“The Eclipse of the Baptismal Narrative: Thinking With and Beyond Karl Barth on Baptism”

by

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A thesis submitted to Wycliffe College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Theology awarded by University of St. Michael’s College

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Abstract

Baptism's disconnection from Church practices and its influence by cultural forces has led to its disintegration as a practice. The result has been an increase in talk about responsible baptism in an effort to resurrect talk about discipleship and responsibility in witness within the community. Identifying with this problem is Karl Barth who is concerned about the currency church practices have on the life of believers and who also calls for a 'responsible baptism'. While Barth's theology of baptism appears to offer a reasonable solution it is grossly out of touch with his own theology as well as evidence in recent theology and secular work that supports a theology of infant baptism. Thus the project of this paper will be to recover Barth's communal-ecclesial-affective dimensions of knowing that although present in his theology are not only lacking but antithetical to a theology of infant baptism. In addition by looking beyond Barth’s theology to attachment and neuroscience it will account for a theology of infant baptism that is tenable and consistent with the concerns both Barth and the Church at large wishes to maintain.
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Chapter 1

1  The Eclipse of the Baptismal Narrative

Great indeed is the baptism which is offered to you. It is a ransom to captives; the remission of offenses; the death of sin; the regeneration of the soul; the garment of light; the holy seal indissoluble; the chariot to heaven; the luxury of paradise; a procuring of the kingdom; the gift of adoption – Cyril of Alexandria

The mystery and meaning of baptism has, throughout the centuries, developed in the form of several diverse and yet complementary images. A look at the New Testament witness reveals that it does not present an authoritative definition or single image of baptism. As the 1982 Faith and Order document Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM), notes “The New Testament scriptures and the liturgy of the Church unfold the meaning of baptism in various images which express the riches of Christ and the gifts of his salvation...The images are many but the reality is one.”

That we have received a practice so rich does not mean that we should simply throw our hands up in resignation and cease to strive for a consensus because “it is just too complicated.” For even within the plurality of possibilities not all of them are necessarily for the good of the community. As St. Paul reminds us, though all things are lawful not everything is beneficial and useful for building up. This fact is evidenced by a history of sometimes bitter division on the topic of baptism which began primarily at the time of Reformation and continues even into today; thankfully, however, we no longer use water to drown those with whom we disagree. The waters that divide, however, raises serious questions as to the Church’s witness. If baptism is “a sign and seal of our common discipleship” and a “basic bond of unity” one wonders if the creation of denominations following lines of division, allowing for a more peaceful if not unified existence, can be justified. BEM also raises this concern,

The inability of the churches mutually to recognize their various practices of baptism as sharing in the one baptism, and their actual dividedness in spite of mutual recognition, have given dramatic visibility to the broken witness of the Church. ...The need to recover


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baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities.\textsuperscript{2}

Not only has Church division led to a lack of recognition of practices, it has also lamentably resulted in a waning of discussion surrounding the topic, in the hopes perhaps that addressing other issues will yield more fruit.

Fortunately, ecumenical discussion of more recent years on the topic of sacraments has begun to acknowledge the ‘eclipse of the baptismal narrative’ by dialogues of the past that have tended to focus on the Eucharist. More recently, in fact, there has been resurgence throughout the Christian world to come to a wider and broader understanding of baptism, particularly regarding its ecclesiological significance, and what it reveals about the relationship of God to humans and the world. Not only has there been a shift to talk about baptism again there has also been a change in focus as to what is discussed.

The shift in focus towards questions of baptism has yielded much fruit at both the practical and theological levels; however, it has also brought many issues to the fore, particularly for Protestant traditions seeking to retrieve a more ‘catholic’ theology.\textsuperscript{3} The BEM document expressly shows significant strides in the convergence of views surrounding the topic. More in particular, such ecumenical discussion has shed new light on the historically bitter debate between adherents to paedo and adult baptism.

Although being able to note baptism’s theological significance in the life of both the individual and the Church its actual visible influence is seemingly lacking. For those traditions holding to Reformation convictions, the question is in approximation with the concern to safeguard the sacrament of baptism as prevenient grace while at the same time taking seriously the pastoral obligations of the baptized community. As such, indiscriminate baptism continues to be a point of concern and along with it a surge of discussions around the phrase ‘responsible baptism.’ Even more interesting is the return to talking about adult baptism as the normative practice in mainline denominations; partly in hopes that adult faith will result in more fervent membership

\textsuperscript{2} BEM, 3.
and a more credible corporate witness. Curiously, however, it has forced the paedo-baptist traditions to account for their practice while remaining tenable.

2 Infant Baptism: Baptism’s Disintegration

2.1 Theological and historical reasons

The view that adult baptism is normative practice is not new. In the time of the apostolic Church baptism can be described as a ‘hasty’ act as the Church gathered those who would carry out the good news. By the end of the second century things slow down and baptism includes a period of testing as the Church realizes that to continue in its witness it must train people do be as such. What happens next, from ca. A.D. 500 on, is described by theologian Robert Jenson as “the history of ancient baptism’s disintegration.”

Jenson traces baptism’s decline to the universal practice of infant baptism. The Church in her history had always also baptized infants; however, it was primarily designed for adults. The early Church believed that Christ’s return was immanent, as such, none of her practices were meant for a second generation. So, when the already baptized began to have children the Church was posed with a problem. The decision – rightly – was made to baptize infants, posing no controversy at all. Baptism thus came to have a twofold use in proclamation: the use of baptism for missionary preaching, lost to those born into believing homes; and the use of baptism in preaching for believers where such discourse becomes meaningful in life and growth of the baptized child. Thus we see that in the ancient Church, those coming to baptism were a mixture of infants and adults.

When the nominal Christianization of the whole Mediterranean took place, however, the mixture of adult and infant baptism deteriorated and with it an initiation shaped primarily for adults. The way the Church viewed herself changed, and in turn, also the practice of baptism.

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5 Jenson, Visible Words, 160.
With a dubiously committed population inside, and no more local mission field outside, the church ceased to think of itself as a fellowship to bring the gospel to those outside and began to think of itself as an institution to bring the gospel to those inside. In these circumstances, the infant baptism that had been permitted, became the standard practice.

As a result of this Jenson tells us, the catechumenate was destroyed, having neither implication nor necessity for infants. Baptism became made up of ritual left-overs. As Jenson starkly notes, “[t]he consequence was profound: there is no longer any testing of readiness for baptism.” The question then changed to focus on the necessity and meaning of the left-over ceremonies of the catechumenate in relation to the infant. By the high Middle Ages the question shifts from one of need to what Jenson describes as “the disastrous question of validity.” This fatal question led to a narrowing and diminishing of the meaning of baptism as it pertains to the life of the world – mission and witness – and the life and nurture of the community – ethics. Alexander Schmemann summarizes well in the following statement:

> for a long time the theological and spiritual interest in baptism was virtually disconnected from its cosmic significance, from the totality of man’s relation to the world. It was explained as man’s liberation from “original sin.” But both original sin and the liberation from it were given an extremely narrow and individual meaning. Baptism was understood as the means to assure the individual salvation of man’s soul. No wonder that such an understanding of baptism led to a similar narrowing of the baptismal liturgy. From an act of the whole Church, involving the whole cosmos, it became a “private appointment,” and in which the Church was reduced to the “minister of the sacraments” and the cosmos to the three symbolic drops of water, considered as “necessary and sufficient” for the “validity” of the sacrament. Validity was the preoccupation- and not fullness, meaning, joy. Because of the obsession of baptismal theology with juridical and not ontological terms, the real question – what is made valid? – often remained unanswered.

Preoccupation with validity generated a meaningless baptism, that is, Christianity becomes such that it demands no renunciation and grace carries no risks. The incoherence of practices in relation to Christian witness and the lack of discipleship led to charges of baptism being a ‘cheap grace’ and the Church has struggled with how to ‘fix’ her practice. Theological and historical

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6 Jenson, Visible Words, 161.
7 Jenson, Visible Words, 161.
8 Jenson, Visible Words, 161.
9 Jenson, Visible Words, 162.
reasons are not the only reasons for baptism’s demise. There are other cultural factors to be considered as to why the Church in relationship to her practices has become ‘undone’.

2.2 Cultural forces for the deterioration of a practice

We have seen to this point the theological and historical reasons for the deterioration of the rite of infant baptism in the Church, namely the universalization of the practice. The consequences were the loss of the catechumenate and concern for discipleship within the community. Baptism lost its rootedness in the biblical command to baptize, make disciples, and be witnesses. Today, although infant baptism is no longer the universal practice, indiscriminate baptism still remains. As we saw earlier indiscriminate baptism follows the belief that we can be Christian without training – discipleship. Underlying this further, is the rite of baptism being plucked from the greater context of Christian life and worship done in community, i.e., the place where one is formed by the practices and skills of a particular tradition. These observations —loss of the authority of tradition and community —are not exclusive to the Church. Many other disciplines, such as science and philosophy have also marked this detrimental change in society. And since the Church is not immune to cultural forces they are observations worth noting.

The phenomenon of the increased loss of community, tradition, and authority in society is acutely observed in the work of psychologist Gordon Neufeld and medical doctor Gabor Maté in their book, *Hold Onto Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers*.

In today’s society, attachment voids abound. A gaping attachment void has been created by the loss of the extended family. Children often lack close relationships with older generations – the people, who for much of human history, were often better able than parents themselves to offer the unconditional loving acceptance that is the bedrock of emotional security. The reassuring, consistent presence of grandparents and aunts and uncles, the

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11 Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate, *Hold Onto Your Kids: Why Parents need to matter more than peers* (Toronto, Vintage Canada: 2005). The work of Neufeld and Mate is based on the science of attachment theory, about which more will be said later. In this particular work these authors look at the science of attachment in the context of parenting to speak out against the phenomenon of peer orientation where children and teens are looking to peers rather than parents for direction: for identity, a sense of right and wrong, for values and codes of behaviour. The effect has been the disintegration of family cohesion, the sabotaging of healthy development, the poisoning of school atmosphere and the fostering of an aggressively hostile and sexualized youth culture. Hereafter I will refer to the book by its primary author Gordon Neufeld.
protective embrace of the multigenerational family, is something few children nowadays are able to enjoy.\textsuperscript{12}

Although Neufeld’s work is to speak out against a culture that lacks attachments, particularly in the attempt to help restore relationships between children and parents and secondarily children and other adult mentors, their observations in connection with the science of attachment, are useful for shedding light into the Church’s problems as well, because it is a phenomenon that the Church is not only fighting but is compliant in. Thus it is worth noting briefly some of the reasons proposed for the loss of community, nurturing relationships (attachment) and discipleship in society that correlatively we also see happening in the Church to the detriment of her practices and her responsibility to a life of discipleship and witness.

2.2.1 Why we have come undone: Cultural Forces

Neufeld proposes several reasons for why we have come undone. The first contributor to our lack of connection is mobility. We are no longer connected to those we live next to. Increased mobility has also meant that society today has increasingly become one of individualization and fragmentation, antithetical in fact to attachment communities of the past. Whereas at one time people worshiped, shopped and went to school all in the same village, this is no longer the case.

Another consequence of mobility is anonymity: “Incessant transplanting has rendered us anonymous,”\textsuperscript{13} even in our churches. Anonymity means the loss of community and the loss of important relationships necessary for human growth and development.\textsuperscript{14} Neufeld notes,

In today’s society, attachment voids abound. A gaping attachment void has been created by the loss of the extended family. Children often lack close relationships with older generations – the people, who for much of human history, were often better able than parents themselves to offer the unconditional loving acceptance that is the bedrock of emotional security. The reassuring, consistent presence of grandparents and aunts and uncles, the

\textsuperscript{12} Neufeld, \textit{Hold Onto Your Kids}, 35.

\textsuperscript{13} Neufeld, \textit{Hold Onto Your Kids}, 35

\textsuperscript{14} Dr. Susan Johnson, a leader in the field of the science of attachment also observes that the love her mother could find within an entire community, in the 21st century we try find in one partner or set of parents. The problem with this is that we not only set exceptionally high and unrealistic demands on these people, they are expectations for love that we never meant to exist nor for which we were created.
protective embrace of the multigenerational family, is something few children nowadays are able to enjoy.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to the loss of the extended family (communities, churches, etc.) some traditional places of community have become so large (e.g. schools and churches) that \textit{quantity} in addition to mobility have made anonymity easy.

The consequence of the above is the missing attachment with adults in children’s lives who assume some responsibility for them. Such a loss has caused Neufeld to lament,

\begin{quote}
Where are the surrogate grandparents, the surrogate uncles and aunts who supplemented and substituted the nuclear and extend family in the past? Where is the adult attachment safety net should parents become inaccessible? Where are the adult mentors to help guide our adolescents? Our children are growing up peer rich and adult poor.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Other significant contributors to the loss of community are secularization and consumerism. Neufeld insightfully points out that “[s]ecularization has meant more than the loss of faith or spiritual rootedness; it has brought the loss of this attachment community.”\textsuperscript{17} To demonstrate this he gives the example of churches who divide the generations before they even walk through the door! Moreover, we live in a post-Christian society that lacks formational communities. This means that less people are born and raised in communities of faith. As a result future generations no longer inherit the traditions (practices and values) that were formally passed down throughout the generations. Due to the fact that young people are “no longer born into faith communities that embrace them fully and command their allegiance over a lifetime,” it has become necessary for them “to shop for a place to worship, rather than simply inheriting the congregation in which a person is raised.”\textsuperscript{18} Consumerism then comes to have an increased role in faith formation.

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\textsuperscript{15} Neufeld, \textit{Hold Onto Your Kids}, 36.
\textsuperscript{16} Neufeld, \textit{Hold Onto Your Kids}, 36.
\textsuperscript{17} Neufeld, \textit{Hold onto Your Kids}, 36.
\textsuperscript{18} Robert Wuthnow in Bryan D. Spinks, \textit{The Worship Mall: Contemporary Responses to Contemporary Culture}, xxiii.
\end{flushright}
Shopping for religion now forms our worship just as much as it forms society. Parishioners not only are shaped by and value whatever is on MTV, the shopping channel, or Bloor Street Billboards; they are also shaped by competing brands of Christianity. Conversion, does not simply mean conversion to the Gospel of Christ but to a particular ‘brand’ of Christianity, be it Roman, Anglican, Liberal, Conservative, Traditional, Contemporary, Fresh Expression, etc. As if to complicate things further, the Church is not only competing with the various liturgies it has to offer, it is competing with people’s whose lives that are consumed by other ‘liturgies’ such as work, shopping, work out regiments, diets, soccer practices, etc. It is hard to be shaped by the values of God’s Kingdom when the most any given person will spend in corporate worship is one hour a week. The valuation of consumerism in our churches and in culture has been to the neglect of a healthy development of humanity, namely our children. Not only do we spend less time connecting with each other, especially our kids, the Church with society has fostered the lie that the consumption of goods can fill our need for connection.

A final unravelling point has been that of ‘rapid change’ and ‘technology gone haywire.’ Neufeld has noted that, “[w]hen circumstances change more quickly than our culture can adapt to, customs and traditions disintegrate.”\footnote{Neufeld, \textit{Hold onto Your Kids}, 39.} The Church has always struggled with change often criticized for being ‘behind the times.’ However, given Neufeld’s observations perhaps being ‘behind’ is not such a negative thing. Perhaps, instead of keeping up with society’s changes, the Church might be better served to witness against the abnormality of such rapid change by not changing and doing what it has always done. The more we become an instant culture or instant Church the more we lose what used to be passed down through custom and tradition from one generation to another.\footnote{Neufeld, \textit{Hold onto your Kids}, 39.} When this happens authority is lost and discipleship becomes virtually impossible as we see next.
At one time “the culture was to be followed, not questioned.” However, in a society of lost attachments where tradition no longer has authority but the autonomous self, discipleship not only becomes virtually impossible but comes to be viewed as unnecessary. Theologian Marva Dawn makes the same observation saying this:

In raising children of faith we are presented with the problem of postmodernity, namely its disregard for tradition and authority and its staunch individualism. ... As many scholars have noticed, postmodernism has moved young people from the alienation of the 1960’s to the schizophrenia or multiphrenia of the 1990’s [and still into the 2000’s]. Having no larger story in which to place themselves, youth don’t know who they are. Constantly shifting their image of themselves to fit with the fads and fashions of the times, adolescents especially lack a nucleus of identity, a personality that has been formed by moral authority and mentoring models.

One important point to note from this is that authority must be recovered in order for meaningful relationship and discipleship to take place.

The increase in privatization, consumerism, and the pursuit of individualism has created a cultural landscape on which communities of all kinds, including our churches, are eroding as it becomes harder to “build communities and churches on [such] soil.” The basic message to be heard in each of these unravelling points is that the way in which we live is at odds with how we are created to live. From a Christian perspective, autonomy and individualism cannot be reconciled to a Christian doctrine of creation that emphasizes humanity’s finite and embodied nature. Furthermore it is antithetical to the Christian belief that we are created to be persons in relationship. It is imperative then, that what we do in worship should witness to the life we are

21 Neufeld, Hold onto your Kids, 41. This speaks loudly to a post Reformational context as well and the changes that it wrought to both Church and society

22 Dawn, Is it a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church’s Children, 22, 26.

23 This will not be easy as we will see later. Although boundaries and authority are necessary for healthy human living we are not naive to where the Church has abused these both making the recovery of them difficult.


