death and resurrection of Jesus occur in sequence and cannot be undone or repeated. Barth writes, "He has put all to death in a Son who obediently willed Himself to suffer

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<sup>52</sup> CD, IV/1, 336.

<sup>53</sup> CD, IV/1, 336.

<sup>54</sup> CD, IV/1, 342.

death in the place of all. He never comes back to this point.”<sup>55</sup> God has made a new beginning through the Son for us, from which he does not go back.<sup>56</sup>

Barth concludes the section asking how we can arrive at the perception that Christ belongs to us and we belong to him. The answer is the resurrection of Christ, his life as the Resurrected from the dead.<sup>57</sup> His resurrection is the future hope and promise of life.<sup>58</sup>

#### **IV.1 Implications for Responding to Suffering**

In this section Barth examines how it can be said that there is a “beyond” through the resurrection. Barth argues that in the resurrection God reveals the force and effect of his love to the suffering world. The resurrection marks the effective presence of Christ in the world. Humanity can look beyond suffering and death to the hope revealed in the resurrection, even in the midst of current suffering.

#### **V. The Direction of the Son**

Barth returns to a substantial discussion on the resurrection in CD IV/2, in the section titled “The Direction of the Son.” Previously Barth argued that in the resurrection Jesus’ life history is contemporaneous with all times. Here Barth addresses how the crucified Lord is *pro nobis* (for us) in the resurrection of Christ.

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<sup>55</sup> CD, IV/1, 345.

<sup>56</sup> CD, IV/1, 345.

<sup>57</sup> CD, IV/1, 349.

<sup>58</sup> CD, IV/1, 356.

As I have shown in chapter one, Barth previously argued that God need not have chosen humanity with respect to God's freedom to act. Though God was free not to act for humanity, Barth argues here that God has undeniably chosen to act for humanity. He states that the New Testament is witness to nothing less. Barth states, "There is no Jesus existing exclusively for Himself, and there is no sinful man who is not affected and determined with and by His existence."<sup>59</sup> Barth proclaims that this is not a statement of faith that is wishful thinking, but a statement of faith in the New Testament sense; a statement of being and a statement of power.<sup>60</sup>

God *for* us is also God concealed *from* us. Barth argues that sin alone cannot account for the concealment of God being for us because God has made provision against sin through our redemption and sanctification.<sup>61</sup> God is concealed from us even as we have and know our justification in him. The concealment of God is of his own power and doing, just as his revelation is also his own doing. As Dawson correctly observes, Barth is careful in speaking of the concealment to protect against any notion that humanity penetrates this disclosure from the anthropomorphic sphere.<sup>62</sup> The unveiling is God's act alone.

How does the unknown become the known reality? Barth answers that the unknown is known through the revelatory event of the resurrection. The resurrection is not merely a fact about Jesus or his existence, but the event of

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<sup>59</sup> CD, IV/2, 281.

<sup>60</sup> CD, IV/2, 281.

<sup>61</sup> CD, IV/2, 289.

<sup>62</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 142.

revelation.<sup>63</sup> Barth argues, “All Christian knowledge and confession, all Christian knowledge of God and man and the world, derives from the self-revelation of Jesus Christ, from His resurrection.”<sup>64</sup> In His death we see only our own death, but in his resurrection, Jesus reveals that in him we are alive as the called and elected in him.<sup>65</sup> Our life is “posited afresh in fellowship with God.”<sup>66</sup>

In the resurrection, Jesus as the *new man* reveals that we are new beings. In the resurrection Jesus reveals himself as Lord and us as his people.<sup>67</sup> Barth contends that the New Testament imparts the truth that we are Christ’s, laying God’s claim on us.<sup>68</sup> The New Testament places us under the power of the Word that liberates us to live as Christians, faithful to our conversion accomplished in Christ. Barth argues that our liberation holds fast even in the face of death. It is hope for humanity even in the depths of suffering.<sup>69</sup> Barth argues that in the crucifixion God had each person before him. Humanity can now live in the hope of its own resurrection and eternal life in harmony with God.<sup>70</sup> Barth states,

The power of the resurrection is proved by the fact that it reveals to man this life of Jesus, effectively bringing him, and into him, the promise of eternal life which is given in it, making it his own, and moving him for his part to make it his own, to grasp it, to allow it to be the comfort and confidence and hope of his life as he still lives it in the shadow of death.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 144.

<sup>64</sup> CD, IV/2, 300.

<sup>65</sup> CD, IV/2, 300.

<sup>66</sup> CD, IV/2, 300.

<sup>67</sup> CD, IV/2, 301.

<sup>68</sup> CD, IV/2, 304-5.

<sup>69</sup> CD, IV/2, 311.

<sup>70</sup> CD, IV/2, 316.

<sup>71</sup> CD, IV/2, 317.

The power of the resurrection does not suppress or destroy our humanity but gives it a new determination and the promise of eternal life.<sup>72</sup>

### **V.1 The Holy Spirit and the Resurrection**

Barth has been accused of equating the Holy Spirit with the resurrection in such a way that he fails to distinguish between the Spirit and the resurrection. I agree with Dawson that this accusation is misplaced because Barth demonstrates the interrelationship between the Holy Spirit and the resurrection, and later in CD Barth demonstrates that through the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, Jesus is present to humanity across space and time in the resurrection.<sup>73</sup>

Barth contends that the Holy Spirit is the presence and action of Jesus himself.<sup>74</sup> In the resurrection, the Spirit of Christ reveals himself to us and our relation as children of God. He imparts his power to his community to be his witnesses.<sup>75</sup> Although atonement is complete in the cross, Christ's community waits in hope for the realization of complete redemption, enduring the suffering of the world.

Barth argues as co-heirs in Christ, Christians "can bear their suffering as a subsequent suffering with Him, and with Him, follow the One who has gone before them."<sup>76</sup> Christians bear their own suffering as they move towards glory. Our suffering is subsequent to Christ's but not equal to his suffering. Reflecting

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<sup>72</sup> CD, IV/2, 318-19.

<sup>73</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 150.

<sup>74</sup> CD, IV/2, 323.

<sup>75</sup> CD, IV/2, 323.

<sup>76</sup> CD, IV/2, 328-29.

on Romans 8, Barth argues that Christ's community does not suffer and hope in isolation from the world. All creation groans in bondage awaiting liberation. Barth contends that Christians are bound with non-Christians in this groaning, but as those who possess hope in proclaiming "Christ is Lord."<sup>77</sup> Christ's community is assured of hope through the Holy Spirit because Christ has already fulfilled it.<sup>78</sup> Christians are the advance-guard of the risen Christ in a world that has yet to know what has been accomplished in Christ.<sup>79</sup> Christians live as saved people through what has already transpired in Christ, but they also live as a people of hope, waiting for what is not yet seen.<sup>80</sup> Barth speaks of Christians' suffering as a subsequent suffering, because Christ's suffering is unique in that through suffering and death God redeemed humanity. Christ's suffering and death accomplishes what our suffering and death cannot.

## **V.2 Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ**

Barth argues that the Holy Spirit is without contradiction the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus. Barth asserts that this understanding of the Spirit is not a parallel conclusion, but illuminates the activity of the Spirit. Barth contends that the Holy Spirit unifies the Father and Son. In the transition between God and humanity, we encounter God as he truly is. Barth argues,

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<sup>77</sup> CD, IV/2, 329.

<sup>78</sup> CD, IV/2, 330.

<sup>79</sup> CD, IV/2, 330.

<sup>80</sup> CD, IV/2, 330.

God in the Holy Spirit, as He acts and reveals Himself between the man Jesus and other men, is the living God, and as such our God, who really turns to us as the One He is and not under a mask behind which He is really another, because in the first instance distance and confrontation, encounter and partnership, are to be found in Himself.<sup>81</sup>

God's interaction with humanity through the Holy Spirit is not alien to himself.