25 Mangina, Practical Knowledge of God, 12.
created to live – the life given in Jesus Christ; the life received in our baptism and established within the Church and founded upon the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

2.3 ‘Responsible’ (?) baptism: A plausible solution

The brief history of infant baptism demonstrated how our practices as a Church have often times failed to have currency in the life of believers. Discussions on baptism that focused on validity created a myopic theology of baptism and a stunted liturgy which in turn resulted in a focus away from discipleship and witness to the world. A question that arose from this for mainline denominations is whether or not there is a place for infant baptism in these Churches. One response to these concerns was to see adult baptism as once again becoming the normative practice, the primary reasons being that adults are viewed as able to be ‘responsible’ and as such take discipleship more seriously. In addition, we also looked at the modern day challenges of society that have also influenced the Church which has resulted in failing church attendance, a general lack of interest in religion in culture, and the perennial criticism, by insiders and outsiders alike, concerning the relationship of Church practices to Christian witness. Finally there is the question of how we talk about the practices of a community and their relationship to discipleship and witness, while taking seriously Reformation convictions to safeguard the sacrament of prevenient grace as well as the pastoral obligations of the community.

In response to both theological and cultural problems, ‘responsible baptism’ appears as a possible answer. Difficulties arise of course when talking about a sacrament in trying to save the Church’s witness. It is not baptism’s fault or the fault of grace that Church attendance wanes and the baptized fail to live out their witness. Or is it? Can we say that God’s grace has been insufficient to develop faithful people in his Church? Has baptism become a ‘cheap grace’? If so, can we really counter it by a ‘responsible baptism’ in which we pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps? Can we truly make baptism more responsible in order that we might save face in the Church’s witness? Can meaning be restored to a once rich and meaningful practice; or, is baptism, to echo a concern of Barth, becoming a practice that can be abandoned without any loss?

In the 21st century it is imperative that the Church be able to articulate a theology of infant baptism that takes seriously the issue of nurture and discipleship within the community and the
importance of Church practices in influencing both our personal and ecclesial witness to the world. A theology of infant baptism must have proclamatory use, preaching the gospel both inside and outside of the walls of the Church.

3 Karl Barth: Thinking with and Beyond

One theologian who believed sincerely that the practices of the Church must have currency in the life of the Christian and the world to which they witness and who also sought to address the charges of ‘cheap grace’ and indiscriminate baptism in relation to cultural forces, is Karl Barth. Unfortunately, however, Barth’s rejection of ecclesial mediation, sacramentality, and (as part of that) infant baptism, is inconsistent with his overall theological convictions. Although more attention will be given later to these convictions, briefly, Barth’s doctrine of creation, that calls us to be human, in relationship to God and the world around us, and the doctrine of the covenant that establishes this relationship and gives us the freedom to live out our humanity, are the governing themes that rather than being the basis for a rejection of sacraments are such that they allow for a view of infant baptism to make sense within Barth’s own theology. Barth further emphasizes through these themes that we are created to be people summoned to respond to God’s grace in worship, worship that involves mind, body and soul. Furthermore, discipleship, i.e., Christian formation, necessarily depends on being in this particular relationship, thus it would appear that a rejection of infant baptism puts him at odds with the very claims he is trying to make. In other words, he lacked a sufficiently holistic understanding of “knowledge”—a deficit in his anthropology—and this, despite the fact that there many contrary clues to be found in his own work. Briefly then, it will be my aim to try and recover the communal-ecclesial-affective dimensions of knowing, as rooted in his controlling themes of covenant and creation, that actually allow for a theologically fitting doctrine of infant baptism.

A holistic understanding of knowledge based on our createdness as agents in relation means that our knowledge and growth in faith depends upon the communities to which we are attached. Thus even though Barth was misguided to have rejected the traditional view of sacraments (and with it infant baptism) Barth was correct to emphasize the importance of relationship, the primacy of the role of the community in faith formation and the responsibility towards each other within the God given order to which baptism calls us. To demonstrate further that Barth was
correct to emphasize these concerns I draw on recent work in neuroscience and attachment that are not only analogous to his theology but show why his conclusions regarding baptism are mistaken. Thus not only will I show the theological fittingness of infant baptism using Barth’s theology of covenant and creation I will also be demonstrating how it finds analogical support in modern research unavailable to Barth during his life.

3.1 Baptism in Karl Barth

Barth’s treatment of baptism comes in the first section of *Church Dogmatics IV/4*. This section of the *Dogmatics* comes at the end of Barth’s treatment of the doctrine of reconciliation in what was to form his ethics proper. The elements structuring this final portion of the *Dogmatics* are for Barth the ‘foundation’ of the Christian life. Baptism introduces the ethics of reconciliation, followed by an exposition of the Lord’s prayer or ‘special ethics’, ending with the renewal of the Christian life, the Lord’s Supper. Barth understood these ecclesial actions not as sacraments but as community forming activities that attest “the goal and end of [human] conflict and therefore to its hidden meaning.”

The importance of having practices of fellowship frame the portion of special ethics is crucial because it suggests that “no description of ‘action’ will be adequate that fails to take into account the agent’s formation within the community of faith. The agent is not a naked ‘I’ but a member of the church, initiated into its fellowship at baptism and sustained by its common thanksgiving meal.”

The emphasis that our actions as humans are social in nature comes due to a particular emphasis in Barth’s theology, especially the *Church Dogmatics*, on the language of the covenant of grace. The covenant that is social in nature consists of two partners: a God who acts first and humans who act in correspondence to the divine action. Within this covenant the action of each partner is to be taken seriously, however, divine and human actions are not to be confused or separated. As Webster notes, “From the very beginning, Barth’s theme is God and humanity as *agents in relation*. Even at the furthest reaches of his protest against anthropocentric reduction of God to a

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function of human piety, consciousness or moral projects, Barth is attempting to safeguard not
the only the axiomatic divinity of God, but also the authenticity of the creature.”\textsuperscript{28} Moreover, as
persons reconciled to God we are chosen for a life of service to each other and the world
meaning for Barth, that faith – the Christian life – is characterized by activity because “the
possibility of God consists in the fact that man – eye of a needle or not – is enabled to participate
not just passively but actively in God’s grace as one who may and will and can be set to work.”\textsuperscript{29}

The concern to maintain the conceptual distinction between divine and human action, the latter
only corresponding to the former, is most clearly evident in Barth’s doctrine of baptism.
Baptism by the Holy Spirit is viewed as solely God’s act: the Spirit is the primary agent initiating
them to new life in joyful obedience to God. By contrast, baptism with water is simply the
appropriate human response to the work of the Spirit. Such dubious separation of divine and
human action not only makes the doctrine of covenant ambivalent to the sacraments, it does not
bode well for a doctrine of infant baptism. If the covenant is defined as divine act followed by
genuine obedient human action it necessarily means for Barth that faith is active. An active faith
means responsibility in witness, thus in Barth’s view there can be no place for infant baptism,
leaving Barth only to chide “enough on this tiresome matter.”\textsuperscript{30}

Many studies of Barth’s doctrine of baptism are characterized by their criticism of its
shortcomings, which no doubt there are many. More charitable readings, however, reveal that it
has much to offer in thinking about the nature of faith, discipleship within the community and
Christian mission and witness to the world; often eclipsed by his controversial claims. It is in
fact these strengths, as found in Barth’s own theology, that create room for Barth to have
maintained a view of infant baptism. Thus in what follows, I will show the theological
fittingness of infant baptism in Karl Barth; that given the overall scope of his theology and the
insights of attachment theory, Barth in fact did not have to abandon the traditional view.

\textsuperscript{28} John Webster, \textit{Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 33. Emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{29} Karl Barth, The Christian Life: Baptism and the Foundation of the Christian Life Vol. IV/4 of \textit{Church Dogmatics}

\textsuperscript{30} Barth, CD IV/4,194.
3.2 Infant Baptism in Karl Barth

In IV/4, the ‘Baptismal Fragment’, of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth sets out a series of tests for theological justifications of infant baptism. Barth begins with the general question

> whether we have in the doctrine of infant baptism an original element which is integral to baptismal doctrine and Christian knowledge, which proceeds from this, and which may be integrated organically into the other elements.\(^{31}\)

In other words Barth is concerned with the theological fittingness of infant baptism which in his opinion, particularly in the theology of Martin Luther, is merely an exercise “of integration and damage limitation.”\(^{32}\) Other tests Barth gives for infant baptism include: the ability to present one’s case calmly, irritation being a sign of weakness in their position;\(^{33}\) the consistency in which infant baptism is integrated into a doctrine of baptism as a whole;\(^{34}\) and finally, that a credible doctrine of infant baptism prove just that – infant baptism – and not be a presentation of other truths, which although may be greater, only render the argument incapable of accomplishing its task.\(^{35}\)

The latter tests Barth gives are somewhat salutary with Barth’s rejection of infant baptism coming primarily on the grounds of theological fittingness, particularly as it finds its place in ‘The Doctrine of Reconciliation’. A question to be asked, however, is whether or not Barth’s test of ‘theological fittingness’ holds up in relation to his own theology. Did Barth need to reject infant baptism as a sacrament in the way that he did or is it possible that infant baptism could have fit within his view of baptism and secondly the wider scope of his overall theological project?

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\(^{31}\) Barth, CD, IV/4, 166.


\(^{33}\) Barth, CD IV/4, 170.

\(^{34}\) Barth, CD IV/4, 171.

\(^{35}\) Barth CD, IV/4, 176.
In order to begin to answer these questions an explication of the themes of covenant and creation are in order.

3.2.1 Covenant of Grace

Karl Barth’s understanding of the Christian life is grounded in an understanding of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is one that is social in nature consisting of two partners, God who acts first and humans who act in correspondence to the divine action. The establishment of relationship in which God binds himself to a people and through that people to all of humankind means that each partner in the relationship must be taken seriously. Thus, for Barth there must always be a genuine human act that corresponds to the divine action, however, neither is to be confused or separated.36

One of the difficulties, as we will see, is Barth’s emphasis on active faith, however, what the covenant first demonstrates is that the emphasis on activity is only secondary to relationship. Obedience to the command is necessary but it is not sufficient: at the heart of the command is the question of relationship to God.37 As Barth writes of the rich young man who approaches Jesus,

That he should be a something – the covenant-partner-of God – is what all the commandments demand when they claim both what he does and what he does not do. In relationship with God, the command of God attested throughout Scripture thus not only serves to determine the action of ethical agent: it also serves to call her to determine her very being as a covenant-partner of God who loves her neighbour and belongs to Jesus Christ.38

The covenant first claims us as persons in relationship with the living God, a relationship made possible through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. Second, this particular relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ calls us to a particular life. Jesus Christ who is the basis of our relationship with the Divine is also the basis for our humanity, i.e. our life. Christ initiated a new life, shaping our lives and all of human history.

36 C.f. Webster, Karl Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 33.
38 Nimmo, Being in Action, 39.
[Christ’s history] is a fruitful history which newly shapes every human life. Having taken place extra nos, it also works in nobis, introducing a new being of every man. It certainly took place extra nos. Yet it took place, not for its own sake, but pro nobis: qui propter nos hominess et salute nostrum descendit de coelis. ...He was faithful to us by being ready to give Himself, and by giving Himself, to fulfill the covenant between God and man in His own person, i.e., by being faith to God in our place, in the place of those who previously were unfaithful to Him. In our place – even as he was there and then what only He could be, He was this in our here and now, in the weakness, ungodliness and enmity, the heart, the personal centre of the existence of every man. But if He acts extra nos pro nobis, and that extent also in nobis, this necessarily implies that in spite of the unfaithfulness of every man He creates in the history of every man the beginning of his new history, the history of the man who has become faithful to God. ... The Christian life is founded, not when man takes the place of Jesus Christ as his own liberator, but when Jesus takes the place of man to liberate him there.  

Notice here that even while maintaining a strong Christology, Barth is careful to ensure that the partnership of the covenant is maintained. Divine action cannot eclipse human action (extra nos) and nor can human action (in nobis) eclipse divine action. The God of the covenant of grace neither humiliates nor insults the individual. Barth writes that ‘He does not make him a mere spectator, let alone a puppet’. 40 When God acts on behalf of the ethical agent, the divine activity does not suspend but recognizes the reality of the ethical agent, and therefore ‘does not exclude but includes its independent life’. 41

Through Jesus Christ a relationship is established and a new life beings. Our new life established in Christ, that is, as persons reconciled to God means that we are chosen for a life of service to each other and the world. God acts in grace and love and freedom to establish the covenant, however, His acts demand something of the covenant partner. The covenant of grace does not demand a passive faith. And baptism, we learn, for Barth, is the foundation, beginning, and pathway of this particular life.

So far we have determined that the covenant in Christ establishes relationship with God thus establishing new life. This new life is characterized by activity. The covenant is also the means by which we are given the space and freedom as human beings to live out this very life to which

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39 Barth, CD IV/4, 21.
40 Barth, CD IV/3, 528.
41 Nimmo, Being in Action, 11.
we are called; “Within this order of being in Jesus Christ, then, a clearly defined space emerges within which meaningful human action can take place, as the Being in action of God calls forth a particular being in action of the ethical agent.”  

Barth’s unity in distinction of human and divine action creates space for genuine human action, however, without the burden of it being a righteous work. Again this space is a particular space: creation. Relationship and service to one another requires a context for its existence, that context is creation, which we are bounded to it in our baptisms and witness to it in our life together as the community of the baptized.

### 3.2.2 The Ethics of Creation

Creation and covenant are intricately connected in Barth’s theology. Since covenant in Barth’s theology is the epitome and standard of all reality, the same holds true for creation and as such humanity. According to Barth, the covenant “characterizes creation itself and as such, and therefore the being and existence of the creature.” Creation is the external basis of the covenant, meaning creation is the canvas on which covenant history unfolds; the stage where the drama of covenant history takes place. This is because in Barth’s view the goodness of creation is not ‘original’; goodness can only be defined teleologically inasmuch as it functions as “equipment for grace.”

Such a view of creation as rooted in the covenant of grace has several implications for the way in which we view human being and human agency. The first thing to be said is that the individual is a creature of God: “We are human [...] insofar as we are created by God. But more than that, our created nature is given meaning and direction by the fact that we are related to the man Jesus of Nazareth, by the fact, if you will, that God graciously allows us to inhabit the same world he does.”

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43 Barth says himself in III/1 that “Creation sets the stage for the story of grace.” And again he says that “creation is the road to covenant.”

44 Barth, CD III/1, 231.

relationship: God and human. Outside the encounter between God and humanity, i.e. covenant, it is not meaningful to speak about humanity at all.

Second, the individual is a covenant-partner of God summoned to action because of grace. Because we exist, we exist as a particular kind of person, a person who acts, who “exists and lives as he deliberately posits himself in relation to God, to his fellow-men, and to his environment. His actions are this deliberate positing of himself. His life is neither a mere duration of his existence nor a mere vegetative or animal course of events. It is the sequence, nexus or history of his self-positing and therefore his acts.”

Third, the individual is a soul and a body. As Mangina notes, Barth’s doctrine of God as wholly other serves as the basis for a doctrine of the “whole,” i.e. integral human person. Creation and covenant in their simplicity are a command to take life – our humanity – seriously as witnessed in the very life of Jesus Christ. There is no greater calling in life than to be human. As one close friend has chided, “If it wasn’t, why would God have become human and died for it?” Consequently then, “[w]e may and should feel at home in our own skin,...because the God attested in Scripture has so deeply entered into our reality, closer to us, we might say, than our own skin.”

Finally, creation affirms that the individual is a being in her own time yet nevertheless a time inhabited by the One who created time and in humility became flesh and dwelt among us. As beings who live and act we do so in limitation, that is, “within the limits which correspond to our creaturely existence.” This is not a derogatory limitation, suggesting confinement or a ‘lording it over’ it simply means that as persons in relation to God our lives will necessarily take a particular shape. As Barth says, “the individual thing receives its particular dignity and value on

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46 Barth, CD III/4, 470.
48 A favourite baptism quote of teacher and pastor Rev. Annette Brownlee.
50 Nimmo, Being in Action, 50.
the basis of a formative economy which assigns to all things a place and time and function.”

Limitation therefore, means determination as it is determined by the relationship of the covenant and is the creatures “specific path to glory assigned and maintained by the ordering acts of God.”

This final point of our determination by the axiom of Jesus Christ within the limits of our ordering by the covenant of grace has significant implications for witness and discipleship, two key elements in Barth’s theology of baptism. Although further time will be devoted to this in coming chapters it is worth noting some of those consequences here. To begin, ‘freedom within limitation’ helps us to understand sin. Sin, is to live outside of the ordering and limitations of the covenant. The paradox of course is that to live within the boundaries of the covenant is to be truly free. As will soon be seen, part of recovering responsibility through discipleship as it is connected to baptism will be to both recognize and recover the boundaries set out by creation and covenant.

Second, and more negatively, because our self-hood is constantly being determined as it is granted by grace, it appears that Barth is reticent about what Webster calls, “the durable aspects of moral-selfhood (character, growth, acquired wisdom).” Is there a way to account for growth in discipleship and witness in the Christian life if it defined as one not of progression but episodes of determinative encounter? A more detailed answer will be given later, one that allows us to say ‘yes.’ For the moment I will simply echo Webster who states positively that such “temporal determinacy upon ethical agency gives significance to human action while at the same time relativising them is such a way that they do not assume the status of defining human personhood.” Positively this means that we are free to unanxiously live into the humanity commanded to us by grace. Freedom within limitation or ‘temporal contingency’ means that there is no burden to have to create our own meaning or bring shape to our own lives. As one

51 Barth CD III/3, 192.
52 Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 72.
53 Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 74, emphasis in the original.
54 Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 75.
pastor theologian has put it, “[w]hatever else the Christian life may be, it certainly is not a summons for us to get busy ‘cooking up’ a life for ourselves according to a recipe, even an apostolic one.”\textsuperscript{55} Instead we enter “into a given form, of cheerful unpossessive acknowledgment of determinacy and limitedness, there to find space for freedom and flourishing and for the modest ‘little steps’ which correspond to God’s command.”\textsuperscript{56} The gospel is about what God is doing in the world to make and keep human life human. God’s action is what counts first, not our own.

3.2.3 Creation, Covenant and Prayer

To say that God’s action is primary does not mean that ours in unnecessary. Barth would have never said this. What it does mean is that our lives already have meaning in Christ and we do not have to strive to make them something that they already are. Our task is simply to receive the gift, to show up at the table and offer praise and thanksgiving. Not surprisingly we find in Barth that the work which defines the active Christian life is prayer. Barth describes prayer as “the most intimate and effective form of Christian action.”\textsuperscript{57} In fact it is most paradigmatic of our human activity in response to God. What is more, prayer, i.e., petition of the Father, is the very image of restored ethical agency as it is presented in his exposition on Baptism and the Lord’s Prayer. Prayer most readily images the covenant relationship of prevenient grace followed by genuine human action and as far as creation is concerned is the reason for which we are created. Webster comments:

Barth begins [with prayer] because petition focuses his account of the relation between God’s acts of divine grace and the corresponding human activity which grace evokes. Prayer as petition, in so far as it demonstrates this understanding of grace and its human answer, leads us to ‘the innermost centre of the covenant between God and man.’\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Philip G. Ziegler, “If...then” or “Because...therefore”? (From GenerousOrthodoxy.org, Fleming Rutledge's Website ©2005-2008. Resource: Recommended Sermon), 2.

\textsuperscript{56} Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 76.

\textsuperscript{57} Barth, CD III/3, 264.

\textsuperscript{58} Webster, Ethics of Reconciliation, 77.
Petition is simply asking, “the taking and receiving of the divine gift and answer as it is already present and near to hand in Jesus Christ.” This image of petition that characterizes the Christian life is not only the paradigm of the human but the image Barth gives of baptism. Baptism as prayer is the simplest reading of his theology of baptism.

3.2.4 Reconciliation

These themes of covenant, creation and prayer come together in the final volume of Barth’s *Dogmatics* titled “Reconciliation.” Restored relationship through covenant and a redeemed creation ordered to God in praise are possible because of the reconciling work of the Father through his Son Jesus Christ on the cross. It seems fitting that Barth would end this volume with a section on the Christian life that begins with baptism and ends with Eucharist. Through baptism we are reconciled to God in Christ and to all of creation through the body of Christ. We will also see that as the beginning of the Christian life, baptism is the beginning to which we continually return. The Father who comes into the far country and the prodigal child returning home are images that find prominence in Barth’s discussion of reconciliation and is one that beautifully images infant baptism.

However, while reconciliation seems to be a fitting place for Barth’s explication of baptism, it has many inconsistencies, because he rejects a traditional view of baptism. It is to these we now turn.

4 Problems with Barth’s Theology of Baptism in relation to Covenant, Creation and Reconciliation

We have hinted already that Barth’s themes of covenant and creation as they form his doctrine of reconciliation, lead him to reject infant baptism. However, this was not always the case. Early in the *Dogmatics* the relation of the covenant is one of unity in distinction and Barth assigns no specific roles to either human or the divine. It is a reality recognized through faith, “as

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59 Barth, *CD* III/3, 274.
sacramentally mediated, first in Jesus Christ, the first sacrament, then in further attestations of him."  

Unfortunately, Barth’s development of covenantal themes, namely the further polarization of divine and human action leads him to reject baptism and Eucharist as sacraments. In Barth’s view baptism is not an occasion “on which divine grace is given through creaturely, ecclesial actions, and which also have ethical implications; but as essentially and strictly human ethical actions.” Even more lamentably, Barth’s relentlessness to maintain the strict distinction between God’s act and corresponding human action leads to a rather dubious separation of baptism with the Holy Spirit and baptism with water. Baptism with Holy Spirit comes to be seen as solely God’s act and constitutes the divine change once in time whereby a person becomes a Christian, i.e., a person faithful to God, without any mediation of the Church. This divine change, so radical and effective, demands gratitude through joyful obedience in the human act of water-baptism. Thus baptism with water comes to be seen as solely a human act of genuine human obedience in response to the grace of baptism with the Holy Spirit. Although Barth would emphasize that both baptism with the Holy Spirit and baptism with water must go together it is difficult at this juncture in his theology to see them as anything but separate. Finally, by insisting that the baptized be an active partner in baptism he further distanced himself from the traditional view by also rejecting infant baptism. Of course this was a theological and ecclesiological exile he himself predicted.

In addition to wanting to maintain covenantal themes, it would seem also that Barth’s need to emphasize active faith, discipleship, and responsibility in witness leads him to reject a traditional view of infant baptism. Not only are there several issues with this, not least of which a complete neglect of tradition, it is a move Barth never had to make. Furthermore, as neuroscience and attachment will attest, to reject the sacraments, is to completely overlook a doctrine of creation.

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60 Nimmo, Being in Action, 33.
62 Yocum, Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth, 34.
63 Barth, CD IV/4, ‘Preface’, xii.
that says we are created to be in right relationship and that we learn to be most human within the context of these secure attachments. A view to some of these problems is in order.

## 4.1 The problem of active faith and infant baptism

The first problem and the topic of chapter two has to do with the nature of faith particularly as it must be a faith that is active if it is to include infants. As we saw above, if “[c]reated human being *is* in so far as it participates in the covenant with God which is established in the irreplaceable history of Jesus Christ,” then active faith is also participatory faith. The question remains as to whether infants are capable of this sort of faith. Furthermore, in keeping with the covenant, can divine action remain prevenient in addition to the objectivity of God’s revelation in Christ? The answer to this question we shall soon discover is ‘yes’. Not only does Barth have a participatory view of faith it is an active faith that can include infants and moreover it is one that finds analogical support in the field of neuroscience.

The insight of neuroscience into participatory faith is the realization that our brains are wired in connection to the world around us. The God of the universe “has designed our minds, part of his good creation, to invite us into a deeper, more secure, more courageous relationship with him and with one another.”\(^{64}\) Whereas previously, modern enlightenment notions of Christian faith emphasized knowing facts, what is right or valid, neuroscience is showing that is type of thinking about faith – one that needs to be right, to be rationally ordered and correct – has “subtly but effectively prevent[ed] us from the experience of being known, of loving and being loved, which is the highest call of humanity.”\(^{65}\)

The concept that knowledge is formed in relationship raises questions for Barth in regards to knowledge of faith. For as Nimmo points out, mediation of some kind is needed for knowledge to take place:

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\(^{64}\) Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising connections between neuroscience and spiritual practices that can transform your life and relationships* (Carrollton: SaltRiver, 2010), xvii.

\(^{65}\) Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 17.
According to Barth, to know Jesus Christ is to know the sovereign and gracious claim of God on humanity in Him, and the shape and character that claim gives to human life as free and responsible action. Such knowledge is not abstract, theoretical knowing but effective knowledge. It gives shape to the life of the human being as a person agent. It has ethical force. The birth of such knowledge in baptism, and its renewal in the Lord’s Supper, graphically attest the need for what Barth sees as a divine miracle of grace to found and sustain the divinely commanded life of faithfulness.

Knowledge of God brings life through transformation, however, that such transforming knowledge requires participation in church practices. Barth, in rejecting baptism as a sacrament essentially eliminates or at least dismisses the primary way in which we obtain knowledge as human beings, i.e. creaturely mediation. If Barth’s Christology, ethics of creation and covenant of grace are meant to safeguard the authenticity of the creature then a view of the sacraments must account for the way in which we acquire knowledge, habits and virtues as creatures.

What is more, the insights of neuroscience confirm what Christianity has affirmed for centuries: to love God is to be transformed by the renewing of our minds which cannot happen apart from the body. Jesus was fully human and this included a body informed by emotion. Nothing was left out in redemption. One of the most crucial aspects of this for an understanding of faith will be the role of emotion in faith formation and the development of relationship with God and the people around us. Therefore, as Yocum pointedly notes, “In the baptism fragment, Barth’s theology, and particularly his emphasis on independence in the moral life, may call for correction by closer attention to the way in which human beings, by God’s intention, are born into a social-linguistic environment and develop their identity and moral selfhood out of that environment, in which they are primordially dependent animal beings.”

4.2 The problem of indiscriminate baptism in connection with responsible discipleship

Barth was deeply concerned that the community of the baptized live in light of their baptisms. In other words he wanted followers of Christ to take seriously the command to love one another. Prior to loving one another, however, he desired that every person come to a transformative

66 Nimmo, Being in Action, 34.
67 Yocum, Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth, 167.
understanding of what it means to be loved by God. However, because Barth believed that it was impossible for a child to have understanding of faith and to love responsibly towards the community, he rejected infant baptism. The problem with rejecting infant baptism on these grounds is that in order to love God and our neighbour we must rely on the Christian community. Furthermore, as we learn from the science of attachment, we learn to love within the context of love.

4.2.1 Attachment: The Connections of Life

For much of modern human history dependence in society is seen as being regressive and something that we should grow out of. However, new research is showing that more than anything else in life humans crave connection. In fact, virtually every action we take as humans is part of a deeper attempt to make connection with other humans. Even when we think we are avoiding it, when it terrifies us and when we fear being hurt by it, we crave connection. Another term for connection is attachment. Attachment is the science of love and connection that supports neuroscience’s supposition that there is no such thing as an individual brain, not even an individual neuron. Even though attachment as a formal domain of scientific study is new, the concept is not. As the creation narrative in Scripture makes clear we are made for relationship in the image of God who is community, integration and connection. “It not good for man to be alone” Scripture tells us – connection has been knitted by God into the very fibres of our being.

This view that we are wired for connection raises some serious questions pertaining to Barth’s rejection of the sacraments and his emphasis on community and relationship. To begin, the view that Jesus can attest himself without any creaturely mediation raises serious questions as to the nature in which Christ becomes the event in a person’s life and their relationship to the community into which they are baptized. For,

[i]f the church’s practices of baptism, eucharist and so forth mark places where God’s action coincides (by divine promise!) with certain human actions, then the community becomes in some sense the ‘bearer’ of Christ to the individual believer. True, the grace of the cross is sovereign and in no way depends upon the church. But [...] the discovery of the cross and

68 Thompson, Anatomy of the Soul, 109.
its implications for our lives as moral agents may very well depend upon communal mediation.\(^69\)

In order to have a concept of witness there needs to be some form of ecclesial mediation attributed to Church proclamation in the Prolegomena because “[w]ithout the sacramental action of God in the practices of the Church, its task as witness is itself impossible.”\(^70\)

Furthermore, the loss of a view of sacraments creates problems not only for witness and proclamation but also discipleship and faith. By rejecting any role of creaturely mediation, Barth effectively eliminates (or at least so it seems) the ecclesial space needed in order to give life and nurture the faith of the members of the gathered community. The Church is the space that not only witnesses to life but gives and offers life. The command of God is first a call to receive that life from Christ (found within the community) and then to be that sphere which gives life and fosters growth in the lives of its members making it possible to be witnesses to the world. Sadly, for Barth, this view does not fit with his rejection of baptism as a sacrament.

The body of this thesis will consist of five chapters including the introduction. In the introduction I have showed reasons for baptism’s disintegration from both a theological and social-science perspective. I have also showed how this has resulted in an increase in discussion about ‘responsible baptism’ and how looking at Barth’s theology in connection to neuroscience and attachment will take us to a deeper understanding of infant baptism in the 21\(^{st}\) century.

It has also explicated further Barth’s theology of baptism, highlighting the central theological tenets he wishes to maintain, in relation to his covenant theology of grace and the ethics of creation. I have also demonstrated further how the work of neuroscience and attachment show Barth’s conclusions regarding Church practices, and in particular baptism, to be inconsistent within his overall theology and following this how infant baptism is more fitting to the themes he wishes to maintain.

\(^{69}\) Mangina, “Stranger as Sacrament,” 333.

\(^{70}\) Stout, Baptism and Ecclesiology, 86.
Chapter two will deal more in depth with the issue of the relationship between Church practices, Christian witness and discipleship. The chapter will draw on the work of James K.A. Smith who argues that we are primarily liturgical beings and thus formed by the practices we inhabit. Smith’s importance is threefold. One is to show the importance of why we do what we do. Second, it will be to give theological grounding for the claims of neuroscience and attachment, particularly the claim that we are formed ‘precognitively’ and the role of the community in formation. Finally, it will be demonstrated how Barth, who by making similar arguments to Smith, stands in ambiguity to his rejection of the sacrament of infant baptism.

Chapter three will look at the role of practices in faith formation, expanding upon and further emphasizing the point made in chapter one that we are formed ‘precognitively’, i.e., at the level of our emotions. This chapter will deal in particular with Barth’s rejection of infant baptism based on his belief that the one baptized must be able to demonstrate active faith and ask for baptism. Drawing primarily on the work of theologian Joseph Mangina who in his work The Practical Knowledge of God, demonstrates the participatory nature of faith in Barth as well as the place of affect, I will argue that it was unnecessary for Barth to reject infant baptism based upon the necessity of active faith.

The focus of chapter five will be to expand upon the ecclesial implications in light of the theses presented in the previous chapters. Central to the chapter will be to highlight the importance of discipleship and witness in Barth’s theology of baptism; and in particular the role of the Church in fostering Christian formation. In this chapter I will deal with Barth’s criteria for baptism that a person exhibit ‘active faith.’ To do this I will show how Barth’s view of invocation, i.e., prayer is most exemplified by children, making baptism a most appropriate act for them.

Chapter six will be the concluding chapter wherein the case will be made for the theological fittingness of infant baptism in Karl Barth, particularly as it is found in the image of the child. It will bring together the insights of the affect dimension of faith - that our brains are wired ‘precognitively’ – and the ecclesial dimension – that the environments we participate in are necessary to faith. Moreover, I will draw upon attachment theory which is the science that tells us that discipleship happens not only within community but that becoming people of character depends upon right relationship. In fact, as I will argue, Barth’s emphasis on reconciliation in
correspondence with attachment theory provides a key component left out of discussions on ethics and theory and practice: love. As such his emphasis on community and discipleship within the context of right relationship stands in ambiguity to his rejection of sacraments, not present in his earlier theology.

In order to demonstrate these connections I will draw on Barth’s imagery of reconciliation of God going into the far country, in the parable of the Prodigal Son in order to demonstrate how the ecclesial-affective dimensions of faith come together for a tenable view of baptism. Through the parable of the Prodigal Son, we will see how the themes presented in each chapter come together to show that Barth did not in fact need to reject a view of infant baptism. Indeed his theology is one that supports quite strongly the sacrament of infant baptism.
Chapter 2
Is There Meaning in These Acts?

Ever since the Church’s beginnings there has been concern as to the relationship between her practices and the life of her members. Church and World alike, throughout history, have wondered if what the faithful do in worship really makes a difference in terms of how they live their lives. Given that the common criticism charged against Christians is hypocrisy, the question of whether or not Church practices really hold any currency in the life of the believer remains ever pertinent. Addressing these very questions and issues in his book, For the Life of the World, Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann asks this pointed question:

Of what life do we speak, what life do we preach, proclaim and announce when, as Christians, we confess that Christ died for the life of the world? What life is both motivation, and the beginning and the goal of the Christian mission? \(^1\)

As the question suggests there remains a call for an increased understanding of how worship transforms and gives life; and furthermore, how a life shaped by that worship lives out its mission as witness to the world.

The question raised by Schmemann is rooted in the conviction that there is an intrinsic relationship between human practices and character formation. It is a conviction echoed not only in the theological world such as we see in the works of Stanley Hauerwas and James McClendon, but also in the philosophical world in Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor and in the scientific world in the works of Michael Polanyi and David J. Siegel. Efforts in each of these fields have been pivotal for a Christian understanding of Church practices and Christian formation.

While not all agree on every aspect, within the context of Christian theology, a basic supposition shared is that knowledge of God is communicated and grasped within the concrete practices of the life of the gathered community, that is, “what Christians say about the triune God cannot be adequately explicated without reference to what Christians most characteristically do in worship

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\(^1\) Alexander Schmemann, For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminar Press, 1963), 11-12.
and obedience to that God.” Furthermore, that sharing in those claims and making them involves more than just a change in one’s cognition; and that a person enters the concrete embodied forms of those practices in order that she might imitate the life that is the beginning and goal of Christian mission.