The Holy Spirit is not a "magical third" between Christ and humanity. God turns to us as he really is, and we encounter the authentic Triune God.<sup>82</sup> The distance between God and humanity is overcome by God through the resurrection of Christ. The movement of Christ crucified to Christ the head of the church takes place through the resurrection in the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>83</sup>

The Spirit of Christ illuminates the life of Christ for us, as the life of the Son with the Father and the Father with the Son. The Spirit awakens knowledge, faith and confession, not as a third party guide, but as God himself.<sup>84</sup>

### **V.3 Implications for Responding to Suffering**

Barth argues that God shows himself to be for humanity in the self-revelatory work of the resurrection. Barth states that as co-heirs with Christ, we bear our own suffering as a subsequent suffering with Christ. Christ alone bears his own suffering and we follow him as the one who has gone on before us. Barth contends that the Christian community also bears with the suffering world. In this

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<sup>81</sup> CD, IV/2, 343.

<sup>82</sup> CD, IV/2, 343.

<sup>83</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 161.

<sup>84</sup> CD, IV/2, 359.

capacity, we proclaim the reality of the hope accomplished by Christ in his death and resurrection.

## **VI. The Promise of the Spirit**

Barth's concern in this section titled "The Promise of the Spirit" located in *CD* IV/3, is with the transition of Jesus Christ to humanity through the resurrection. Barth explores how the reconciling act is effective in our lives. Barth argues that the resurrection of the Crucified One is the basic form of Christ's glory.<sup>85</sup> The resurrection is the form of Christ's going out to, and entry into the world as his prophetic work.<sup>86</sup>

The resurrection is Christ's self-declaration of his being and act in the relationship between humanity and God. The coming of Christ to humanity in the resurrection is a new coming. Barth argues that this marks the *parousia*, the effective presence of Christ. He rightly affirms that in the incarnation the whole work of Christ is complete in "all its dimensions."<sup>87</sup> The whole work though complete, was not revealed in Christ's glory until the resurrection. Therefore, the resurrection is the manifestation of Christ's effective presence. Barth contends convincingly that the New Testament presents the resurrection as Christ's coming again, but as a new coming of the effective presence or *parousia*. Barth continues arguing that the effective presence occurs in one event but three forms. These forms are the resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit and the final return of

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<sup>85</sup> *CD*, IV/3, 281.

<sup>86</sup> *CD*, IV/3, 281.

<sup>87</sup> *CD*, IV/3, 294.

Jesus Christ.<sup>88</sup> He insists that the three forms “have the character, colour and accents of the Easter event.”<sup>89</sup> In one form there is the recapitulation of the other two. Barth maintains that this is analogous to the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>90</sup>

As the first form of the *parousia*, the resurrection offers two distinctions. First, the resurrection is Jesus’ self-declaration of his coming into the world for humanity. The resurrection announces the “alteration of the relationship between God and man.”<sup>91</sup> God has bound himself to humanity.

Second, the resurrection took place in history, at a specific time and place. As a result no one past or future is the same because Christ rose from the dead.<sup>92</sup> Barth reaffirms that in this outworking of Christ’s prophetic office, all humanity is implicated, yet not all hear. Barth proclaims a universal implication without a *universalist* conclusion. He argues,

But the real goal and end of the resurrection of Jesus and its attention was His going out into the world, into all the world, just as the reconciliation revealed in this event was the reconciliation of the world and not the satisfaction of the little flock of believers.<sup>93</sup>

The Easter event establishes the mission of Christians to go out to the world as the risen Crucified One goes out to the world.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> CD, IV/3, 294.

<sup>89</sup> CD, IV/3, 294.

<sup>90</sup> CD, IV/3, 296.

<sup>91</sup> CD, IV/3, 296.

<sup>92</sup> CD, IV/3, 298.

<sup>93</sup> CD, IV/3, 303.

<sup>94</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 197.

Barth argues that the determination given to the world in the resurrection has a beginning, middle and end.<sup>95</sup> In short, Barth contends that the resurrection overturns every power, is universal in scope and is irreversible.

### **VI.1 Suffering in the Post-Easter World**

How is it that suffering continues to exist in the world in the shadow of the resurrection? Barth explores why the effective presence of Christ in the resurrection has not been fully realized.

In the Easter event Christ himself awoke humanity to faith in him.<sup>96</sup> Barth argues that in the resurrection Jesus has returned from the place from which no one has returned, that is the tomb.<sup>97</sup> God alone is above death, described by Barth as the denial of any future beyond which there is nothing but God the creator.<sup>98</sup> As the one who has crossed over into death and back again, Jesus participates with those who move toward death. Barth declares that life after death can only be new life. The believing community is nourished by the source of this new life – the coming of the Lord.<sup>99</sup>

The believing community waits in a world already reconciled but whose redemption is not yet fully realized. Barth states that “deserved and undeserved” suffering is present, and humanity wages conflict against evil and suffering.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> CD, IV/3, 307.

<sup>96</sup> CD, IV/3, 309.

<sup>97</sup> CD, IV/3, 309.

<sup>98</sup> CD, IV/3, 311.

<sup>99</sup> CD, IV/3, 313.

<sup>100</sup> CD, IV/3, 328.

Humanity is not alone as Christ remains in “conflict with darkness in his prophetic work.”<sup>101</sup> Barth writes,

It is He first who bears the burdens of persisting wickedness, the resultant evil and the death which darkens everything. He does this now as the Resurrected from the dead as once he undertook and did it in Gethsemane and on Golgotha, with all the affliction and pain which this entailed and which He did not refuse. It is not for nothing that John 20:20ff speaks of the wounds borne by the Resurrected and proving to the disciples His identity with the Crucified.<sup>102</sup>

Christ is victor even as the resurrection stands in conflict with the ongoing suffering in the world. Barth argues that it is the will of Christ to be moving toward the “not yet.”

The Resurrected One bears the wounds of the crucifixion, even as Christ stands victorious over death, sin and suffering. The current plight of humanity is not beyond Christ as he is already victorious. He, in fact, is the one who proclaims the hope to come.

Barth argues the work of the resurrection is not immediately realized because humanity is invited “to share in the harvest which follows the sowing of the reconciliation.”<sup>103</sup> God grants freedom to those who are justified to participate in his work in space and time.<sup>104</sup> The freedom granted to humanity occurs in the sphere in which time and space move towards the full realization of the reconciliation.

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<sup>101</sup> CD, IV/3, 328.

<sup>102</sup> CD, IV/3, 329-30.

<sup>103</sup> CD, IV/3, 331.

<sup>104</sup> CD, IV/3, 323.

Barth states that the Christian position is grounded in four key truths. First, Christian knowledge of Jesus is due solely to the self-revelation of the Resurrection. Second, Christians see the future of salvation. Third, Christians can only move forward to this future. Fourth, Christians are called from all others to be witnesses of Jesus in the world.<sup>105</sup> All this is possible because of the promise of the Spirit in coming to us.<sup>106</sup>

## **VI.2 Implications for Responding to Suffering**

Christ participates with those who are suffering. In our movement towards death, Christ is present with us as the one who has crossed over into death and abolished death through his resurrection. Death has been abolished, yet we continue to live in a world where suffering and decay remain. The work of the resurrection is not immediately realized as God invites us to participate in the harvest following the reconciliation. As we suffer in the world and with all humanity, we participate in the fruit of the reconciliation and proclaim hope to the world.

## **VII. The Trinity and the Resurrection**

Barth frequently speaks of the Trinitarian aspect of the resurrection. The revelatory work of the resurrection reveals the Triune nature of God. In this section I turn my attention to Barth's Trinitarian development in his resurrection material.

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<sup>105</sup> CD, IV/3, 342-44.

<sup>106</sup> CD, IV/3, 350.

Dawson argues that Barth could have developed further the relationship between the resurrection and the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>107</sup> He offers his own critique and proposal. I will briefly examine elements of Dawson's criticism as a means of connecting Barth's earlier Trinitarian development with his resurrection material. I will show how Barth's understanding of what transpired at the cross within the Godhead is consistent with his doctrine of the resurrection.

### **VII.1 The Threat of Dissolution**

Dawson correctly argues that the cry of dereliction on the cross expresses an *actual* threat against the unity of the Godhead.<sup>108</sup> He states that the death of the Son is an assault on the Trinitarian being and life of God.<sup>109</sup> He argues that the threat of dissolution is the result of the Son of God binding himself with humanity, meaning that death's threat against humanity is a threat against the Trinitarian being of God.<sup>110</sup> Curiously Dawson argues that the death of Christ means the utter dissolution of the God-man but not the disintegration of the hypostatic union.<sup>111</sup> By "utter dissolution of the God-man" Dawson means the giving up of the life of Christ who is divine and human "in indissoluble unity."<sup>112</sup> Dawson's choice of the term "dissolution" proves to be confusing. Dawson means the threat against the Trinity is *actual*; however, the Trinity is not dissolved at the

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<sup>107</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 216.

<sup>108</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 217-18.

<sup>109</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 219.

<sup>110</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 219.

<sup>111</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 218.

<sup>112</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 218.

cross.<sup>113</sup> If the threat of dissolution of the Trinity is *actual*, what occurs in the resurrection?

Dawson contends that the resurrection in the face of Christ's death is the supreme reassertion of God's self-determination to be God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>114</sup> According to Dawson, while the Trinity is not dissolved at the cross, he does argue that the Father loses the Son in the death of Christ. I agree with Dawson that the cross threatens the Trinity, but to argue that the Trinity is not dissolved while at the same time arguing that the Father was without the Son at the cross proves difficult to maintain. The difficulty of this argument is evident in Dawson's claim that the Father needed to raise the Son for the sake of the Trinity. I will now explore further Dawson's argument.

## VII.2 Freedom and the Triune God

Dawson argues that the resurrection is necessary for the being of God. He counters Barth's assertion that God was free not to have chosen humanity and by implication, that God need not have raised the Son.<sup>115</sup> Dawson argues that because Barth connects God's freedom to God's being as Father, Son and Holy

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<sup>113</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 222.

<sup>114</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 219.

<sup>115</sup> Adam Eitel provides some insight into Barth's position. He argues that Barth affirms the non-necessity of the resurrection for two reasons. First, the resurrection is not essential to atonement, meaning it does not add to the work of atonement. This is true for Barth, though the resurrection reveals the reality of the atonement. Second, the resurrection was not necessary in that it was not grounded in the natural rhythm of world occurrence. The resurrection was not assisted by human involvement. Barth's view should not be misunderstood as meaning that he undervalued the resurrection. The resurrection holds a critical place in Barth's theology as shown above. Adam Eitel, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Karl Barth and the Historicization of God's Being," *IJST* 10, no. 1 (January, 2008), 36-58.

Spirit, God's freedom cannot include a freedom to deny himself as Triune.<sup>116</sup> He argues that had the Father not raised the Son, the Father would have been left without the eternal *other*.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, the freedom to forgo the resurrection would be akin to God's own self-denial.<sup>118</sup>

I disagree with Dawson's assessment of why the resurrection was necessary for God's determination to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Dawson contends that the Trinity is not dissolved in the death of Christ, yet he argues that in Christ's death the Father is without the Son. When Dawson argues that the Father is without the Son, he risks collapsing the Trinity.

Paul Molnar provides a valid challenge to Dawson's position. Molnar agrees with Dawson that the Son experienced death for humanity in his divinity and his own humanity. Molnar argues that to say the Father lost the Son is to assert that Jesus surrendered his divinity at the cross. Molnar counters, arguing that the emphasis should be placed on the Triune God "bringing his divine power to bear" on our behalf.<sup>119</sup> Molnar emphasises the unity of the Godhead in the reconciliation of humanity.

I agree with Molnar's position and argue that it reflects Barth's own position. Barth argues that in coming to humanity, Christ never became a stranger

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<sup>116</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 220.

<sup>117</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 221.

<sup>118</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 221.

<sup>119</sup> Paul Molnar. Review of *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, by R. Dale Dawson. *IJST* vol. 11, no. 2, 242.

to himself.<sup>120</sup> Barth maintains the unity of the Trinity in saying that God need not have raised Jesus from the dead. As Molnar argues, “that he did so was an act of free grace that took place in the economy for our benefit.”<sup>121</sup> Molnar argues that it is because God’s triunity was never broken that God’s act of the resurrection is an act of grace.<sup>122</sup>

Engaging the immanent and economic Trinity provides a way of understanding Barth’s position on the resurrection. Molnar argues that when Dawson equates the intradivine relation of the Trinity with the resurrection, he subtly collapses the immanent into the economic Trinity.<sup>123</sup> Molnar insists that equating the historical event of the resurrection so closely with the inner Trinity reduces the eternal Trinity to God’s economic activity.<sup>124</sup>

As I have indicated in chapter two, Barth argues that immanent Trinity is the content of the economic Trinity, but that the economic Trinity is not exactly equivalent to the immanent Trinity. The Triune God suffers in his work without dissolving the immanent Trinity. The resurrection proclaims the unity of the Triune God maintained in the suffering and death of the Son.

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<sup>120</sup> CD, IV/1, 180.

Molnar, “Review,” 243.

<sup>121</sup> Molnar, “Review,” 243.

<sup>122</sup> Molnar, “Review,” 243.

<sup>123</sup> Molnar, “Review,” 243.

<sup>124</sup> Molnar, “Review,” 243.

### VII.3 Further Pneumatological Development

As noted above, Barth has been criticised for underdeveloping his pneumatology. As I have contended above, it was Barth's unfulfilled intent to develop further his thoughts on the Holy Spirit in CD V.

Barth argues that through the resurrection the Spirit of Christ moves out into the world and encounters people, drawing them to the being of Christ. The Trinity is revealed in the transition of reconciliation between God and humanity, through the resurrection.

Dawson maintains that Barth could have developed further the role of the Holy Spirit as *Creator Spiritus*. According to Dawson, Barth lays the foundation for this development by speaking of the role of the Spirit in raising Jesus to new life.<sup>125</sup> I agree with Dawson that there is room for thinking through the implications of God's creative work in the Spirit. Dawson focuses on the Spirit's activity in raising the Son to new life. I would add that the Spirit creates new life for humanity through the resurrection. Barth states that life after death can only be new life.<sup>126</sup> The Spirit's creative activity could be applied to this new life made possible through the resurrection. As Barth has stated there would be no resurrection for humanity apart from the resurrection of Christ.

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<sup>125</sup> Dawson, *Resurrection*, 225.

<sup>126</sup> CD, IV/3, 313.

## VIII Conclusion

The resurrection is God's self-revelation of reconciliation. In the resurrection, the transition of reconciliation between God and humanity occurs. It is through the resurrection of Jesus that we can say that humanity is *in* Christ.

Barth's first significant work on the resurrection was his 1924 monograph, *The Resurrection of the Dead*. His work in CD III and CD IV develops and matures his theology of the resurrection. Barth argues that the hope of humanity is found in the resurrected Christ. His resurrection abolishes death and grants the hope of our own bodily resurrection.

Barth contends that in the resurrection Jesus' life history is made contemporaneous with all times. The resurrection marks the effective presence of Christ in the world as the Holy Spirit facilitates the transition between God and humanity.

The resurrection marks the beginning of the *parousia* - Christ's effective presence in the world. The believing community is included in the harvest of the reconciliation. As a result, the Christian community continues to endure suffering, living in conflict with evil. Barth argues that in our suffering we are bound with the suffering of all humanity. Christ has not abandoned his people, but persists with them as the one who has crossed over into death and has returned victorious from the grave. Barth contends that through the resurrection, humanity is drawn by the power of the Spirit into the Triune God.

## Chapter 4

### **Human Death and Suffering in Barth's Theology**

Chapter one provided an examination of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity. There I argued that God revealed himself as triune to humanity. In chapter two and three I examined the passion of Jesus, his death and his resurrection, exploring the relationship within the Godhead in these events. I have argued that the cross and resurrection were triune events in which God freely suffered for humanity. I have explored Barth's understanding of how the suffering of Christ affected the inner Trinitarian relationship.