Our participation in practices and the environments (or liturgies) of which these practices are a part are not limited to the Church. James K.A. Smith in his book *Desiring the Kingdom* brings awareness to the truth that we are formed by many different liturgies that shape us into certain kinds of people:

> [L]iturgies – whether “sacred” or “secular” – shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people, and what defines us is what we love. They do this because we are the sorts of animals whose orientation to the world is shaped from the body up more than from the head down. Liturgies aim our love to different ends precisely by training our hearts through our bodies. They prime us to approach the world in a certain way, to value certain things, to aim for certain goals, to pursue certain dreams, to work together on certain projects. In short, every liturgy constitutes a pedagogy that teaches us, in all sorts of precognitive ways, to be a certain kind of person.

Smith’s purpose is to help us see that formation happens everywhere. The challenge for the Christian is to see that what we do in worship witnesses to what is real i.e. Jesus and his Kingdom, and offers something counter formational to the false liturgies that the world offers.

The questions pertaining to practices and Christian formation are not easy ones. For, just as there are many practices that are both “sacred” and “secular,” there are many Christian practices about which no universal agreement among denominations is held. In fact many of them continue to be a source of division which raises the question of whether or not we can talk about the relationship between Christian formation and practices if the very same practices that are to transform and make us Christlike also divide. While the question remains relevant, there are some basic features that constitute a practice that are held in common among theologians today.

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The first is that the good of the practices of the Church are internal to them; meaning that they are known and recognized by practicing them and/or learning to participate in them. Second, practices as embodied by the life of the community are formational, shaping us to be certain kinds of people. Third, and central in this paper, the influence of the practices of a particular community, by way of engagement in them, happens primarily at a pre-cognitive level. As such our knowing about them is more often tacit than explicit, that is,

Being a disciple of Jesus is not primarily a matter of getting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into your head in order to guarantee proper behaviour; rather, it’s a matter of being the kind of person who loves rightly – who loves God and neighbour and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love. We are made to be such people by our immersion in the material practices of Christian worship – through affective impact, over time, of sights and smell in water and wine.

The observation that we are oriented by our affect as we shall see is essential for Christian formation and discipleship. Moreover, we will learn that it is the primary way that we learn beginning at very young age; the implications of which are huge for an understanding of infant baptism.

The assumption surrounding all these features of practices is the assumption made of the human person by James K.A. Smith that we are primarily “homo liturgicus—embodied, practicing creatures whose love/desire is aimed at something ultimate.” To view ourselves as liturgical beings is to take seriously our embodied nature; that is to say our non-cognitive way of being in the world and its relation to our embodiment. It is also to take seriously our temporality as human beings. To have a body means also that we have a story. Thus in short we are ‘storied bodies’ who

74 This point will become more pivotal and central when talking about faith and more specifically infant baptism in relation to faith and growth in faith.

75 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 33. Emphasis mine.

76 James J, Buckley and David S. Yeago, “Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?”, 13. When speaking about the passions the authors talk in particular about the role of suffering, or, pathos in the Christian life.

77 James K.A. Smith. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2009), 40. The idea is based on Augustine’s distinguishing between the two cities based on love and not belief as well as the conviction that our restlessness stems from our desire to love and be ordered toward God (‘our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee’).
inhabit the world not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it. One might say that in our everyday, mundane being-in-the-world, we don’t lead with our head, so to speak; we lead out with our heart and hands.  

To say that we are storied bodies means also that we are intentional beings, that is, we intend toward the world that we live in. The way we do this is not primarily through thinking but by feeling. To put it differently, most of how we live out life in the world is done tacitly, without thinking about it, like driving home from work on a familiar route or brushing our teeth, rather than explicitly, like reading the words in this essay. Pushing this notion one step further, Smith, drawing upon Augustinian notions, argues that

the ‘desiring model of the human person begins from our nature as intentional beings who first and foremost (and ultimately) intend the world in the mode of love. ...We are essentially and ultimately desiring animals, which is simply to say that we are essentially and ultimately lovers. To be human is to love, and it is what we love that defines who we are. Our (ultimate) love is constitutive of our identity. ... Our ultimate love is what we worship.

We are shaped by what we love; by what drives our passions. And what we ultimately love and are shaped by often eludes conceptual articulation.

Yet, to say that we are embodied creatures that are ordered and shaped by that which we worship is not to say that we all love the same thing. This is because our love/desire is ordered toward our picture of the good life. We all love but our love is not necessarily ordered to that which is good. There are many competing visions of ‘the end’ that vie for our attention and not all of them are good. Therefore, even though we all love, our love can be misdirected, which is the effect of sin.

Smith goes onto say that our love/desire is aimed by the fulcrum of our habits. These habits are inscribed into our hearts by way of images and pictures of the good life. This is because stories and icons are the stuff of embodiment and affectivity moving us towards our ultimate desire. Habits are also inscribed into us through bodily practices that train the heart. Over time these rituals and practices often in tandem with icons and stories, mold and shape our ‘precognitive’

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78 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 47.
79 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 50-1.
disposition to the world by training our desires, causing us to tend to act in certain ways towards certain ends.\textsuperscript{80}

To sum up, habits\textsuperscript{81} are formed by practices. The routines and rituals that we participate in on a daily basis inscribe particular ongoing habits into our character such that they become second nature to us. Smith also notes that these habits have “automaticity” about them, that is, they are the actions and tendencies we will follow without thinking.\textsuperscript{82} The way in which we acquire these habits happens in two ways. The first is that we learn them intentionally, that is we choose to learn them through practice. An example of this would be learning to play the clarinet. A person chooses to practice playing her scales on the clarinet everyday in order that it becomes second nature to her. She no longer has to think about the scales but can do them ‘unconsciously’. Michael Polanyi who writes similarly on the topic would say that the instrument becomes an extension of the person in such a way that the focus is no longer on the clarinet and scales but on other things like dynamics or breathing. Things like playing the clarinet and learning to drive are practices that we intentionally choose to participate in, in order to train the unconscious – and then make them second nature.

Habits can also be acquired unintentionally. Smith describes ‘unintentionally’ in the following manner:

There can be all sorts of ‘automating’ going on that we do not choose and of which we are not conscious but that nevertheless happens because we are regularly immersed in environments that elicit commonly “paired” responses. ...Whether we intentionally choose to participate in a practice, or unintentionally just find ourselves immersed in it over time, the result is the same: the dispositions become inscribed into our unconscious so that we “automatically” respond the way we have been conditioned.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 58-9.

\textsuperscript{81} Smith refers to them as precognitive dispositions.

\textsuperscript{82} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 81.

\textsuperscript{83} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 81.
Research tells us that only five percent of our daily activity is consciously chosen, which means there is a lot of responsibility required of the formational communities in our formation.\textsuperscript{84} It should also be noted, however, that the habits we acquire either intentionally or unintentionally are not all the same. On the one hand some are more mundane than others, like brushing one’s teeth and do not tend to touch on our identity; Smith names these as \textit{thin} habits.\textsuperscript{85} On the other hand some habits are more meaning-laden and play a more significant role in shaping who we are; Smith calls these \textit{thick} habits.\textsuperscript{86} ‘Thick’ habits we might say, include things like Sunday worship, daily prayer and meeting together with friends. The lines between what is a more meaningful practice than another are not always hard and fast, nor easy to determine. The more important point to remember is that no practice or habit is neutral. Thus we must always be asking what kind of person a particular habit or practice is trying to produce and to what end it is aimed.

The fact that there are both thick and thin practices and habits leads Smith to suggest that our “thickest practices constitute and function as liturgies.”\textsuperscript{87} Liturgies can be sacred or secular but are different from practices and rituals in that not all rituals are liturgies (e.g. a hockey player who does not skate over the lines in warm-up) and neither are all practices liturgies (e.g. baking cookies). Liturgies, Smith argues, are a certain species of practices. They are the “rituals of ultimate concern: rituals that are formative for identity, that inculcate particular visions of the good life, and do so in a way that \textit{means to trump} other ritual formations.”\textsuperscript{88} Liturgies want to determine what we love ultimately, that is what we love “above all” and what we put ahead of other interests. It is what defines and makes us the kind of people we are. In short, “it is what we worship: ritual practices that function as pedagogies of ultimate desire.”\textsuperscript{89}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 81.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 82.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 82.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 86, emphasis mine.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 87.
\end{itemize}
To view practices and rituals in this way is to cause us to be attentive to the “liturgies” that we are daily immersed in and the way in which they are shaping us. From a Christian perspective this means two things. First, it means that there are many liturgies that want to aim our heart away from God, teaching us to love something other than God and directing us away from his Kingdom. Second, it means that Christian worship needs to be intentionally formative and pedagogical in order to counter the mis-formations and mis-directions of the world. And, perhaps, by way of adding an addendum to the second, we must be aware of the way in which our worship also mis-directs and mis-leads, turning us toward the kingdoms of the world rather than the Kingdom of God.

4.3 Attachment theory: Outsider wisdom for Christian formation

Smith’s work draws attention to the fact that we are storied bodies of desire and love; whose desire and passions are ordered by the rituals and practices we find ourselves in, either intentionally or unintentionally creating us to be the people we are. For the Christian she is either shaped as one who intends and acts in ways that point to God or not. All of this brings perspicacity to how we should consider the practices we are a part of and the kind of people they are creating us to be. However, there is one crucial characteristic of practices/liturgies that represents a significant lacuna in the work of virtue ethicists and liturgical theologians. This characteristic is touched upon by Smith and it has to do with the relationship of the individual to the communities in which they participate, whose liturgies shape and form them in a particular way. The element, missing, is love, or as it has come to be known in the social-scientific field, attachment. Attachment, the theory that we are wired for love and restless until we find secure attachment, is, I will argue invaluable for understanding the impact of practice upon the Christian life and one that Barth himself upholds.

Attachment theory’s premise is that we are beings wired for love and attachment. It particularly focuses on the primary attachment of infants to their primary caregiver, usually the mother, who in responding to the infant’s needs creates a sense of safety for the child. The sense of well-being that a child emerges as a result of predictable experiences and care is what attachment
theory pioneer John Bowlby called a “secure base.” 90 The “secure-base” that is the parent-child relationship, enables the child to explore the world, be resilient to stress, give a coherent story in which they can make sense of their lives and shape their capacity to love and be loved. 91

Central to Bowlby’s concept of parenting and crucial to the development of emotional stability and functioning, is the provision of a secure base by both parents. Bowlby describes it as a base from which

A child or adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened. In essence this role is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and to perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary. 92

Without the experience of a secure base the effects are that a person is more likely to become vulnerable to adverse experiences and later meet such experiences. 93 Studies have in fact shown that as early as the age of two a child will be an exact replica of how they have been treated. As Bowlby remarks, “indeed the tendency to treat others in the same way we ourselves have been treated is deep in human nature; and at no time is it more evident than in earliest years.” 94

Canadian medical doctor and author Gordon Maté who draws upon attachment theory in his own work identifies six ways in which humans attach as children. The first way we attach Maté tells


91 Medical doctor and author Gabor Mate in his book When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress puts it this way, “The way people grow up shapes their relationship with their own bodies and psyches. The emotional contexts of childhood interact with inborn temperament to give rise to personality traits. Much of what we call personality is not a fixed set of traits, only coping mechanisms a person acquired in childhood. There is an important distinction between an inherent characteristic, rooted in an individual without regard to his environment, and a response to the environment, a pattern of behaviours developed to ensure survival.” (p. 127)

92 Bowlby, A Secure Base, 11.

93 Bowlby gives the example of women who grow up in disrupted homes being more likely to be teenage mothers and have unhappy marriages. Other examples include drugs and alcohol abuse or other forms of addiction that people seek to fill the attachment void. The prevalence of diagnosis of ADHD is also a result of this with over 3 million children in America receiving stimulant meds.

94 Bowlby, A Secure Base, 91.
us is through our senses – sight, smell, sound, and touch. Our sense of being close and being loved is first through physical proximity with something outside ourselves. The next way in which children attach is through what Maté identifies as sameness. A child attaches through sameness via identification – being one with the person or thing – as she seeks to be like those she feels closest too. Following closely in line with identification is the next way children attach: belonging and loyalty. To identify with someone is to be close to someone and to be close to someone is to consider that person as one’s own. And where one feels a sense of belonging there follows loyalty wherein one shows faithfulness and obedience to one’s chosen attachment figures. Loyalty also means that when an attachment changes so does one’s loyalty. An example of this is the teacher we might have growing up that we really liked and wanted to be with and worked harder and for whom we behaved better because we felt a sense of attachment to them. From a Christian perspective the best example is that of Israel who when oriented towards God were loyal and faithful but when oriented away from God divulged into idolatry.

The next three ways in which we attach are closely related to the first three. In addition to desiring a sense of belonging and orienting our loyalty to the person or thing which we are attached to, we seek significance; that is we want to feel that we matter to somebody. As Margaret Mead intuitively puts it, “one of the oldest human needs is having someone to wonder where you are when you don’t come home at night.” The secure-base is that place that fosters a place where children can know that they matter. However, to know you matter to someone is to also risk being hurt which leads to the fifth way that we seek attachment – emotional intimacy. Maté notes, that if the senses are the most primitive way we attach, being the “short arm,” then love is the “long arm.” For example, Neufeld tells us that children who are able to carry the image of being loved, or having the beloved caregiver in their heart, they are better able to withstand physical distance while keeping the attachment figure close.

Finally, to be close to someone is to be known by them; the sixth way of attaching. However, to be known is to be vulnerable and as such sharing oneself with another and then misunderstood or rejected is a risk many consider not worth taking. As a result this is the rarest of intimacies, “yet there is no closeness that can surpass the sense of feeling known and still being liked, accepted, welcomed, invited to exist.”

Given what we have already said about how humans are embodied creatures formed primarily through emotions, and that habits and practices direct our emotions towards a particular view of what is good, it is not surprising to also learn that given the central importance of the way in which children (and humans in general) attach, whomever a child is most attached to will have the greatest impact on her life. Consequently just as the Christian cannot serve two masters the same is true of a developing child. Maté puts it this way,

> What does not work, and cannot work is, the coexistence of competing primary attachments, competing orienting relationships – in other words, orienting relationships with conflicting values, conflicting messages. When primary attachments compete, one will lose out.

The analogy of attachment theory with Smith’s argument above is that we cannot have two competing primary liturgies. One liturgy and its practices will inevitably shape us in a more impactful way than another. Given that these two things are together it becomes even more imperative that we show responsibility towards children.

The theological implications of this are enormous because until now, in virtue ethics we have simply assumed that people will just do and follow the practices necessary to do good and become the certain kinds of people we desire to be. However, it is one thesis of this paper that while practices and habits of a community are important, the fact that we are liturgical beings ordered by love and those to whom we attach, means that true transformation through participation in practices can only happen when a person is well attached/ in right relationship. In other words, you can teach about any Church practice or doctrine and participate in them daily but unless there is right relationship, ordered by love; it will be nothing but a clanging gong or

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crashing cymbal. It is interesting that in the introduction to their book on ethics authors Stassen and Gushee make the observation that forgiveness and reconciliation are absent or lacking altogether in conversations on virtue ethics.\textsuperscript{99} An emphasis on community and immersion in practices for the development of virtue is not enough because it is the types of relationships and emotional context that shapes a person’s relationship with their bodies and psyches.\textsuperscript{100} Therefore, a discussion of practices and their relationship to the Christian life must include an awareness of this; yet not only this, but that one of the internal goods of the practice of baptism is attachment.

4.3.1 What does Karl Barth have to do with it?

One might wonder then what Karl Barth has to say, if anything, to this conversation concerning practices and virtues; Barth has been criticized extensively for there being little or no evidence of this kind of thinking in his work. While for the most part this is perhaps true, I believe that evidence for this kind of thinking is not altogether lacking in Barth’s work. Furthermore, I believe that Barth’s Christological emphasis and his placing of baptism in the \textit{Dogmatics} section on reconciliation, takes into account, albeit not explicitly, the thesis presented above, that we are liturgical beings ordered by love and primary attachments.

While the main thesis will be to determine the theological fittingness of infant baptism in Barth, the underlying assumption of our created nature as liturgical beings is pivotal not only for helping to see how practices are formational but also for helping to understand the place of infant baptism within the broader scope of Barth’s theology and more importantly, the life of the Church.