I have stated that the exploration of the suffering of Jesus in relation to the Godhead can inform a Christian response to human suffering. It cannot be overstated that the suffering and death of Christ was God's act of reconciliation, restoring humanity to himself through Jesus Christ. The death and resurrection cannot be reduced to a mere act of empathy or co-suffering on the behalf of the triune God. The reconciliation of humanity through Jesus Christ at the cross was the eternal will of God.

The human experience of suffering is not equal to the suffering of Christ at the cross. The cross was borne by Christ alone. As demonstrated above, Christ suffered the full measure of human sin in Gethsemane and in his death on the cross. Jesus is the Judge, judged in humanity's place. Christ bears the judgement of God in humanity's place.

In light of the distinct suffering of Christ, this chapter explores Barth's understanding of the human experience of suffering and death. What is the meaning of human suffering and death, and how does the Trinitarian experience at the cross inform the human experience of suffering and death?

To answer this question, it is necessary to explore briefly Barth's theological anthropology. I will outline the key points of Barth's approach to understanding humanity for the purpose of developing the framework in which to address human suffering and death. I will then examine Barth's development of suffering and death as presented in CD III/1 section 42.3 "Creation as Justification" and CD III/2, section 47.5 "Ending Time."

In support of the material from *Church Dogmatics*, I will draw upon *Deliverance to the Captives*, a collection of sermons given by Barth primarily in the prison in Basel during the 1950s. In these sermons, Barth addresses the experience of suffering and reflects on the inevitable event of death. While the content of the sermons does not match the rigorous theological engagement of *Church Dogmatics*, the book does reveal how Barth's theology is preached. The material is relevant for several reasons. The sermon material expresses the application of Barth's theology and provides an additional lens through which to explore his theological development. This material counters the charge that Barth's engagement of suffering and death is unsympathetic and removed from human experience and therein pastorally insignificant. Barth wrote many of the sermons for an audience of prisoners who identified with the theme of suffering.

## I. Barth's Theological Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of the human race. The tools of the social and physical sciences are applied to understand how humanity functions. Humanity serves as the subject and starting point of anthropologic exploration. Barth pursues a markedly different approach, rooted in theological inquiry. He begins with the God-man (sic), the self-revelation of God through Jesus Christ. Barth states, "The ontological determination of humanity is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the man Jesus."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the starting point for understanding what it means to be human begins with Christ. Jesus is the "real man." Barth means that in the life and death of Jesus who is in unity with God, true humanity is revealed. The "real man" is not subject to the ideals or systems of thought that bind our perception of what it means to be human.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to say that Barth ignored or marginalized scientific inquiry, nor did he dismiss these tools as worthless. A brief example is evident in his theological explanation of death and its meaning for humanity in relation to God. A significant aspect of Barth's understanding of death is that from a theological perspective, death is unnatural. Barth does acknowledge the natural aspect of death in the physical realm – that is that every living thing comes to a natural end. The observation of death in the natural realm, however, does not reveal the theological meaning of death. In fact, Barth argues Christ's entrance into human

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<sup>1</sup> CD, III/2, 132.

<sup>2</sup> Wolf Krötke, "The humanity of the human person in Karl Barth's anthropology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000), 162.

history and submission to death informs the meaning of our looming death. Barth argues further that in light of the death of Christ, our death is necessary, acting as a boundary compelling us to throw ourselves upon God. Otherwise, Barth contends, we would continue to sin indefinitely.<sup>3</sup> The natural end is a theological necessity that is only known through the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In discussing the natural Barth does not dismiss scientific pursuit but understands that this pursuit does not reveal what it means to be human. The implication is that definitive human meaning cannot be derived from any source outside of God through Jesus Christ.

The pivotal assumption of Barth's anthropology is that our understanding of humanity has its source in Jesus Christ. Barth argues that in the life and death of Jesus Christ we encounter the reality of Christ who discloses to us the reality of our own humanity. Christ contradicts our convictions about being human, casting our humanity in a new light.<sup>4</sup>

God's election of human beings into partnership with him does not negate or eliminate humanity. The human being in partnership with God is distinct from God and therefore independent and free within the partnership.<sup>5</sup> Krötke notes this important point, because Barth has been wrongly criticised as "eliminating" humanity by emphasising the eternal free will of God to elect humanity. Critics argue that in Barth's theology, God's eternal freedom operates as an authoritarian

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<sup>3</sup> CD, III/2, 630-31.

<sup>4</sup> Krötke, "Humanity," 162.

<sup>5</sup> Krötke, "Humanity," 164.

dictatorship over humanity.<sup>6</sup> Krötke correctly refutes this, arguing that one cannot speak rightly of God without acknowledging that God in his eternity precedes humanity and acts in freedom. Human beings correspond in freedom to this partnership with God through the history of Jesus that is grounded in the eternity of God. Krötke contends that God constantly acts as a partner, willing the election of humanity, even as this election is grounded in God in eternity.<sup>7</sup>

Barth's assertion that human beings stand in relation to God as God to them has another important implication. God's election of humanity in eternity means that no human being can become "ontologically godless." In the *Doctrine of Reconciliation*, CD IV/1, under the subsection "The Fall of Man," Barth describes fallen humanity as being at the edge of the gulf of nothingness. Humanity cannot disappear into the great gulf becoming nonexistent before God, as this would contradict the will of God. In this way, humanity can be relatively godless, but never absolutely and ontologically godless. Barth states, "His godlessness may be very strong, but it cannot make God a "manless" God. Man in his fall cannot cease to be the creature and covenant-partner of God."<sup>8</sup> The covenant between God and humanity has been broken by the fall, but the covenant is not eliminated. Barth writes, "Man has not fallen lower than the depth to which God humbled Himself for him in Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Krötke, "Humanity," 164.

<sup>7</sup> Krötke, "Humanity," 164.

<sup>8</sup> CD, IV/1, 480.

<sup>9</sup> CD, IV/1, 480-81.

## II. Human Suffering in Barth's Theology

As shown above, the foundation of Barth's theological anthropology is God's partnership with humanity, freely elected in eternity through Jesus Christ. This partnership is disclosed through the self-revelation of God in the "real man" Jesus Christ. With this in mind, I will now examine Barth's understanding of suffering and the reality of suffering in the human experience. Barth addresses this in CD III/1 section 42.3. In this passage he contends with the existence of suffering in the world that God has created as good.

Barth speaks of suffering under the assumption that creation is good, and in particular that God's creation of humanity is good. He rejects any notion that the creature is neutral or bad.<sup>10</sup> The goodness of humanity is not derived from within the creature and cannot be understood apart from the goodness of God. Barth argues that the knowledge of the goodness of creation cannot be obtained apart from the self-revelation of God.<sup>11</sup>

Barth is careful to separate the idea of the creatures' goodness from his understanding of sin. Barth views sin as *nothingness*. He describes sin as an "ontological impossibility" or as an "impossible possibility."<sup>12</sup>

How can Barth argue that sin is nothingness? Barth's concept of sin has been subject to misunderstanding. His theology of sin is correctly understood through his doctrine of election. God has elected the human being to be his

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<sup>10</sup> CD, III/1, 366.

<sup>11</sup> CD, III/1, 368.

<sup>12</sup> Krötke, "Humanity," 165.

partner through the life and death of the man Jesus. God elects salvation for humanity and reprobation for himself. The result is that anything sinful in humanity is not derived from God or is the result of God's action toward humanity. In this way sin has no grounding. It is an absurdity.<sup>13</sup>

Humanity has fallen prey to this absurdity. Krötke aptly describes the destructive work of sin, even as it is an ontological impossibility. Krötke writes,

Sin is something unreal that can only cling to the being of the human person by destroying it and exhausting it like a parasite. Once it has done this work of destruction, then it is what it is – nothing.<sup>14</sup>

Sinful humanity stands on the edge of the “great gulf” but is not eliminated; neither does humanity become nothingness. Therefore, in view of God's eternal decision to elect humanity as his partner, Barth understands humanity's creation by God not only as humanity's actualization, but also as an indication of God's justification of humanity.<sup>15</sup>

The knowledge of God's justification of humanity is revealed, and cannot be grasped in abstraction.<sup>16</sup> Barth contends that God justifies creation in view of its end as covenant partner. The Creator has created according to his will and plan.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Krötke, “Humanity,” 165.

<sup>14</sup> Krötke, “Humanity,” 165.

<sup>15</sup> CD, III/1, 366.

<sup>16</sup> CD, III/1, 369.

<sup>17</sup> CD, III/1, 369.

## II.1 The Brighter and Shadow Sides

Barth develops his doctrine of creation in CD III/1 affirming the goodness of creation. Barth argues that creation is good because it is the object of God's good pleasure.<sup>18</sup> Barth contemplates the goodness of creation by speaking of creation as justified. Barth means that the existence of creation is justified because it is created according to God's divine will and purposes. Barth writes,

The created world is, therefore, right as it is, because in its essence and structure it is an appropriate sphere and instrument of the divine activity, and because man at the heart of it is the true object of the divine work which has its beginning, centre, and end in Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Barth affirms the goodness of creation as it serves the purposes of God and at the same time Barth acknowledges that suffering exists in the created world. Barth addresses this tension when speaking of the brighter and shadow sides of life.

Barth argues that created order has a brighter side experienced in the joys of life, and the "groups of realities which preserve and foster life, purpose, relationships and order, intelligible, controllable and serviceable elements and power."<sup>20</sup> Since revelation and humanity's justification are not humanly controllable, Barth is careful to acknowledge that the justification of the creature and God's self-revelation are not bound up in the brighter side of life.<sup>21</sup> Barth continues to give evidence of this by arguing that God chooses to reveal himself

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<sup>18</sup> CD, III/1, 366.

<sup>19</sup> CD, III/1, 369-70.

<sup>20</sup> CD, III/1, 371.

<sup>21</sup> CD, III/1, 371.

at times and conceal himself at other times.<sup>22</sup> The revelation of God occurs within the created realm but is not subject to creation or the brighter side of life.

Barth speaks of the other side of life as the shadow side. He describes this as the *lostness*, shame and misery of life. In short, the shadow side of life is the dark side of suffering and decay. Barth argues that the human being must acknowledge the shadow side and give ear to what he describes as a sad voice.<sup>23</sup>

The shadow side with its disharmony and senselessness does not prevent the justification of creation, nor is the goodness of creation snuffed out.<sup>24</sup> The shadow side of life does not inhibit God's eternal will for partnership with humanity. In his sermon on Ascension Day 1956, Barth encouraged those in suffering to look upward, not to heaven but to the person of Jesus Christ. Barth writes,

Such a person experiences joy in the midst of his sorrow and sufferings, much as he still may sigh and grumble. Not a cheap and superficial joy that passes, but a deep-seated, lasting joy. It transforms man in his sadness into a fundamentally joyful being.<sup>25</sup>

The shadow side remains, but humanity is transformed by God's grace. Humanity can experience the lasting joy of partnership with God, even in the midst of suffering.

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<sup>22</sup> CD, III/1, 371.

<sup>23</sup> CD, III/1, 372.

<sup>24</sup> CD, III/1, 372.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Barth, "Look up to Him," in *Deliverance to the Captives*, trans. Marguerite Wieser (London: SCM Press, 1966), 47.

Barth argues that this is not to say that God's will to partner with humanity is contingent on the shadow side. His self-revelation is not bound to the shadow side.<sup>26</sup>

In contemplating the shadow side of life, Barth advises his readers to consider the suffering and sorrow of life. Barth states,

The very last thing which ought to happen is the attempt to elude the misery of life. It is in fact the heaviest curse which can strike a man if he really eludes it, and it is doubly heavy if he masters it in a painless mingling of joy and sorrow.<sup>27</sup>

Barth denounces those who attempt to escape the sorrow in life. He frowns on those who settle into a life that oscillates between joy and pain without engaging the sorrow of those who weep. Barth argues that the reason humanity should not ignore the shadow side of life is that it is exposed by the self-revealed God who is good. He contends that there is no shame in weeping when the lost are faced with the goodness of the Creator. As humanity stands guilty before God's goodness, our own frailty is exposed.

Barth corrects the notion that the shadow side of life affirms the justification or affirmation of God's good purpose of creation, as if God's good purpose attains credibility in exposing the shadow side of life. Instead, Barth argues that justification of creation underlines the shadow side of life.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, God's redemption of humanity does not depend on the shadow side of life,

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<sup>26</sup> CD, III/1, 372.

<sup>27</sup> CD, III/1, 373.

<sup>28</sup> CD, III/1, 373.

meaning that human experience with creation does not define God's act of self-revelation to humanity.

Barth argues humanity cannot flee from the suffering of life nor should we ignore the shadow side of life. In the light of revelation, humanity can weep with those who are suffering while beholding God's good purpose of creation. More precisely, the revelation of God's good purpose of creation forbids indifference to suffering and draws us to engagement.

Some people draw near to God through experiences of suffering. When humanity is bound to God through suffering, it is through the power of divine revelation that transcends creaturely power.<sup>29</sup> Barth contends that humanity instead of binding itself to God, binds itself to death. He states that even in the face of death, people distract themselves from the fear of the reality of death and achieve self composure through distraction. The fear of death possesses no power to bring people into peace with God.<sup>30</sup> Barth never denies that God can use the human experience of sorrow and suffering to accomplish his will. The experience of suffering holds no power in and of itself to bind humanity to God. The power is in God's self-revelation.

## **II.2 The Two-Fold Contradictory Determination**

Barth argues that the positive meaning of existence is found in God's raising humanity into fellowship with himself through the Son. The raising of humanity

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<sup>29</sup> CD, III/1, 375.

<sup>30</sup> CD, III/1, 375.

presupposes that creation is in need of being raised and that the Son shares in the wretchedness of creation.<sup>31</sup> Barth speaks of humanity's position before God as a two-fold determination. The first is the exaltation of the creature. The second is the peril in which the creature finds itself.<sup>32</sup> Barth argues, "Since everything is created for Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection, from the very outset everything must stand under the twofold contradictory determination."<sup>33</sup> Barth states that God is the Lord of life and death and that Jesus has taken up the contradiction in his own life and death. Barth writes,

And He did not do all this in such a way that He confronted it in mere superiority, so that it was alien and external to Him, but in such a way that in the full majesty of His Godhead He participated in these antitheses and their connection, in eternal mercy causing them to be internal to Himself, and to find their origin in His own being.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, God made the contradiction of life his own problem before it was humanity's problem. Humanity cannot escape the contradiction or resolve it. God takes on this contradiction, making "his own the joy, sorrow, light and shade and life and death of creation."<sup>35</sup> Humanity lives by the death and resurrection of Christ and his participation in the two-fold contradictory determination.

Barth asks, "Can the contradiction of life, its dread aspect, and therefore the imperfection of creation really be a final word?"<sup>36</sup> He answers saying that this position is unacceptable because God's self-declaration reveals exaltation and

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<sup>31</sup> CD, III/1, 376.

<sup>32</sup> CD, III/1, 375.

<sup>33</sup> CD, III/1, 376.

<sup>34</sup> CD, III/1, 380.

<sup>35</sup> CD, III/1, 382.

<sup>36</sup> CD, III/1, 383.

humiliation in which humanity is subject to God's power. In Jesus, God has taken on the pain and death of creation, but only *transiently*. God himself made human weakness, suffering and death his own at the cross, but this was not the final word. Christ's participation in the negative side of existence is what Barth calls, "an affair of the moment."<sup>37</sup> Christ's engagement in the negative side of existence is now past, his death will not be repeated as he has risen for evermore.