The place in Barth’s theology in which I have come to have an understanding of his concern for the relationship between practices and Christian formation comes in the lecture fragments published posthumously as \textit{The Christian Life}. Here Barth offers some poignant insight in the


\textsuperscript{100} Maté, \textit{When the Body Says No}, 127.
issue of the supposed contradiction between theory and practice. The contradiction Barth says is not one that is primarily between our theology and our actions but within ourselves. Our very being as we “vacillate between practicing the fatal ‘freedom’ of either continuing on the way from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and their baptism or of interrupting it in some refined or course manner (and often enough the latter), walking according to the flesh instead of the Spirit (Rom 8:4), continuing in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit (Gal 3:3).”101 Thus Barth would have us recognize that the division we experience in our Churches, and the conflicts we experience concerning how we are to act, is not to “deal with the trivial contradiction between our theory and practice, but with the phenomenon of the fatal split in the whole of our lives.”102

The ‘fatal split’ or contradiction within us is the result of our being created to worship and love God. Barth who echoes Augustine says that we can only find peace within ourselves when we find peace in God.103 However, because of our sinfulness, Barth is also very much aware that although we are inherently made beings of desire (see Smith above) we do not by our nature, order ourselves to the things of God. Thus, Barth goes on to say that there are many things in our lives that compete for our attention and our worship; and that can speak more powerfully in shaping us than the word of God. As we are cautioned by Barth that “on this side of the eschaton...[the invocation of Father!] is only one note among many other invocations and exclamations that are hardly in harmony with it but call for notice just as loudly – or even more so.”104

There are in [the Christian’s life] many other factors that speak more or less powerfully and demand to be heard and obeyed [...]. Whether these factors are positive or negative, however, we shall here group them all together and simply say that in the lives of Christians precedence over all of them is due the Word of God which they have heard. It would be unrealistic to say that they are not factors over against God’s word, that all of them

101 Barth, TCL, 150.
102 Barth, TCL, 151.
103 Barth, TCL, 187.
104 Barth, TCL, 70.
individually and corporately have been erased and set aside as insignificant by God’s Word. This would mean that Christians ceased to be human.  

Barth exhorts the Christian to be ordered to and by the primacy of the Word of God. “No matter what may be the worth, importance or urgency of other forces as they legitimately or illegitimately speak, in the lives of Christians the Word of God is to be heard first, and only after it has been heard is the voice of other factors to be heard.”  

Our lives as ordered by the Word of God creates in us a specific character that allows us to be a witness, or to use Barth’s term “a text accessible” to those within the Church as well as the world.  

The question to be asked of Barth is how this happens; what are the practices that allow for the Word of God to be consistently heard first in our lives? How and where does the encounter with the Word of God happen such that it determines our actions to be Christlike? The answer, I want to propose, is through our participation in Church practices as the way in which in we come to know how to be Christian. Specifically speaking, infant baptism is a practice most indicative of the way in which knowledge is socially mediated and how our relationship to the community influences this knowledge and our actions as Christians.
Chapter 3

Karl Barth’s account of Christian knowledge and faith comes in response to and against modern liberalism. 108 Barth was sternly opposed to subjectivized religious knowledge evident in the Marburg school and Schleiermacher. He had no use for a view of faith believed to be inherent to human nature much less a human possibility; nor was revelation some universal that resided in the consciousness of the knower accessible through religious introspection. Concerning the former, writing of Bultmann, Gogarten, and Brunner, Barth says: “From my standpoint all of you, though your concerns differ from mine in different ways, represent a large-scale return to the fleshpots of Egypt. I mean that if I am not deceived, all of you – in a new way different from that of the nineteenth century – are trying to understand faith as a human possibility, or, if you will, as grounded in a human possibility, and therefore you are once again surrendering theology to philosophy.”109 In regards to the latter Barth chides: “We cannot equally well ask about the knowledge of the World-Ground or the Word-Soul, the Supreme Good or Supreme value, the Thin in itself or the Absolute, Destiny or Being or Idea, or even the First Cause as the Unity of Being and Idea, as we can ask about Him who in the Bible is called God and Lord.”110 In keeping with covenantal ordering, human knowledge of God is grounded in the objective knowledge of God as God knows himself. God does make himself known and humans can have genuine knowledge of God, however, always in distinction from divine knowledge.

In Barth’s understanding of the Christian life, conversion to a life of faith is marked by a definite break evidenced by obedient action. The person cannot be the same – “It must be an inner

108 Modern liberal theology that arose in response the Enlightenment is often characterized by scepticism towards authority and tradition, a return to the self and an emphasis on human experience or consciousness as the basis for faith. Schleiermacher was the watershed for modern liberal theology. The innovation of his theology was that it was human reflection on human experience of God. The experience of the human subject became the criterion for theological truth. What this means is that objective revelation and the authority of Scripture and the traditions of the Church all play second fiddle to the human subject. Schleiermacher’s influence would come to have significant influence, particularly within what became liberal Protestant Christianity. With the human subject taking centre stage came an optimistic anthropology and the belief that human beings are capable of doing good

109 Barth in Webster, Karl Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 91.

110 Barth, CD II/1, 6.
change in virtue of which he himself becomes a different man, so that as this different man he freely, of himself, and by his own resolve, thinks acts and conducts himself otherwise than he did before.”

Throughout the “Baptism Fragment” cognition and decision are central to Barth’s view of the human participant in the covenant which leads him to reject infant baptism. In Barth’s view a person must be able to ask for baptism from the community and be responsible for the decision made in asking. Mark Tracey Stout in fact presents Barth’s theology of baptism as one that makes no place for those who come unconsciously to baptism through the faith of others. A person should able to make a free decision because, as Stout notes, “believers need to be capable of commitment, decision, and action before receiving baptism” consequently, he concludes, Barth rejected infant baptism. In this view Barth’s emphasis on volition and action in faith disqualify the infant because a child could not possibly be viewed as an active participant in the covenant in this way.

Although Barth was concerned to affirm the rationality of faith as genuine human knowledge against the liberal view, his view of such knowledge did not remain in the realm of the intellect. Barth was careful not to posit a particular aspect of human knowing over and against another, thus he also maintained the experiential component that is essential to knowledge. Furthermore, because faith as knowledge requires a knower who is to be active, knowledge is also participatory inasmuch as it is grounded in the knowledge and experience of Christ. Finally, because knowledge and faith are subsequent to an encounter with the Divine that effects our entire being, emotion also has a role in human knowledge. Such a view of faith, I will argue, stands in ambiguity to Barth’s rejection of the sacrament of infant baptism based on the criteria of volition and action.

5 Self-Determination as Experience in Karl Barth CD I/1

As mentioned, Barth’s concern to show the rationality of faith does not mean that he eliminated the role of experience. Faith as knowledge and experience in knowing are intimately related in

111  Barth, CD, IV/4, 18.

112  Mark Tracey Stout, A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publishers, 2010), 42.
Barth’s theology, however, against his liberal contemporaries it can never be nor ever become the basis for one’s faith such as he saw in Schleiermacher and his other contemporaries. In keeping with the covenant of grace the position of human experience in the knowledge of God must always be one of subsequence.

God is, and must be, objective to human beings, without being, like other objects of human knowledge, capable of being seized or mastered by them: ‘As knowledge of faith the knowledge of God is just like any other knowledge in that it also has an object’ (II/1, 21). The difference, however, is that in this relation of subject and object, the position of the human subject is always one of subsequence. The object is not at the disposal or in the possession of the knowing subject (CD, II/1, 21).\(^{113}\)

That Barth indeed takes seriously experience in knowledge is illustrated well in Joseph L. Mangina’s account of the ‘Retrieval of Experience in CD I/1’ in his book *Karl Barth on the Christian Life: The Practical Knowledge of God*. Mangina chooses *Church Dogmatics* I/1 because here he sees Barth using a technical vocabulary that will allow him to hold together God’s objectivity in revelation and the reality of genuine human response. In particular, Mangina focuses on the subsection titled “the Word of God and Experience” a text that he believes “nicely displays how for Barth ‘knowledge’ is anything but a flatly propositional assent to certain facts; it has an ineluctably experiential component.”\(^{114}\)

Mangina begins by explicating how it is that the Word of God becomes an ‘event in and to the reality of man’ and whether or not there is a possibility or capability on the part of the human to correspond to the event of the reality of the Word; keeping in mind, however, that for Barth such capacity or possibility for the human does not reside in nor can be constructed within the self. What we discover in Barth is that “knowledge of God’s Word becomes possible for us in the event of the reality of God’s Word” as it is preached, heard and obeyed within the life of the Church’s faith.\(^{115}\) This is the affirmation for Barth. The question lies in regards to the human possibility in relation to the Word, a question Mangina notes, that brings us to the realm of experience.

‘If knowledge of God’s Word is possible, this must mean that an experience of God’s Word is possible’ (I/1, 198). *There is no knowledge without experience*, Barth tells us, for when we know something as truth it becomes a ‘determination of the existence of the person who has the knowledge.’ This determination just is our experience. The human being ‘does not exist abstractly but concretely, i.e., in experiences, in determinations of his existence by objects, by things outside him and distinct from him.'

What is important for this understanding of knowledge as it relates to human experience is that knowledge of God is rooted in our ordinary way of knowing in the world. As I have been trying to show understanding the sovereignty of God and prevenience of grace is to always take seriously the gift of our genuine human creatureliness. Thus in the case of human experience we see that in Barth the nature of that experience, “has to do with the concrete situations and objects that confront us.”

We must be careful to note that experience of God is not apart from grace, however, that is not to say that self-determination under the Word is not our self-determination. Barth affirms that it truly is. Self-determination of a people under the Word is primarily active not passive; a matter of decisions and choices. Divine action is always the ground and basis for human action and precisely because they operate on different levels we may talk about the actual active role of the human person in knowing God. Our self-determination is precisely the means for our knowledge of God.

On this Mangina quotes Barth at length:

> If God’s Word is not spoken to animals, plants and stones but to men, and if determination by God’s Word is really a determination of human existence, in what, then, will it consist if not in the fact that the self-determination in which man ins man finds its absolute superior in determination by God, that as self-determination, and without in the least being affected or even destroyed altogether as such, it receives a direction, is set under a judgment and has impressed upon it a character, in short, it is determined in the way that a self-determining being is by a word and that man is by the Word of God (CD I/1, 201).

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117 Mangina, *The Practical Knowledge of God*, 36. Recall in chapter one James K.A. Smith’s argument that we are shaped by the environments we inhabit and the things in which we commonly interact. Here we see a connection point between Barth and Smith, in that our determination has to do with the everyday interaction of our lives. Just like other objects we encounter, the Word of God shapes us in definite ways.

Against liberalism, Barth reminds us that our experiences cannot be made to be experiences of God. But, precisely because we are beings capable of agency and knowledge our relationship with God is actualized in our very action, knowing, and self-relatedness.\(^{119}\)

The redefining of the human subject in relation to God that is in keeping with covenantal ordering and takes seriously our createdness, is important in that such a view, Mangina tells us, keeps us from three temptations.\(^{120}\) First, it keeps us from privileging one aspect of human life as the medium for experience of the Word. Second, because no human aspect is privileged we have no reason to distrust certain aspects of human existence as unsuitable for communion with God. Mind is not over emotion nor vice versa, “the Word is more than just cognitive but it is also cognitive.”\(^ {121}\) Finally, because all capacities for knowing are human capacities we cannot say that the subconscious or inner spirit or intuition, are better for experiencing God. Reflection on human knowledge must always take into account the manifold ways in which it is possible that we hear and encounter the Word of God.

From different angles, the determination of human existence by God’s Word can be understood just as much as a determination of feeling, will, or intellect, and psychologically it may actually be more one than the other in a given case. The decisive point materially, however, is that it is a determination of the whole self-determining human being.\(^{122}\)

The word or concept that Barth uses to cover the broad range of human experience, Mangina tells us, is “acknowledgement” (Anerkennung).\(^{123}\) “Acknowledgment” consists of three elements: it is an action, it is cognitive, and it is interpersonal. As an action it is something we perform. Such performance even includes different states of consciousness, as such “the spontaneous and unreflective quality of many actions (e.g. uttering an “Amen”) does not detract

\(^{119}\) Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 37.

\(^{120}\) Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 38.

\(^{121}\) Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 38. This point will be of particular importance when discussing the role of emotion in knowledge and the life of faith. In fact we will discover that the dichotomy between intellect and emotion has always been a false one. Emotion is an active and cognitive act an important part of human knowing and important for our self-determination as beings in Christ.

\(^{122}\) Barth, CD I/1, 104.

\(^{123}\) Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 39.
from their character as actions, as intelligent performances of which one can give an account. “As being cognitive apprehension we actually do encounter something or someone, for Barth this means that we actually are granted knowledge of God. Finally, “acknowledgement” because it is interpersonal means that to acknowledge is to respond to the one being acknowledged. Encounter with the other invokes a response. Here Mangina turns to philosopher Donald Evans to illustrate this point:

The word ‘acknowledge’ usually also has an autobiographical aspect, so that states of mind and patterns of behavior are not only implied and made commitments, but are actually reported. If I actually acknowledge how much you have done for me, I not only say something to you, I also think and act accordingly: I admit the fact in my own private thinking, and I try to do something for you in some way. To acknowledge is to be changed or transformed. “In performing the cognitive, verbal, ritual, etc. action of acknowledgement, my own life is modified in a certain way; my act is my being.”

For Barth in relation to God, it is in our act of self-determination, that the whole person is conformed to God in his or her life as a Christian. Experience in Barth, rather than being immediately available or a priori, is actualized only through the living out of the Christian life. This will be important for Barth’s understanding of the practice of baptism, particularly since as Mangina consistently emphasizes, “we cannot make our experiences to be experiences of God.” Living the Christian life will always be a sort of ambiguous undertaking. As Barth tells us, our acceptance of the Word will participate in [a] twofold indirectness. It, too, will have a secular form, the form of all kinds of human acts (baptism ?), and this form will be its concealment, its ambiguity. Apart from this ambivalence, which is deeply rooted in the very nature of the matter, there is no experience of God’s Word.

Though ambivalent, it is still nevertheless genuine human experience, as we live out the Christian life in the ordinary tasks of everyday life. However, the Christian life is more than an

124 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 41.
125 Evans as quoted in Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 42.
126 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 42.
127 Barth, CD I/1, 207.
experience of the gospel in which ethics and Church practice are ancillary. Thus an aspect of human knowing as it is connected to human experience or Barth’s understanding of “acknowledgment”, is its participatory nature, i.e., the gospel’s character in relationship to the knowing subject. To be Christian means to participate in the very Trinitarian life of God. Thus we have seen that experience of God, our self-determination, is grounded in the very life and action of God, subsequently, for Barth knowledge of God is also personal and self-involving and just as our experience, grounded in who God is.

5.1 Participatory Knowledge in Karl Barth

Knowledge for Barth is a person’s participation in God. Knowledge is self-involving and always engages the whole person. Nimmo summarizes the participatory nature of knowledge in Barth and is worth quoting at length.

Barth notes actualistically that this ‘participation in the self-knowledge of God in His Son... is always a gift of participation’ (II/1,56). Hence, Barth cautions that ‘if our knowledge of this fact from its self-revelation is not new every morning, if it is not newly received from it, with empty hands, as a new gift, it is not this knowledge at all’ (IV/2, 194). In this participation, then, there is always ‘an event in which we really have to do with God Himself’ (II/1, 181). Nevertheless, Barth asserts that there takes place in this human knowledge a genuine human action, precisely in participation in the divine action (IV/3, 220). Correspondingly, knowledge of God does not involve ‘either abrogation, abolition or alteration of human cognition as such, and there of its formal and technical characteristics as human cognition’ (II/1, 181). Indeed, by contrast, Barth affirms that ‘There is not more intimate friend of sound human understanding than the Holy Spirit’ (IV/3, 220). Even in the event of grace, then, Barth cautions that participation in the knowledge of God is indirect, to the extent that God things proper and suitable, a creaturely share in a creaturely matter.

What is interesting to note is that participation as we see here is understood to be not just active but also has a passive component or aspect as well. Paul T. Nimmo in his book Being In Action, describes two aspects of participation in Karl Barth that also apply to how we understand faith and the Christian life. The first aspect is participation in Jesus Christ which is true of all individuals in light of the divine election and the history of Jesus Christ. It is passive since by virtue of being human, each person has its head in the man Jesus Christ. All are raised to true

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128 Nimmo, Being in Action, 172-3.
humanity in Christ\textsuperscript{129}; “by virtue of his resurrection from the dead, his true humanity becomes analogously (but therefore really) predictable of all men and women.”\textsuperscript{130} Barth writes

There is no one...who does not participate in [Christ] in this turning to God. There is no one who is not himself engaged in this turning. There is no one who is not raised and exalted with him to true humanity. “Jesus lives and I with him.”\textsuperscript{131}

To stress our participation in Christ in this way is to highlight an important aspect of Barth’s understanding of participatory knowledge and that is its hidden character in the life in Christ.\textsuperscript{132}

The second aspect of participation is that which represents the active correspondence of the ethical agent to her original determination. It is the active response to the passive participation that is made objectively real in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{133} “In this active mode, the will of God is done ‘as God participates in the creature, and enables it to participate in Himself, and in the purpose and direction of His works’.”\textsuperscript{134} The ways in which we participate as agents in the covenant are through worship and prayer, in knowledge of Christ and in mission and witness.\textsuperscript{135} This is the second anchor of Barth’s teaching on participation in that he interprets it “in practical terms as discipleship.”\textsuperscript{136}

In addition to being both passive and active, Mangina tells us that the form of our participation in the crucified and risen Jesus is both existential and sapiential. Participation in Barth is existential when he reminds us that knowledge of faith is self-involving, and embodied knowledge. In short it is a knowledge concerned with the whole person. The same is true of our participation in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{129} Nimmo, \textit{Being in Action}, 173.
\textsuperscript{130} Mangina, \textit{The Practical Knowledge of God}, 66.
\textsuperscript{131} Barth, \textit{CD IV/2}, 271.
\textsuperscript{132} Mangina, \textit{The Practical Knowledge of God}, 66.
\textsuperscript{133} Nimmo, \textit{Being in Action}, 173.
\textsuperscript{134} Nimmo, \textit{Being in Action}, 173.
\textsuperscript{135} Nimmo, \textit{Being in Action}, 175.
\textsuperscript{136} Mangina, \textit{The Practical Knowledge of God}, 66.
\end{flushright}
Christ in which we are raised to a higher level in which the exalted man is the “whole” human being.