Barth argues that the self-revelation of God confirms and transcends the brighter and shadow sides of life and reveals the perfection of creation in the contradiction.<sup>38</sup> Barth contends that humanity receives this perfecting as work that has already been accomplished. Human beings as God's covenant partners are not distant spectators but beneficiaries.<sup>39</sup>

In response, Christians are to engage others and rejoice in their joy and weep with them in their sorrows. As covenant partners, Christians have the comfort that comes from knowing they have been sought and loved by God.<sup>40</sup> In his 1955 Christmastime sermon, Barth states, "we are told that yesterday's misery, guilt and fear, though still existing, have been mercifully covered and no longer harm us, because to us is born a Saviour."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> CD, III/1, 384.

<sup>38</sup> CD, III/1, 387.

<sup>39</sup> CD, III/1, 387.

<sup>40</sup> CD, III/1, 387.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Barth, "Unto you is born this day a Saviour," in *Deliverance to the Captives*, trans. Marguerite Wieser (London: SCM Press, 1966), 25.

### III. Human Death in Barth's Theology

The poignant summation of human suffering is the experience of death. In taking on the peril in which humanity finds itself, the Son became living flesh and suffered and died. He did not alienate himself from the reality of death.

Death is not a trivial matter in Barth's theology. In this section I examine Barth's understanding of death from CD III/2. Barth explores the meaning of the human experience of death and how the reality of death is compatible with a just and merciful God.

Barth argues that death at its core means negation.<sup>42</sup> Death is the intrinsic end of life for humanity and for all things.<sup>43</sup> Illustrating the point further, Barth argues that the only reality not negated at death is the fact that we *have been*.<sup>44</sup> In his treatment of death, Barth engages the seriousness of death's finality. He speaks of how the reality of death looms over human existence. The reality of death's negation is not dampened by the prospect of long life or other human experiences because the end cannot be denied.<sup>45</sup> In his 1959 Easter Sunday sermon, Barth reflects on death saying, "It is the great shadow that hangs over our human life and accompanies all its movements."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> CD, III/2, 588.

<sup>43</sup> CD, III/2, 588.

<sup>44</sup> CD, III/2, 588.

<sup>45</sup> CD, III/2, 589.

<sup>46</sup> Karl Barth, "Not death but life," in *Deliverance to the Captives*, trans. Marguerite Wieser (London: SCM Press, 1966), 147.

Barth continues to define the reality of death by illuminating the relationship between death and chaos.<sup>47</sup> Barth is speaking in particular about the creation of the world out of nothingness. Creation is distinct from nothingness, with created order distinct and separate from chaos. Death belongs to this nothingness, to the chaos opposed to creation.

Having established the meaning of death as negation, Barth addresses the treatment of death in the Old Testament. He carefully addresses several statements in the Old Testament that presuppose the dead appear to others. Barth argues that this should not be understood to mean that the dead live on or exist in relation to others. He acknowledges that the Old Testament speaks of the dead going to the place of their forefathers, but states that this should not be construed as a “living fellowship with the dead.”<sup>48</sup> The dead do not have the Spirit and power of the living breath of God which constitutes the living subject.<sup>49</sup> The dead are deprived of the Spirit, and exist only in the sense of having once been; having once lived in space and time.<sup>50</sup>

The effect of death reaches back from the grave to the living. Barth contends that suffering humanity experiences the full reality of death even as it lives. He argues,

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<sup>47</sup> CD, III/2, 591.

<sup>48</sup> CD, III/2, 589.

<sup>49</sup> CD, III/2, 589.

<sup>50</sup> CD, III/2, 589.

[T]he really deadly thing about it, is true already here and now, namely, that man can no longer see God, or worship Him, or praise and adore Him. Man is no longer present before God and for Him. He is forsaken by God. God is no longer his comforter, Helper, Avenger and Saviour.<sup>51</sup>

The reality of death and its consequence casts a shadow over fallen humanity. It remains true for Barth that humanity stands on the brink of nothingness, but cannot be ontologically godless, as noted above. Apart from the self-revelation of God, humanity is blind to the real peril of death.

### **III.1 How Death is Compatible with God**

Barth asks how the reality of death can be compatible with the triune God. How is it that the Creator allows the creature to suffer negation? Barth answers that the death humanity experiences is the sign of God's judgement.<sup>52</sup> Barth explains that all of humanity is marked for judgement as a tree is marked for cutting.<sup>53</sup> He argues that humanity is plunged into the outer darkness of "eternal torment of a past and non-recurrent opportunity."<sup>54</sup> Barth preached in 1955, "We suffer in the shadow of death and of eternal judgement toward which we are moving."<sup>55</sup> He then proclaimed that even though we are on the brink of death, we are saved by grace through the death of Christ for us.<sup>56</sup>

Barth speaks of the judgement against humanity as the ultimate truth over the human person. Humanity should fear this truth, because death is the divine

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<sup>51</sup> CD, III/2, 592.

<sup>52</sup> CD, III/2, 596.

<sup>53</sup> CD, III/2, 597.

<sup>54</sup> CD, III/2, 597.

<sup>55</sup> Karl Barth, "Saved by grace," in *Deliverance to the Captives*, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Karl Barth, "Saved by grace," in *Deliverance to the Captives*, 38.

CD, III/2, 598.

judgement of God. Barth states that indeed, death is feared, even among those who stoically give themselves over to it.<sup>57</sup>

Death cannot be understood as a neutral event because it is the sign of God's judgement on all humanity. Barth acknowledges that death is part of the natural lifecycle in one sense, however, as the sign of God's judgement death is contrary to the goodness of creation. As a sign of God's judgement, humanity cannot make peace with death as a merely natural occurrence.

Barth argues that in the Old Testament death is divine judgement. He contends that the New Testament maintains this position. Though death is the sign of God's judgement, God is not allied with it. Barth writes,

For Jesus, at least during His Galilean ministry, was from the very outset engaged in open combat with suffering and sickness in all its forms. Now that the Messiah has come, the immediate and inevitable result is an onslaught against the invasion of the realm of death in the whole world of life.<sup>58</sup>

Jesus confronts death as a bitter enemy. Jesus opposes sickness meaning death-on-the-way, as an unnatural evil.<sup>59</sup> Barth argues that the gospels discern the work of demons in sickness as an outbreak of the demonic world, though operating with divine permission.<sup>60</sup> Jesus opposes the demonic as he contends with the bitter enemy of death. Barth does not attribute the power of death directly to the demonic, but instead maintains that death is God's divine judgement.

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<sup>57</sup> CD, III/2, 598.

<sup>58</sup> CD, III/2, 599.

<sup>59</sup> CD, III/2, 599.

<sup>60</sup> CD, III/2, 600.

Barth contends that the miracles of Jesus were signs of divine grace set against divine judgement.<sup>61</sup> Barth argues further that the miracles are in fact a countersign, unmasking the power of death and signalling that God will not always allow death to run its course. Barth states that the calming of the sea and the feeding of the multitude in the wilderness are examples of Jesus opposing death. Barth reminds readers that in the New Testament the sea and wilderness are symbolically connected with the grave.

Barth points out that Jesus performs no such miracles in Jerusalem, but confronts the power of death directly. Barth states that the miracles are the preliminary announcement of the meaning of the cross.<sup>62</sup> The judgement against humanity is suffered by Christ. In opposing death, Christ gives himself over to death, unlike in the work of his miracles.<sup>63</sup> Barth states, “He is as helpless in the face of death as any other man. Nor would He be the Son of God – of a God friendly to man – if he were not ‘obedient even unto death’ (Phil. 2:8).”<sup>64</sup>

Humanity continues to suffer and die as the sign of the judgement. In contrast, Christ did not suffer the sign, but the actual judgement as the Judge, judged in our place.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> CD, III/2, 600.

<sup>62</sup> CD, III/2, 600.

<sup>63</sup> CD, III/2, 602.

<sup>64</sup> CD, III/2, 602.

<sup>65</sup> CD, III/2, 600.

### III.2 Death as a Lesser Power

Barth argues that although death is humanity's final enemy, death itself stands under God. Death and God are not equally opposed forces. Rather death is a servant and slave to God.<sup>66</sup> Two implications can be drawn from this.

First, in facing death humanity is not only confronted by death's power, but by God Himself.<sup>67</sup> Barth argues that if death were its own tyrant, humanity could openly oppose and defy it.<sup>68</sup> Barth continues arguing that in fact death is where God is in the right against us.<sup>69</sup> Barth states,

Our end is not a tolerable evil, but the great and serious and intolerable evil, to the extent that in our opposition to God we draw upon ourselves God's opposition to us. In its perhaps concealed but very real basis our fear of death is the well-grounded fear that we must have of God."<sup>70</sup>

In death humanity deals with God, receiving the sign of what is owed. Humanity stands guilty before a just God. In death humanity should fear God himself.

The second implication of death being subject to God as his servant is that death is unable to loosen God's grip on humanity.<sup>71</sup> Barth argues that God is the Lord of death, but is also *for* humanity.<sup>72</sup> Barth states, "If the fire of His wrath scorches us, it is because it is the fire of His wrathful love, and not His wrathful hate."<sup>73</sup> God is the deliverer and helper and we are under his sovereignty. We are

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<sup>66</sup> CD, III/2, 609.

<sup>67</sup> CD, III/2, 607.

<sup>68</sup> CD, III/2, 607.

<sup>69</sup> CD, III/2, 608.

<sup>70</sup> CD, III/2, 608.

<sup>71</sup> CD, III/2, 609.

<sup>72</sup> CD, III/2, 609.

<sup>73</sup> CD, III/2, 609.

his property and are the object of his love.<sup>74</sup> Death remains a tyrant, but not an omnipotent tyrant.<sup>75</sup>

To speak of death as God's servant is not to equate the power of death with God or to say that death is good. The power of death is chaos and a perverse power of Satan.<sup>76</sup> Death is alien to creation and God's creative will. God is Lord of death but he never affirms death.<sup>77</sup> He is for humanity and affirms life.

### **III.3 The Necessity of Death**

As noted above, physical death is a theological necessity that is only known through the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Barth argues that to belong to God we must be finite. In our finiteness and mortality we are on the same ground as the Son who delivered us through His own death. Barth states that our physical death is necessary and unavoidable.

### **III.4 Death of the Faithful**

Barth argues that death as expressed in the Old Testament is from below, or from the human perspective. He contends that the New Testament views death from above but confirms the Old Testament, and attests to the faithfulness of God in the Old Testament.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> CD, III/2, 611.

<sup>75</sup> CD, III/2, 611.

<sup>76</sup> CD, III/2, 616.

<sup>77</sup> CD, III/2, 616.

<sup>78</sup> CD, III/2, 621.

Barth argues that in the New Testament there is no suggestion that in death there is “continuation into an indefinite future of a somewhat altered life.”<sup>79</sup> Barth denounces the pagan dream of a good time after death.<sup>80</sup> He argues instead that the death, resurrection and return of Christ are the basis for understanding humanity’s “future, end and goal in God.”<sup>81</sup> Barth writes of the New Testament, “What it looks forward to is the ‘eternalizing’ of this ending life.”<sup>82</sup> The corruptible and mortal life will be “divested of its character” and will put on incorruption and immortality.<sup>83</sup> The past life will be transformed and will participate in the eternal life of God. Barth contends that the resurrection of the dead secured and revealed in Christ’s resurrection “is our participation in His future revelation.”<sup>84</sup> Barth speaks of this participation as the hope for humanity in the time we still have.

Barth is careful not to present death as good or desirable, but he does not deny that there can be grace in death because humanity remains in the hands of God.<sup>85</sup> Death is never a friend, but Barth argues that its enmity and menace can disappear. He states that scripture demonstrates that some individuals met peaceful ends, but he stresses that this is not their own doing, but the result of God’s granting.<sup>86</sup> As evidence, Barth notes that references of the faithful falling asleep or having fallen asleep speak of a way of dying with peace. He argues that

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<sup>79</sup> CD, III/2, 624.

<sup>80</sup> CD, III/2, 625.

<sup>81</sup> CD, III/2, 624.

<sup>82</sup> CD, III/2, 624.

<sup>83</sup> CD, III/2, 624.

<sup>84</sup> CD, III/2, 624.

<sup>85</sup> CD, III/2, 634.

<sup>86</sup> CD, III/2, 637.

this should not be understood as meaning those who have died are asleep and their lives simply on hold. Barth summarizes,

The New Testament Christian does not fear death. But he never hopes for it. He hopes for the One who has delivered him from death. It is because he hopes for Him, and expects to be with Him when he dies, that he is willing to die 'gladly' like Jacob.<sup>87</sup>

The Christian does not make peace with the hostile power of death, but the believer can face death in grace and hope because Christ has taken the judgement of death upon himself.

In March of 1958 Barth preached the sermon, *Teach us to Number our Days*. He instructs his listeners that it is necessary to be taught how to number the days given.

It reminds us, moreover, of our inability to summon the right thoughts about death into our hearts and minds, and at the same time of the urgent necessity to ponder the matter nevertheless lest we fail to become wise, to get a heart of wisdom.<sup>88</sup>

Barth argues that in response to the inability to think rightly about death, listeners must turn their attention to the New Testament, remembering the suffering and death of Jesus. Barth expounds, "Our death happens in the power of his death, as the consequence, reflection and sign of the divine 'no,' of the judgement carried out in Jesus' condemnation."<sup>89</sup> Barth argues that to number our days means to let the power of Jesus' death work in us, creating a wise and humble heart within us.

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<sup>87</sup> CD, III/2, 640.

<sup>88</sup> Karl Barth, "Teach us to number our days," in *Deliverance to the Captives*, trans. Marguerite Wieser (London: SCM Press, 1966), 120.

<sup>89</sup> Barth, "Teach us," 122.

At the hour of our death, Barth advises, we have only God's mercy to rely on. Our death occurs in the power of Jesus' death as the great *Yes* spoken by God.<sup>90</sup>

#### **IV. The Triune God and Christian Community**

Barth's exploration of the human experience of suffering and death is informed by God's self-revelation through the Son who enters the human predicament. How does a Trinitarian perspective on the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ inform the Christian community's experience with suffering and death?

First, a Trinitarian perspective informs our understanding of the limit of our existence and the rule over our existence. In his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, Barth proposes that God acts as Father in his work towards us as Creator. He argues that the Father as Creator is revealed through Jesus Christ, and the Creator is known "absolutely in the death of man, and at the end of his existence."<sup>91</sup> Life and death are under the will of the Father. Barth states that God the Father is the Lord of our existence and we sit under the judgement of God's will. Humanity is not its own lord, but comes to the knowledge of God the Father's lordship over human existence through the revelation of the Son. The Father's lordship is not distant or removed from humanity.

Second, the Triune God embraces humanity through Jesus as the suffering servant. The self-offering of Jesus to death means God is for humanity. As noted in chapter two, Barth criticised the evangelical theology of his time as

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<sup>90</sup> Barth, "Teach us," 123.

<sup>91</sup> CD, I/1, 445.

anthropocentric, reducing God to a pious notion distant from human experience.<sup>92</sup>

Barth disagrees, arguing that God is intimately engaged with humanity. Barth writes,

In Him God has entered in, breaking into that *circulus vitiosus* of the human plight, making His own not only the guilt of man but also his rejection and condemnation, giving Himself to bear the divinely righteous consequences of human sin, not merely affirming the divine sentence on man, but allowing it to be fulfilled on Himself.<sup>93</sup>

The Triune God affirms humanity's guilt and takes the punishment of human sin upon himself in Christ. God reconciles humanity to himself.

Third, the Triune God abolishes death through the resurrection of the Son.<sup>94</sup> Barth argues that the highest act of Christ's sovereignty is the abolition of death, but Christ's power remains in conflict with penultimate powers until his fulfilment. Humanity continues to contend with suffering and death, assured of the hope of the resurrection.

Fourth, the Christian community endures suffering and faces death assured of its resurrection that is secured by Christ in his resurrection. Christians look to Christ in their suffering, and follow him as the one who has gone on before them, bearing his own burden of suffering. Barth argues that Christians serve as the

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<sup>92</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 39.