The higher level to which [the power of the resurrection] snatches as person is not the dubious height of an abstractly spiritual life, of pure inwardness. It is a matter of man’s life it is totality, of man as the soul of his body, and therefore of the outward life, with all its distinctive elements and functions, in which he is related to other cosmic creatures, and not merely of rational and spiritual life which seems to differentiate him from them. It is a matter of his life including, and not excluding, its vegetative components. The exalted man Jesus, from who the power of this life derives, is the One who is exalted in the totality of his soul and body, just as he is also the One who is humiliated in the totality of his outer and inner life.  

The power of the cross, Barth tells us, is always aimed at human life.

The life that is taken up with Christ is also one that has a ‘sapiential’ character. Knowledge of God also has a practical orientation: “Barth wants to claim that all people, virtually, and Christians in the mode of active response, are given a share in God’s life through Jesus Christ.” The active response we are called to is one of witness. This is the charge of the Christian community as one is taken up into Christ’s prophetic work. It is not a status we posses but becomes real inasmuch as we bear witness to the world.

That Barth has made participation something fully established and based in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and yet actualized in the Church’s action of witness, mission and service to the world prevents participatory knowledge as being viewed as form of cheap grace. What Barth recovers or rather unfolds for us in his understanding of participatory knowledge will be important for moving forward and talking about infant baptism and participation in faith.

5.1.1 Faith as Knowledge

Barth writes that whatever is said about the nature of faith will also have to be said of the knowledge of God as the knowledge of faith. As Nimmo has remarked “There is a noetic

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137 Barth, CD IV/2, 316.
139 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 84.
dimension to participation in the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth writes that ‘as human life is a being in responsibility before God, it has the character of a knowledge of God’, (III/2, 176) and, correspondingly, the individual ‘can and must, within the limits which are his lot, participate in the knowledge of God’(II/1, 201).”¹⁴⁰ Faith always accompanies knowledge in the *Church Dogmatics*. And just as we saw with knowledge it is both divine gift and genuinely human; it consists of having both a passive and active sense. And most importantly for Barth, faith is actualized in action. Faith as gift demands faith in the form of obedience. It cannot stop at the point of cognitive faith. As Barth avers, “the idea of a purely theoretical faith separable from life can only be an absurdity.”¹⁴¹

Faith, as the covenant of grace demands, is an event that takes place in divine and human freedom.¹⁴² Following in line with the definitions given of participation the first aspect of participatory faith is passive. It is the understanding of faith in Barth that sees faith not as a human notion nor as something derived or based on human experience for it can never begin with itself.¹⁴³ Faith in this objective sense is not assent to human propositions or doctrines but is what occurs when the believer encounters the One in whom he believes, however, Barth cautions it should not be interpreted as too magnificent an experience.¹⁴⁴

Faith is our orientation to Christ. It is faith in Him. Faith means that we cease to be in control wherein we discover that we belong to Christ. Thus we find our true selves not with inward introspection but outside ourselves in the person of Jesus Christ for self-fabricated faith can only be the faith of unbelief.¹⁴⁵ Faith, “is at once the most wonderful and simplest of things. In it a man opens his eyes and sees and accepts everything as it is objectively, really and ontologically

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¹⁴⁰ Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 172
¹⁴¹ Barth *CD* II/2, 767.
¹⁴³ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 741.
¹⁴⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/1, 745.
– is. Faith is the simple discovery of the child which finds itself in the father’s house and on the mother’s lap."  

Faith is simply following, following its object. Faith is going a way which is marked out and prepared. Faith does not realise anything new. It does not invent anything. It simply finds that which is already there for the believer and also for the unbeliever. It is simply man’s active decision for it, his acceptance and his active participation in it.  

Faith in this way transforms and there begins and takes place a new and particular being of the person.

We have seen that the event of God’s being for us in the event of the cross is one in which we are included only in a passive sense. Just as the beginning of life is given and rooted in Christ, so is the beginning of faith and our participation in him. However, the second aspect of faith, the event of human faith that is our participation in Christ’s high priestly work, is a gift. It is only after we have first talked about what God has done through Jesus Christ that we can then begin to talk about the human side of things. The human aspect can only be an explicit topic of discussion after what needs to be said about the divine work has been said. For as a “human act it consists in a definite acknowledgment, recognition and confession. ... As a human act it is simply the confirmation of a change which has already taken place, the change in the whole human situation which took place in the death of Jesus Christ and was revealed in His resurrection and attested to by the Christian community.”

In Him it is just his new right which has been setup, his new life which has appeared. And in Him it is just he who is called to new responsibility, who is newly claimed. It is just he who is not forgotten by Him, not passed over, not allowed to fall, nor set aside or abandoned. It is just he – and this is the work of the Holy Spirit – who has been sought out, and reached, and found by Him, just he who He as associated with Himself and Himself with him. God did not will to be God without being just his God. Jesus did not will to be Jesus without being his Jesus.

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146 Barth, *CD IV/1*, 748. The image of the child will be central for Barth’s understanding of the Christian life and crucial to determining the place for infant baptism in his theology.

147 Barth, *CD IV/1*, 742.

148 Barth, *CD IV/1*, 751.

149 Barth, *CD IV/1*, 754.
5.1.2 Participatory Knowledge as Sacramental Knowing

We have seen thus far that Barth’s reticence towards the liberal view of faith had to do with the personal inward view of faith of that came to prominence, wherein a divine presence could be introspected. Barth believed, “that the experience of the Christian subject will be shaped by its object, the God who makes himself known to faith. ... God discloses himself to faith in ways that engage the whole person, including cognitive, experiential, and all other capacities.”

Maintaining such a view prevents Christianity from being reduced to a “mere species of psychological consolation” and keeps a Christianity concerned for the life of the world. However, such a view of faith also creates some ambiguity in terms of Barth’s view towards the sacraments because he was strongly opposed to mediating systems that would posit some creaturely given, whether experience, culture, value, or knowledge etc., as a condition of possibility of God’s revelation. Thus Christ becomes in Barth’s theology the only external mediating object (or secure base) in which one can find personal identity. That being the case material objects such as water or wine normally believed to mediate the objective Christ are rejected by Barth.

We noted earlier that the potential for participation does not lie within the ethical agent, for the hiddenness of God must always remain. Yet, God really makes himself known to us in some way. The kicker or problem as Mangina identifies it is “in some way.” The answer is found in Barth’s Christology. “God is precisely “objectifiable” where he chooses to make himself his own object: in the person of Jesus Christ ... But now that freedom is secured not through God’s being so to speak ungraspable, but in a determination that we grasp him in a particular place.

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150 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 16.
That place is Jesus, present to us by the Spirit through such objective media as Scripture, preaching, and the sacraments.\textsuperscript{155}

The knowledge of faith we have described to this point as sacramental knowing is demonstrated by the objective knowledge of God and its revelation to human beings. In Barth’s writings it is referred to as primary and secondary objectivity. Primary objectivity refers to God as God is known is himself. Within the Trinity God knows himself immediately, directly. Secondary objectivity refers to the human knowledge of God that is differentiated from God’s self-knowledge and is always mediated yet is also objective knowledge. The very work of God in secondary objectivity is Jesus Christ. Christ is the first sacrament and everything else is secondary.\textsuperscript{156} However, the content of this Gospel proclaimed by the Church – Incarnation revealed in his deeds – must in correspondence have a visible form which is the “visible Church, audible preaching, and operative sacraments [...] grounded on the witness of the apostles and prophets which must be shown and proved objectively.”\textsuperscript{157}

By the time of his writing in \textit{Church Dogmatics} IV/4 Barth had completely rejected sacramental mediation. Barth’s denial of sacramental mediation, however, was not necessary given this earlier theology of primary and secondary objectivity. The first reason is because

The knowledge of God ‘coincides’ with an action of God connected with creaturely media: the Bible, the visible Church, the sacraments, the preaching of the Church, the witness of the apostles. Creaturely media includes creaturely action: preaching, witness, sacraments. Arguing against the reliability of God’s action with creaturely media undermines this.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{155} Mangina, \textit{The Practical Knowledge of God}, 34, emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{156} Nimmo says this about the mediatorial role of the Church: “Any account of the mediatorial role of creaturely being must preserve the character of the revelation of God to humanity – which is coextensive with the reconciliation of God and humanity – in two respects. First, it must give full weight to the fact that the essential mediation is an already accomplished reality, secured in the eternal decision of God, and made known in creaturely – historical realm in the history of Jesus Christ. Second, it must avoid the displacement of the God-man Jesus Christ by a creaturely agent.” (\textit{Being in Action}, 57)

\textsuperscript{157} Barth, \textit{CD} II/1, 20.

\textsuperscript{158} Yocum, \textit{Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth}, 41.
Furthermore, as Barth’s ethics of creation and doctrine of the covenant of grace have shown, “a sacrament need not reduce the freedom of the creaturely world, nor enslave God to a mechanistic process.” Thus, agreeing with Stout and Webster, what Barth needs is a better understanding of sacramental mediation in the life of the church, particularly if he is concerned with maintaining its ethical impetus because “without the sacramental action of God in the practices of the Church, its task as witness is itself impossible.” To put it another way the very way in which we come to have knowledge of God in faith is through sacraments and as such our knowledge is a sacramental knowledge. Indeed Barth’s anti-sacramentalism undermines the very things he wishes to address through his doctrine of baptism, i.e., indiscriminate baptism, discipleship, and witness. More in particular, as we shall see, the rejection of infant baptism and the sacraments undermines Barth’s own understanding of how we know as human beings in relation to an ethics of creation and participants in the covenant of grace. The importance of experience and affect in knowledge and the engagement of the entire human in knowledge of God and faith, suggests a need for ecclesial mediation in a way not given in his account of baptism. Furthermore, it seems to support a view more in line with infant baptism than that of adult or believer’s baptism.

5.1.3 What Science is telling us- A Participatory and Self-Involving view of Knowledge

People have for a long time been unsure as to how to deal with emotionality; and Christianity and its theologians are not strangers to the uncertainty surrounding emotions. Christians like many others have come to believe that emotions are to be controlled or ignored, having no impact in daily life. Furthermore, since the Enlightenment we have been sceptical of the role of affect or emotive experiences in religion. The result has been the creation of stark dualisms

159 Stout, A Fellowship of Baptism, 78.

160 Stout, A Fellowship of Baptism, 86. Stout points out that part of the problem for Barth is that a sacrament is entirely God’s action: “A sacrament ‘is an event in the world of time and space which is directly initiated and brought to pass by God alone, so that in distinction from all other events it is basically a mystery to human cognition in respect of its origin and possibility.’” (CD IV/4, 108). Barth wanted to protect both divine and human freedom and this is possible within a sacramental theology. At this point Stout reaches to Christopher Ellis to demonstrate this point, however, he could just as easily looked to Barth since the God of the far county comes to us, he came to humanity without losing his freedom although there was certainly a giving up.
between reason and emotion, mind and body, and faith and reason. As Psychologist Leslie Greenberg\textsuperscript{161} notes

the great complexity of being human is that, in essence, we are two ‘selves’ that do not necessarily get along. One self drives the rational stream of consciousness, in which people are more thoughtful and deliberate, pondering the events of the week, plans for the day, and the future...it is the seat of integrated ideals and values, which reflect the person’s healthy assimilated standards and goals. The other self is more automatic. It derives from an experiential, sensory stream of consciousness that is passionately more impulsive and yet more delicate; sensitive and, in many ways sensible. Emotions embody our evaluations and goals, and many are prosocial.\textsuperscript{162}

The danger is in believing that one is conscious and the other unconscious; or to put it differently that one is cognitive and the other is non-cognitive, that one is passive and the other active. Understanding emotionality lies not in privileging one stream of consciousness over the other but in integrating the two because “[w]hat we make of our experience makes us who we are.”\textsuperscript{163}

Increasingly it is being shown that the knowledge we gain is through practices. In other words, our imbeddedness in the life and practices of particular forms and communities determine our particular form of existence. Experiences shape who we are and are intrinsic to our development as human beings. As neurobiologist Daniel J. Siegel notes, “experience is biology.”\textsuperscript{164} One of the primary ways, we remember and perceive reality is through story.

Stories are the ways we make sense out of the events of our lives. Individually and collectively we tell stories in order to understand what has happened to us and to create meaning from those experiences. Storytelling is fundamental to all human cultures, and our shared stories create a connection to others that builds a sense of belonging to a particular community. The stories of a particular culture shape how its members perceive the world. In this way, stories both are created by us and shape who we are. For these reasons, stories are central to both individual and collective human experience.\textsuperscript{165}

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{162}] Greenberg, \textit{Emotion Focused Therapy}, preface, x.
\item[\textsuperscript{163}] Greenberg, \textit{Emotion-Focused Therapy}, ‘preface’, x.
\item[\textsuperscript{165}] Siegel, \textit{Parenting from the Inside Out}, 39.
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}
It is through telling the stories of our experiences that human beings, particularly children, are able to make sense of and help to integrate both the events and the emotional content of that experience. There are many experiences from childhood that only make sense and that we have memory of because we have been told a story about them. Baptism is one of these experiences. It is the responsibility of caring adults to help children understand these experiences which is done through story for “[t]he way we tell our life stories reveals the way we have come to understand the events of our lives.” Furthermore, how we perceive directly influences how we behave. The telling of an integrated story involves the ability to integrate the right and left sides of our mind or the ‘heart’ and ‘mind’ so to speak. This ability to tell stories and create meanings also shows the inherent social nature of human beings. Most importantly it is a way of knowing not limited to adults:

Science has shown that the brain, even in young infants, is quite capable of making generalizations, or mental models, from repeated experiences. These mental models are a part of implicit memory, and are thought to be created in the patterns of neuronal firing in the perceptual modalities of vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell that accumulate in repeated interactions.

Corresponding to the view that knowledge is not attained by way of external proposition but through embodiment, is the view that affect informs the way we live and move and have our being in the world. Along with the increased awareness that we know not primarily through facts and propositions is the role of affect in the attainment of knowledge. In fact science is recognizing that affect (i.e. our emotions) actually have noetic status and a primary one at that.

People definitely are wiser than their intellects alone. By rapidly apprehending patterns in the world much faster than the information can be consciously analyzed, emotions guide reasoning. Emotions are not simply disruptions of ongoing life that need to be controlled; rather, they are organizing processes that need to be attended to. In combination with reason, they help make people more effective in their ever-changing environments by helping them rapidly adapt to the world and by facilitating adaptive problem solving. Emotions involve both cognition, in the form of evaluations, and motivation, in the form of needs, and they are

166 Siegel, Parenting from the Inside Out, 41.
167 Siegel, Parenting from the Inside Out, 41.
168 Siegel, Parenting from the Inside Out, 43.
169 Siegel, Parenting from the Inside Out, 51.
therefore higher level experiences than either cognition or motivation alone. They are richly infused with all that is important to us: our meanings, our needs and our values. Without emotions, people could not live satisfying lives.  

Human understanding of emotions has varied throughout history. At one time we referred to them as passions because it was believed we were passive recipients of them; more recently the term emotion is used to denote the action tendency aspect. Thus when thinking about emotion we can think of it “as a process that integrates distinct entities into a functional whole;... as a fundamental integrating process is an aspect of virtually every function of the human brain.”

Emotions then are a necessary component to human agency. They are crucial to survival, communication and problem solving and are an essential aspect of being human. Initial primary emotions are the brain’s first assessment of the importance and goodness/badness of an experience. Through emotion our minds become organized and prepare our bodies for action.” Emotions are essential for how we come to understand ourselves in relation to the world around us and how we act towards it. Morality is not simply the knowledge of what is right and wrong i.e. reason. Human morality derives from an “immediate sense of feeling, especially a feeling for the suffering of others. Feelings such as compassion, sympathy, benevolence, gratitude and justice come not from reason but from feelings for others.” Put more simply “[e]motion moves us and reason guides us” for the experience of emotion does not lead to wise action alone.

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170 Greenberg, Emotion Focused-Therapy, 12.
171 Greenberg, Emotion Focused Therapy, 14.
172 Siegel, Parenting from the Inside Out, 59.
173 Greenberg, Emotion Focused Therapy, 11.
174 Siegel, Parenting from the Inside Out, 60.
175 Greenberg, Emotion-Focused Therapy, ‘preface’, x.
176 Greenberg, Emotion-Focused Therapy, ‘preface’, x.
5.1.4 Sacramental Knowledge and the role of affect

That we are shaped by experience in relation to objects outside ourselves has much to do with the fact that we are first and foremost affective beings. We are determined by our passions. Although Barth is often (unjustly I would argue) criticized for having too much of an intellectual view of the Christian life, it was not without regard to the role of affect and experience in shaping the human person. Barth was concerned with the noetic status of affect as it pertained to faith and the Christian life. Increasingly both in the world of philosophy and neuroscience it has been determined that the primary way in which humans know through experience and action is via affect. Our emotions have an impact not only on how we think, for it is a form of thinking, but on how we live and move and have our being in the world. How these passions are shaped depends upon the context in which we find ourselves and to what end they are being ordered.