<sup>93</sup> CD, IV/1, 175.

<sup>94</sup> Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.J. Stenning (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 169.

advance-guard of the risen Christ in a world that has yet to know what has been accomplished in Christ.<sup>95</sup>

In a 1957 sermon Barth reflects on the criminals crucified with Jesus. He calls the condemned and dying men the first Christian community. He states, “Christian community is manifest wherever there is a group of people close to Jesus who are with him in such a way that they are directly and unambiguously affected by his promise and assurance.”<sup>96</sup> It is curious that Barth includes the unrepentant thief who rejects Christ’s promise and assurance. Nonetheless, the point remains that Christians respond to suffering and death as the community directly affected by the promise and assurance of Christ. The Christian community faithfully opposes sin, suffering and death as those reconciled to God in the death of Christ and empowered by the hope of the resurrection.

## **V. Conclusion**

Barth’s theological anthropology is grounded in understanding Jesus as the “real man.” The truth about humanity is revealed in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. God desires partnership with humanity through reconciliation. Barth understands the human experience of suffering and death through this lens.

Barth argues that there is a brighter side to life and a shadow side. The shadow side of life is the dark side of suffering and decay that cannot be escaped

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<sup>95</sup> CD, IV/2, 330.

<sup>96</sup> Karl Barth, “The criminals with Him,” in *Deliverance to the Captives*, trans. Marguerite Wieser (London: SCM Press, 1966), 77.

or ignored. The shadow side of life does not inhibit God's partnership with humanity. Barth contends that humanity can experience the lasting joy of partnership even in suffering. In this way, humanity experiences a two-fold contradiction. God raises humanity into partnership with him, yet humanity remains in peril. Jesus as the suffering servant engages humanity in suffering making the two-fold contradiction his own. In response Christians are to engage others in both joy and sorrow.

Barth argues that death at its core means negation. The power of death opposes God but is subordinate to him. Barth asks how death can remain in opposition to God. He replies that the negating power of death is the judgement of God against the sin of humanity. Jesus has taken this judgement upon himself as the Judge, judged in our place. Humanity experiences death as the sign of this punishment. Death is never to be longed for and is never a friend, although Christians can face death with grace. The Christian community does not escape the reality of death, but lives with the hope of the resurrection that declares the abolishment of death. Christ opposed death during his earthly ministry and remains in conflict with the penultimate powers. Humanity continues to contend with death, assured of the hope of the resurrection and its ultimate fulfilment.

## Conclusion

The theology of Karl Barth offers a framework for the twenty-first century church as the Christian community responds to suffering and atrocity in the world. I have examined Barth's Trinitarian understanding of the suffering of God at the cross in order to consider the implications for addressing human suffering. Barth argues that God embraces suffering humanity, making the human predicament his own at the cross. He states that God has given himself in his revelation, but has not given himself away. Barth breaks from the Western Christian tradition when he attributes suffering to God, but maintains that God remains Lord in and of himself. His Lordship is not diminished because of his freely chosen suffering.

### I. Barth on the Doctrine of the Trinity

Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is essential to his understanding of God's suffering and the implications for humanity. Barth has placed his doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of *Church Dogmatics*, because God reveals himself to humanity as Triune; the Lord in threefold repetition.

In his Trinitarian development, Barth emphasizes the unity within the diversity of the Godhead. He articulates the distinctive "modes" of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, exploring God in his eternal essence and work. Barth speaks of the Father as the Eternal Father and Creator, the Son as the Eternal Son and Reconciler and the Holy Spirit as the Eternal Spirit and Redeemer.

Barth argues that the Triune God engages suffering humanity in the freedom of his eternal *loving*. Barth contends that God draws humanity into

fellowship with himself without making humanity necessary to God's being. In contrast to Moltmann and Fiddes, Barth argues that God is free to be for humanity without giving himself away. According to Barth, God's freedom is his self-determination grounded in his own being.

Barth states that the content of God's essence is one with his work, but God has not collapsed his essence into his work. Failure to maintain the distinction between God's essence and his work leads to pantheism. The distinction between God's essence and work or immanent and economic Trinity means Barth can speak of his loving as God's nature without arguing that God's loving towards humanity is required to complete himself.

## **II. Barth on the Passion of Christ**

In the passion of Jesus Christ, humanity encounters God as he is. Therefore our understanding of God's mutability must not prevent us from understanding that God humbled himself in coming to the cross. Barth argues that the mutability of God must be understood through God's constancy; that is God's perfect freedom in concert with his perfect love.

Barth contends that the unity of the Godhead is maintained even as Christ suffers at the cross. He argues that the garden of Gethsemane is the decisive movement that reveals the unity of the Godhead. Barth states that Christ *desired* to have the cup removed, but that the *will* of the Father and Son remained unified in the garden.

Barth argues that Christ experienced the true depth of human misery in the passion and that our own experience of suffering only touches the edge of the shadow of the cross. Christ bears his cross and we bear our own, never knowing the depth of his dereliction, though the cry of dereliction should rightfully be our cry.

Barth affirms that the suffering of the Son means that the Father also suffers. He moves beyond the traditional understanding of *apathia*, but avoids speaking of suffering within the immanent Trinity. He argues that though God suffers, he never becomes less than God. The threat of the dissolution of the Trinity is real at the cross, but the Godhead is not broken. Barth states that the death of Christ is “the complete humiliation of God.” He argues that because Jesus is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, death cannot hold Christ.

### **III. Barth on the Resurrection of Christ**

The resurrection of Christ is the corner stone of Christian faith and critical to Barth’s theology. The resurrection is also important for understanding the suffering of the Triune God and the implications for responding to human suffering.

One implication is that the self-revelation of God is grounded in the resurrection. Without the resurrection, the reconciling work of Christ would remain hidden and humanity would be unaware of its predicament of sin.

Another implication is that in the resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit, that is the Spirit of Christ, the being and act of the crucified Lord comes to all humanity. Through this act, we can say that humanity is in Christ. Barth argues that through the resurrection the life of Christ becomes contemporaneous with all time. God is the Lord of our space and time.

The resurrection of Jesus signals Christ's abolishment of death. We have the assurance of our own resurrection in Christ's resurrection as the person of Christ is our eschatological hope.

Christ is the victor over sin and death, though we await the final realization of what has been accomplished in Christ. As his community, Christians are invited to be witnesses of Christ to the suffering world.

#### **IV. Barth on Death and Suffering**

Barth argues that humanity is under a two-fold determination as exalted creatures in fellowship with God through the Son and as those in peril because of sin. God through Christ has taken up the two-fold determination in his own life and death. Barth contends that humanity lives by the death and resurrection of Christ as he has taken humanity's contradiction upon himself.

God opposes death. His opposition is not as one who is equal with death, but as the One who stands over death. God has taken on death and its act of negation and as a result, humanity's experience of death is a sign of God's punishment for sin that he himself has bore. In death, humanity is confronted with

God, but also confronted with the reality that death cannot loosen God's grip on humanity. Death remains a tyrant and enemy of humanity, but God is sovereign over death as we remain the object of his love.

Humanity can never make peace with the hostile power of death. The Christian community opposes death, but in facing our own death we can experience grace and hope. The Christian community with all of humanity is under the lordship of God. Our predicament has been taken upon the suffering servant. The suffering of Christ is not merely an example of suffering, nor is it an act of empathy. Christ's suffering and death affirms humanity's guilt and is the inclusion of our punishment upon himself. The resurrection is the fulfilment of hope, the abolishment of death and God's inclusion of humanity into his Trinitarian life.

## **V. Further Inquiry**

Further research could explore how Barth's Trinitarian perspective on the death and resurrection of Jesus can inform the practical operation of the work of the Christian community in responding to humanitarian crisis and atrocity.

How can Barth's theology frame what the Christian community communicates about suffering within the community? How can insights from the study of Barth's theology frame what we say about suffering to the broader society?

Furthermore, how does the Trinitarian understanding of God's suffering at the cross and Christ's resurrection ground the Christian community's practical response to suffering in the world?

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