Just as for philosophers and scientist, Barth’s own interest lay in the noetic status of affection and in particular religious affections as discussed in Schleiermacher. We have shown how emotions have come to have noetic status in more recent years, the question remains as to their relation to the Christian life. Joseph Mangina, writing in the *Practical Knowledge of God*, demonstrates well Barth’s attention to experience and affect in the formation of knowledge in the *Church Dogmatics*. Mangina notes that he is after two things in describing the affections. First he insists that “affections must intend their object; in technical terms the logic of belief is always grounded in the logic of [belief?]”. At the same time however, because salvation engages the whole person faith can never simply be ‘coldhearted’ assent to the Bible or Church doctrine In fact, “[p]recisely because it intends the triune God, faith is a matter of the heart; as Calvin put it, ‘faith rests upon the knowledge of Christ. And Christ cannot be known apart from sanctification of his Spirit. It follows that faith can in now wise be separated from a devout disposition.’ The affective dimension of the Christian life is thus an important index to its self-involving

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character.” Important for Barth is that although faith is self-involving, such subjectivity always plays a subordinate role in Barth’s account of divine action.

Affectivity is presented as a theme in Barth by Mangina and argues that they are in fact intentional, that is, they “take the form of definite judgments about God, the world and the self.” As we saw earlier emotions are our orientation towards the world. They not only provide a “framework through which the world is viewed, ‘they shape us in such a way as to affect our judgments’.” For Barth this means that affect is important insomuch as it informs our being in the world, particularly as beings who act.

In the section explaining how emotions orient us toward the world, Mangina turns to theologian Don E. Saliers. While much of what Saliers says can be affirmed, his definition of affections somewhat misses the point. Saliers notes that emotions are pre-cognitive. What we have learned above is that emotions are a type of cognition. It is true that how emotion or affect orients us towards the world is something of which we are largely unaware. To use the term of scientist Michael Polanyi, it is a ‘tacit knowing’. Much of our being in the world, how we act and react is done without our immediate knowledge of it such as breathing, eating, getting dressed, etc. Many of these things we learned to do at a young age before we could articulate them, thus the saying applies, “we always know more that what we can say.” It is why we can have an experience of a worship service and be brought to tears yet be unable to articulate why, perhaps, until later. It is why a child can say the Lord’s prayer and kneel for prayer without an awareness of why she is doing it and yet her action will still have a transformative and formational impact. Saliers also tells us that affections “combine evaluative knowledge of the world and self-awareness” which is the emotional intelligence that Greenberg speaks of; it is something we have to learn. Awareness of affect and how it effects our actions is imperative for the theological task.

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178 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 128.
179 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 32.
180 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 126.
181 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 129.
Mangina goes on to point out that emotions are what orient us toward the object of faith. Certainly this is true, and in fact we will put faith in whatever draws our love. The question is how do we order our emotions and our desires such that our faith is in Christ and not some other idol? The answer has to do with the Church whose liturgies shape us and help us tend toward Christ and whose people teach us how to integrate heart and mind. The importance of emotion for learning and ethics and the fact that integrating heart and mind is something that is learned demonstrates, I believe, the importance of infant baptism and furthermore the responsibility of the community in the shaping and directing of those emotions.

5.2 Affect in Karl Barth

Mangina directs us to several places where Barth talks about affect: Hope in CD IV/3, Wonder in Evangelical Theology, and Joy and Gratitude in CD III/4. Mangina chooses to focus on gratitude and joy where in Barth’s words ‘joy is the simplest form of gratitude.’ Two things are to be noted in this account of emotions in Barth. The first is that gratitude and joy as with the other affects, is a visible form of witness: “In leading joyful and grateful lives we witness to the unexpected mercy of God in Jesus Christ – the vertical dimension of the concepts, if you will. But the visible form of this reference is a certain observable shape of life, without which it would not function as a witness.”

The second thing to be noted is that the view of emotions falls in line with the covenantal ordering where Christian affections correspond to God’s action. The example he gives is Barth’s demonstrating that grace demands gratitude in IV/1, 41. That joy has a corresponding character is also found in Barth’s account of election in CD II/2, “The elect person is first of all one who, ‘lets himself be loved by God,’ Human joy, [...] is properly ordered and corresponds to the glory of God.”

The practice of joy and hope through utter dependence on the Father is the image given not only in these sections as outlined by Mangina but also in Barth’s the Christian Life where he explicates his understanding of the Lord’s Prayer. Barth is concerned that the distinctive given

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182 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 133, emphasis mine.
183 Mangina, The Practical Knowledge of God, 135.
for the Christian life be defined by a particular human action that follows certain criteria which
he names as invocation. 184 The Christian life “is the humble and resolute, the frightened and
joyful invocation of the gracious God in gratitude, praise, and above all petition”; it is the basic
meaning of all human obedience. 185

Barth notes that we pray because we are called to do so, not because of any reason or desire or
need or our own. We are simply directed to do so. 186 While this may be true, I believe that as
persons created to be embodied people, directed by our passions, worship (i.e. prayer) is
something we are created to do. As Augustine famously quoted, ‘our hearts our restless until
they find their rest in thee.’ Thus just as the grace of our being created is a call to life, so it is
also a command to worship as rooted in the prior divine grace of God who by grace has made us
children of the Father.

Men become and are God’s children [...] by God’s grace, which is his possibility and not
theirs, by the goodness of the Father. It is not originally intrinsic to them, nor is it accessible
to their own grasping and disposing. Rather, it is freely intended for them and addressed and
promised them, as this grace and goodness becomes a present event in their life and though,
in action and suffering, so that they acquire thereby the genuine freedom to cry, ‘Father’. 187

If Barth says that invocation is primary before anything else including faith, then it would seem
to coinhere with our being beings created for worship or liturgical beings. Furthermore, if grace
is primary, in other words it is God through Christ who establishes right relationship with
humankind, then like infancy, the knowledge of God as Father comes through later awareness as
we are shown love and care by the Father. Children worship (live, move and have their being)
within the bosom of the Church long before they have any explicit knowing of whom they are
worshipping or why and they are not any less God’s children.

184 The criteria Barth gives for the human action are as follows: (i) The action must be distinctive to the human
partner in the covenant of grace established by God; (ii) The action must be one in which the human is empowered
by the grace of God; (iii) The action must be authentically human; (iv) The action must have central significant and
import for all of a person’s life (being and action); (v) God is only helper in the act; (vi) The action must be
approached with humility; and (vii) the act must be done in complete confidence. (The Christian Life, 42)

185 Barth, TCL, 43.

186 Barth, TCL, 50.

187 Barth, TCL, 73.
5.2.1 On Being Like Children

The life of the Christian that Barth describes is nothing less than the understanding of what it means to be childlike in our faith. Barth tells us that invocation of ‘Father!’ “points to a place where the one who calls on God knows that he himself, along with everything and all things is absolutely dependent and conditioned.” 188 Another theologian drawing on the image of childhood for the Christian life, is John Saward, in his book The way of the Lamb. Drawing at one point on Chesteron’s ‘The Way of the Child’ Saward describes the way of spiritual childhood as an exercise in hope as we abandon ourselves in complete trust to our heavenly parent. 189 To be little means to resist the will to power, to have a childlike soul – “to remember one’s poverty and utter dependence, in all things of nature and grace, upon the heavenly Father.” 190

To be childlike takes away the concern of whether action becomes works righteousness. For to be like a child means that like a child, we recognize our dependency upon the Father, expecting everything of the good God, just like children expect of their parents. This is because “merit does not consist in doing and giving much, but rather in receiving, in loving much.” 191 As such “there is no need to despair about reaching the summit of the mountain of love, because Jesus does not ask for great actions, but only for abandonment and gratitude,” 192 a sentiment that Barth could indeed have echoed.

5.2.2 Conclusion

To this point we have been tracing the truth found in Scripture and articulated in Barth that “the witness of the New Testament and the Bible as a whole, is that God acts, in, with, and through human means to impart knowledge of Himself, to sustain and support human beings in life, both

188 Barth, TCL, 57.
In the previous chapter we noted how participatory faith is genuine human knowledge and how Barth’s understanding of faith as knowledge corresponds to and finds support in recent philosophical and scientific understandings of how the human person comes to have knowledge. We learned that this is because the human being “does not exist abstractly but concretely, i.e., in experiences, in determinations of his existence by objects, by things outside him and distinct from him.” The Christian subject is always shaped by the object of faith – God – who makes himself known in Jesus Christ in a way that engages the entire person. Such an engagement means that faith is participatory, shaped by human desire, experience, and encounters with the world.

By way of exploring the nature of faith in Barth and its relationship to human knowing, Barth’s ethics of creation was upheld by concluding “given who God is, it is impossible to know him without having one’s self-knowledge, affections, and agency transformed in a profound and abiding way.” Thus we saw that not only one’s environment but one’s entire being, especially one’s emotions, are vital to knowledge of God in faith. Furthermore, it was also determined that such a view of faith is in accordance with Barth’s theology of the covenant of grace, for it demands that the ‘whole’ human being be taken seriously when speaking about knowledge and experience of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. Divine action, i.e. grace does not impinge upon human action but opens the way for free genuine human action and self-determination as rooted in this very grace.

The participatory nature of faith that is also genuine human knowledge connects with what we learned in the first chapter: that we are liturgical beings, i.e. we are shaped by the object we intend to. We are beings shaped by those things that command our love and that we love. The crucial point made about participatory human knowledge was the primary role played by emotions which reemphasizes and connects to the observation made in chapter one that we are liturgical beings. As beings ordered by love our knowledge comes to us primarily in ways tacit

to us. In other words, the object to which we are most attached (love) will determine our being, our values and how we respond to the world. For Barth this means that the Christian is exhorted to be ordered to and by the primacy of the Word of God. “No matter what may be the worth, importance or urgency of other forces as they legitimately or illegitimately speak, in the lives of Christians the Word of God is to be heard first, and only after it has been heard is the voice of other factors to be heard.”196 Our lives as ordered by the word of God create in us a specific character that allows us to be a witness, or to use Barth’s term “a text accessible” to those within the Church as well as the world.197

196 Barth, TCL, 177.
197 Barth, TCL, 201.
Chapter 4  
The Role of the Community in Faith Formation

The insight of the previous chapter that we are liturgical beings whose knowledge and action is ordered by love not only requires a community it also demands responsibility of the community. Responsibility of the community is an important aspect of his doctrine of baptism. To be baptized means that what we do and how we live out our lives as Christians must witness against what the world teaches us. However, given the lack of a mediatorial role given to the Christian by Barth and more importantly the Church, the question is raised as to how true witness and transformation can take place in the life of Church for the life of the world. Yocum identifies this problem when he says,

If one rejects the concept of sacraments, as Barth does, on the principle that the actions of God and the action of human beings must be sharply distinguished, such that human action does not reliably mediate divine action, then one risks distorting the relationship between God and human beings that is manifested in the Church.  

Sacramental mediation in the life of the Church is needed, especially if Barth wants to maintain the ethical impetus equated with his view of baptism. This chapter will look at the role of the community in the shaping and forming of faith and also draw further upon the insights of attachment theory to demonstrate why the role of the community is so central. The purpose will be to demonstrate where Barth got it right and the difficulties created by an abandonment of a sacramental view.

6 No faith without the Church

The place where one encounters the Word of God and is awakened to faith is the sphere of the Church. Yocum in his work *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth* explicates well the sacramental sphere of the Church as found in I/1 of the *Church Dogmatics*. In *CD* I/1 we are told that the “Church is where the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is acknowledged in faith.”  

This mediation happens via the sacraments of the preaching of the word, Eucharist and Baptism.

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199 Barth, *CD* I/1, 3.
For Barth, the necessary consequence of God’s revelation is that the world contains a place, created and indicated by God, in which God makes human beings recipients of his revelation. This place is the Church, not only in its inward and invisible aspect, but in its external and visible beings (I/2, 211). Thus, revelation requires not only something objective, a presentation of revelation to humanity, but something subjective, the power to receive that revelation (I/2, 223-4) which is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Faith – knowledge of God – is never in abstract. The Word that we encounter, who is Jesus Christ, must have a form and that form is the Church because “if what he feels and wants is something without form, then he is not a theologian, but he is also not a Christian. For Jesus Christ is not without a form, but in the sphere in which he encounters Him He is both form and object – and in the same sphere in which he listens to the world of the Scripture and to that of the community (and therefore to Himself) he can know Him.” The determination of our being, i.e., our faith, happens in relation to our action within the Church. As Barth tells us, “Faith is the determination of human action by the being of Church and therefore by Jesus Christ, the gracious address of God to man. In faith, and only in faith, human action is related to the being of the Church, to the action of God in revelation and reconciliation.” Faith by definition means and requires fellowship with one’s neighbours. We need the other to discover not only who Christ is but who we are.

Above all, the necessary summons to confession is concretely given by the existence of others, who according to their confession in the world, are likewise caught up in the act of faith by the existence of the Christian community. It is not on the basis of his own discovery and private revelation, but by the mediatorial ministry of the community which is itself in the school of the prophets and apostles, that a man comes under the awakening power of the Holy Spirit and therefore to faith.

Barth is consistent in his emphasis that one cannot come to faith or love by faith on our own.

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200 Yocum, Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth, 17, emphasis mine.
201 Barth CD IV/1, 765.
202 Barth, CD IV/1, 765.
203 Barth, CD I/1, 17.
204 Barth, CD IV/1, 779, emphasis mine.
6.1.1 Community precedes faith

That context presupposes and comes prior to the individual and as such individual faith is a theme not only evident in the opening pages of Scripture\(^{205}\) where created context precedes the created human but also in Barth’s ecclesiology. The Christian cannot exist apart from the community of love.

It seems as though we might (and perhaps should) reverse the order and say that the Holy Spirit effects the eventuation of Christian love and therefore the existence of individual Christians, and in and with this the upbuilding of the Christian community and therefore the existence of Christendom. But this is only in appearance. If it is true that Christian love is that which (with Christian faith and Christian hope) makes an individual man a Christian, we have to remember that the individual man does not become a Christian, and love as such, in a vacuum, but in a definite historical context, i.e., in and with the upbuilding of the Christian community.\(^{206}\)

In Barth’s view a person is a member of the community first and then an individual Christian in their particular time and place.\(^{207}\) There is in fact no way to come to the knowledge of faith in Jesus Christ that does not lead one through the Church. For “the hidden glory at the right hand of the Father in which He is manifest to the Father and to Himself has no other earthly-historical complement than that of their [the Church’s] witness.”\(^{208}\)

6.1.2 Baptism and the community

That coming to faith has a contingent element and is not without the concert of the community is a thesis Barth will continue into the ‘Baptism Fragment’. For Barth, being awakened to faith and being added to the community are one and the same thing.\(^{209}\)

To be Christians, and therefore holy members of the holy community means – [...] – that they have actually been awakened to faith in Him, that they have found themselves members of the community in this fact, that in fulfillment of their faith and election and calling they

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\(^{205}\) See Genesis chapters 1-2.

\(^{206}\) Barth, CD IV/1, 618.

\(^{207}\) Barth, CD IV/2, 705.

\(^{208}\) Barth CD IV/1, 719.

\(^{209}\) Barth, CD IV/1, 688.
have asked for baptism and received it as a confirmation, that with a *lively faith* they are Christians and therefore in the community. (Barth, *CD* IV/1, 696, emphasis mine)

By the power of the Holy Spirit though the witness of Scripture and the proclamation of the community we are awakened to faith and come to believe in Christ. We are called, to ‘lively faith’ because grace is both a divine act and offer, yet also requires *active human participation* in it.\(^{210}\) In fact for Barth that to speak of human experience and action is to speak of the community of faith.\(^{211}\) However, as he also so often cautions it is a human experience and action which is not of our own reason and power.

Faith and being in community are inextricably intertwined. The individual is never beyond the sphere of the Church. As Barth posits, “A life is not Christian if it is not life in and with the [Christian] community.” Through participation in the community of faith we come to see ourselves as we truly are, “stamped by Him and set in His light.”\(^{212}\) We have become children of God. Through baptism in the Church we are awakened to and learn the story of our faith. It is the story of Christ’s history who by coming into the far country to reconcile us to himself graciously allows His story to become our own.

However, while Barth’s upholding of the role of the community in relation to faith is to be commended, his rejection of infant baptism as a sacrament as well his reluctance to attribute any mediatorial power to the Church makes these claims rather ambiguous in relation to his claim that coming to knowledge of faith presupposes participation in the Church. Further complicating things is Barth’s earlier suggestion in the *Dogmatics* that seems to suggest that the visible life of the community is sacramental.

The Christian religion is the sacramental area created by the Holy Spirit, in which the God whose Word became flesh continues to speak through the sign of His revelation. And it is also the existence of men created by the same Holy Spirit, who hear this God continually speaking in His revelation. The Church and the children of God do actually exist. The

\(^{210}\) Barth *CD* IV/1, 643.

\(^{211}\) Barth *CD* IV/1, 645.

\(^{212}\) Barth *CD* IV/1, 770.
actuality of their existence is quite unassuming, but it is always visible and it its visibility it is significant.\textsuperscript{213}

In this sacramental sphere, i.e., the Church, divine and creaturely actions are united however, divine action is always and logically prior to the human action which attests to it. Our capacity to mediate grace has nothing to do with innateness but with divine command and decision. Moreover, because the very action of the Church is sacramental it also means that these actions are the very being of the Church. As such these signs within this sphere are not merely indispensible means of grace, they are effective signs with ethical and spiritual consequences. This means that the Church as the sacramental sphere where one comes to faith is also the ethical context for the building of character.

The Church as ethical context is what Barth refers to when he calls the community the school of faith. It is the place of discipleship; discipleship that, because it comes to us by grace, takes the form of obedience. However, as we noted in the previous section, an understanding of discipleship and formation within the community must “include understanding of the Spirit forming the community to be his witness through the concrete practices of the church.”\textsuperscript{214}

Historically, baptism has had a central role as one of many formative practices within the Church that “recreates and continually shapes the Christian community under the Spirit’s guidance.”\textsuperscript{215}

Similarly for Barth, the role of baptism comes to have significant place when talking about the role of discipleship and the role of the community in the life of the baptized.

The contingent nature of faith means that the role of the community is vital to the cultivation of faith, i.e. discipleship. However, Barth’s move away from a sacramental view raises many problems because it seems to negate the mediation of the community in discipleship he wishes to uphold. Furthermore, when considering infant baptism, that a child can come to have ‘lively faith’ requires the agency of the community. In fact, as I have been hinting, the ethical sphere of the Church is necessary to the development of the human agent. Charles Taylor proposes that

\textsuperscript{213} Barth, \textit{CD I/2}, 359.

\textsuperscript{214} Stout, \textit{A Fellowship of Baptism}, 169.

\textsuperscript{215} Stout, \textit{A Fellowship of Baptism}, 169.
the notion of ‘moral space’ as an essential component in achieving identity as a human agent. There is an essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in a moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary.²¹⁶

As we traced in the previous chapter, faith is through participation in the life of the community. As we participate in the ecclesial sphere – ‘moral space – we come to have more knowledge of who God is, who we are and how we are supposed to act in relation to God and our responsibility to the community. We cannot know who we are apart from the people of God. The Church is necessary for our salvation because

What Christians believe about the universe, the nature of human existence, or even God does not, cannot, and should not save. Our beliefs, or better our convictions, only make sense as they are embodied in the political community we call Church.²¹⁷

Community is necessary for discipleship. The Christian life is not lived in isolation. In order to live a life of service and to learn this vocation the communion of saints is required. This communion of saints is “a fellowship of baptism,”²¹⁸ therefore, the question of ethics is directed at those who are members of the body of Christ by way of their baptism because ethics concerns not just the individual but the community.²¹⁹

I am myself the subject of responsibility to the command of God, and therefore the subject of which the question of ethical reflection speaks. But I am this only as included in the “we.” I am myself the covenant-partner of God, but my God is our God. I may and must hear his command but his command applies to us all.²²⁰

The Church is not only the ethical sphere, but also the ethical agent. For just as the self-determination of the individual is for a life of service so it is also true that the Church is called to

²¹⁶ Charles Taylor as quoted in Webster, Barth’s Moral Theology, 152.
²¹⁷ Hauerwas, After Christendom, 26.
²¹⁸ Barth CD IV/2, 702.
²¹⁹ Barth, CD II/2, 655.
²²⁰ Barth, CD II/2, 655.
serve. All functions and practices of the community are to have the determination of service and all the saints in the communion of saints are called to for a life of service.  

7 Determined for a Life of Service: Discipleship and its relationship to Baptism

7.1 The Nature of Discipleship

The life to which we are called in our baptism is a life of service. As Barth avers looking to Jesus as Lord is not an ‘idle gaping’. The call to discipleship comes in the form of grace because grace requires that a person do something; grace commands. This is the first of four aspects of discipleship given in paragraph 63 of volume IV/2 of the *Church Dogmatics*, wherein Barth describes of the nature of discipleship. The second is that discipleship is about relationship, in that the call binds the person to the One who calls her. The relationship is a particular one between Christ and the one who is called. When the person called responds with belief their faith evidenced in the form of obedience is discipleship. Third, discipleship begins anew each day. As Barth puts it, ‘it is always a definite first step’. A decision is required of us each day as to whether or not we will follow the command. If we choose not to, Barth warns, we will bear

221 Barth, *CD IV/2*, 693.

222 Barth *CD IV/2*, 533. Theologian Joseph Mangina gives a wonderful description of the divine command as it relates to ethics in Karl Barth in his book *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*. He describes Christian ethics as starting with what God has done followed by consideration of our moral choices. Rather than beginning with the question ‘What should I do?’ theological ethics begins with the question ‘What is real?’ We see this in connection with the ethics of creation that calls us to be human. We are created by God, reconciled to Him through Christ who shares his life with us and made to be heirs of his kingdom. Before the human acts we have already by grace been given the context, the freedom and the necessary relationship as God’s children to do so.

223 Barth *CD IV/2*, 537.

224 Barth *CD IV/2*, 539. Discipleship as a first step also follows Barth’s view that baptism is also a first step. It also connects with Barth’s teaching that we receive people based on their baptisms, however, we always receive them as beginners. The issue of discipleship always being a first step and baptism always being a beginning raises the issue of whether one can truly experience true growth through discipleship in Barth’s theology. Furthermore, Barth’s belief that what counts in the Church is not progress but continual reformation (*CD IV/1*, 705) also seems to inhibit any talk of growth. It is certainly true the actualism of Barth’s theology prevents any such view. This is a point to which we shall soon return because if transformation comes as a result of grace and a new creation is truly formed and being formed and if a Christian is called to responsibility within the community through service then growth in faith must have a place – even more so when we talk about sacraments.
a yoke that is not Christ’s but our own and which is a hundred times heavier.\textsuperscript{225} Finally, discipleship makes a definite break with the world which means that it has consequences for the public sphere. Discipleship “is not merely a matter of saving [one’s] own soul in the attainment of a private beatitude. [A person] loses his soul, and hazards his eternal salvation if he will not accept the public responsibility which he assumes when he becomes a disciple of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{226} First and foremost, however, discipleship is a matter of grace.

7.2 Discipleship: The Command of Grace

We noted earlier that the primary aspect of discipleship is grace. Before the human can respond in obedience they first encounter the reconciling power of grace. We also saw earlier that what is true of discipleship is also true of faith – it also first and foremost grace. For Barth, faith is something to be received new each day. It cannot be hoarded. As Barth says, faith “is never something which is there already, it is always a gift which has to be seized again and again. We can have it, and the retrospect and prospect which it gives, only as it is given to us as a fit, and we grasp it as such.”\textsuperscript{227} Similarly, freedom for ethics is not “a possession or inherent quality of the ethical agent, but is a gift from the divine mercy that is ‘continually to be received as such, and only as such’.”\textsuperscript{228} Faith, in fact, is the life lived in obedience, i.e., the life of discipleship. Given the actualistic or occasional nature of human action which includes faith and ethics, it is not surprising that Barth has been criticized for having little room for continuity and progress. This is because “[i]f obedience remains always an unactualized potential (except in Christ), then this would seem to spell disaster for the possibility of significant human action.”\textsuperscript{229} If the

\textsuperscript{225} Barth CD IV/2, 542.
\textsuperscript{226} Barth CD IV/2, 545.
\textsuperscript{227} Barth, CD I/2, 706. This raises the question of whether faith can be increased; whether it can be sustained or nourished and whether or not we can speak of growing in our faith.
\textsuperscript{228} Nimmo, Being in Action, 111.
\textsuperscript{229} Robert Willis as quoted in Nimmo, Being in Action, 157.
Christian and the community are continually ‘surprised by grace’ it makes it difficult to see how we are able to rely on previous human experience or reason.\(^\text{230}\)

Mangina makes a similar observation regarding a lack of growth in Barth, noting that a teleological account of sanctification appears to be missing in Barth’s thought. The reason for this he claims is that “since we contribute nothing to our salvation, talk about capacities or growth in relation to God is excluded from the outset. Grace being sovereign and free, we are forced to exclude”\(^\text{231}\) anything that might be credited on the human side. Grace is never something we possess, “it can only be shared with us ever anew.”\(^\text{232}\) Again Hauerwas also criticizes Barth when he says that, “by describing the Christian life primarily in terms of command and decision, Barth cannot fully account for the kind of growth and deepening that he thinks is essential to the Christian existence.”\(^\text{233}\)

While these criticisms are not unfounded, I do not think growth in the Christian life is entirely lacking in Barth’s theology. For example, “The Christian community both as a whole and individually” in Barth’s view, “will always be somewhere on the way in the movement from yesterday to tomorrow and therefore \textit{Deo bene volente} from the worse to the better.”\(^\text{234}\) The baptismal life—the Christian life—is in Barth view a journey, a hastening towards the goal of perfection. One cannot talk about journeying without also thinking about growth. To this end, the questions raised by the actualistic nature of human action are best seen relation to Barth’s understanding of baptism as it relates to discipleship and the Christian life, namely that it is a journey of beginnings.\(^\text{235}\)


\(^\text{231}\) Mangina, \textit{The Practical Knowledge of God}, 166.

\(^\text{232}\) Hauerwas in Mangina, \textit{The Practical Knowledge of God}, 166.

\(^\text{233}\) Hauerwas in Mangina, \textit{The Practical Knowledge of God}, 166.

\(^\text{234}\) Barth, \textit{CD IV/2}, 716.

\(^\text{235}\) Beginnings will also help in understanding the connection of discipleship, authority and ethics within the sacramental sphere of the Church as relates to baptism.
7.3 Baptism and Beginnings

7.3.1 Baptism: the grace of new life

Although Barth’s doctrine of baptism is primarily ethical and Christological in nature, he does not neglect themes of regeneration and salvation. Barth’s use of new birth and regeneration in fact are central to his understanding of baptism as both beginning and foundation of the Christian life. Near the beginning of the ‘Baptism Fragment’ Barth begins with the theme of new birth and regeneration noting that

> The Christian life begins with a change which cannot be understood or described radically enough, which God has the possibility of effecting in a man’s life in a way which is decisive and basic for his whole being and action, and which He has in fact accomplished in the life of the man who becomes a Christian.\(^\text{236}\)

The history of Jesus Christ, in the form of pledge and promise, is available for all people because of God’s Word which is present for, with, and in every person.\(^\text{237}\) One becomes a Christian “on the basis of the initiative of Jesus Christ and in the event of the life, act and speech of Jesus Christ present for him.” One becomes a Christian through this event of Jesus Christ in this way or not at all.\(^\text{238}\)

And in response to the pledge and promise “baptism can only be the first step into the Christian life. In its full reality this life is not in it but before it. Baptism is a beginning in the light of which it can be only the first grasping of the promise which is made to a man in God’s work and word, and hence the joyful but prayerful orientation of this man to the fulfilment of the promise in a specific temporal future.”\(^\text{239}\)

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\(^{236}\) Barth, *CD*, IV/4, 9. C.f IV/4, 132.

\(^{237}\) Barth, *CD* IV/4, 25.

\(^{238}\) Barth, *CD* IV/4, 33. Without sacramental mediation there remains the question as to how Christ becomes this event – the speech act in a person’s life. Recalling the primary and secondary objectivity of earlier, it would seem that the secondary objectivity of Christ’s revelation would be this way, however, Barth’s rejection of the sacraments makes this move impossible.

\(^{239}\) Barth, *CD* IV/4, 89.
Other images for baptism that Barth uses in connection with beginnings and new life are the images of dying and rising to new life. They are also used in connection with living out the Christian life yet still find importance as related to beginnings as we see in following:

Man dies but in so doing he begins to live. When the old is passed forward becomes the only Christian option. This is the great change in the life of a man wherein he becomes a Christian – an astounding change which can be regarded only as divine. His Christian life begins with this beginning.  

The grace of baptism that offers new life is the foundation of our new relationship with God. It is a grace that has once for all validity because it is the sole action of God. It is a change that the person, now newly, Christian will remember and take comfort and glory in, because “it is not a half grace, or half adequate grace; it is whole grace and wholly adequate grace.” Baptism is our common infancy. Indeed as Barth tells us, Christmas is the birthday of every Christian. Through baptism grace is a mother to all people, of every age and sex, brought forth though this common infancy.  

7.3.2 Call to Discipleship – Response to New Life

Baptism is not only our birth into the family of God it is the beginning of a life of discipleship. As we have been emphasizing throughout, Barth was deeply concerned about the ethical and practical nature of baptism. In order for someone to be(come) faithful to God there must be a change that comes over them. It is a change in which a person “thinks and acts and conducts himself otherwise than he did before.” He notes that in baptism, “The possibility of God consists in the fact that man – eye of a needle or not – is enabled to participate not just passively

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241 Barth, *CD IV/4*, 35. It is important to note that the once for all validity has to do with baptism with the Holy Spirit for Barth as he separates Spirit and water by making one solely divine and the other solely human, respectively. This is one of the most unfortunate aspects of his theology of baptism because in all his previous theology he does well to keep the physical and spiritual together, however, in the ‘Baptism Fragment’ it is difficult to see them as anything but separated.


243 Barth, *CD IV/4*, 18.
but actively in God’s grace as one who may and will and can be set to work too.”

“The possibility of discipleship – faithfulness to God – is always first a matter of grace. Reception of grace proves itself in action; action made possible only by grace. “The genuineness of the faith in which he received and takes to heart the pledge and promise given to him must and will prove itself at once in an action which corresponds to this pledge and promise.” It is this proving faith in action that disqualifies infants from baptism. However, infant baptism is not as theologically unfitting as it seems in relation to Barth’s view of discipleship and active faith.

7.4 Discipleship and Infant Baptism

In his discussion of infant baptism Barth asks himself how baptism can be the beginning of the Christian life for a child who cannot profess their faith. Certainly an infant is unable to prove themselves through action with the immediacy that an adult can and that Barth seems to require. However, Barth seems to have misunderstood himself for when he speaks of divine and human agencies “the secondary human agent is both receptive and in correspondence to, but not absorbed by, the primary divine agent; [...] even in receiving one is a spontaneous doer, acting in correspondence to the action of the one whose act is received.” Webster further points out, that it is the case for Barth that “where God acts, we are seen to act—precisely in receiving” Thus, we can conclude that the infant at baptism who in receiving grace is a ‘spontaneous doer’ and an active participant in the life of the covenant.

244 Barth, *CD IV/4*, 6
245 Barth, *CD IV/4*, 72.
246 Barth, *CD IV/4*, 42.
248 Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 143.
Moreover on this point, we might ask Barth why it is the case that the Christian life can only begin when a person can be responsible, i.e. an adult. Life does not begin when we become adults (although some might view it this way). Life begins, as the image of new birth suggests, at birth. Over time a person obtains and is granted more privileges and responsibilities but their life is still a real life; yet Barth wants to maintain that the Christian life begins when a person can ask for baptism and is deemed by the judgment of the community to be ready. While this view appears to increase the responsibility and maturity of the community, if baptism is full membership into the community, whether as an infant or an adult, it is still the responsibility of the community to determine (judge) when and at what time members are capable of taking on more duties and responsibilities in the Church. Even Barth notes that although we are all called to serve not everyone serves equally, i.e., with the same function. Each Christian has their necessary place whose service is indispensable to the life of the entire community.²⁴⁹

Exalted in to fellowship with Jesus Christ, each Christian as such is set in the lowliness of His service. ...At bottom, there is something wrong with the community itself even if one of its members has dropped out of its ministry or never had a share in it.²⁵⁰

Indeed one has to wonder if barring children from baptism, as and such, from membership in the community goes against this very notion. If children are among the least of these then the community suffers when their participation is lacking. Thus Barth might have been better served to have held to a view of infant baptism.

It is unfortunate that Barth rejected infant baptism. Stout assumes that Barth believed that Church reform will be the result of a break away from passive Church membership and as such infant baptism. While this might seem to be what Barth is doing, it is not. Barth believed so strongly in the power of grace (divine action) he could believe in the possibility of genuine obedient human action. Barth was well aware of human sinfulness but nevertheless knew that we are called to true discipleship, not in spite of but in the midst of our sinfulness. While Barth did indeed desire a more faithful witness, his concern had more to do with baptism becoming a cheap grace. And whether one is baptized old or young this is always a possibility. Through the

²⁴⁹ Barth CD IV/2, 693.
²⁵⁰ Barth, CD IV/2, 693.
grace of baptism to we are called to a life of service. However, as Barth was well aware, we are not always able to live faithfully to this call. Therefore, baptism is not just one beginning but many. As we will see repentance eliminates the possibility of cheap grace.

7.4.1 Beginning again at the beginning: Baptism and Repentance

Baptism with the Holy Spirit, according to Barth, is a beginning which points to the future (redemption). Growth in the New Testament, in his view, is totality of movement.

It is not to be understood merely as the progress which corresponds to the beginning. In all its actions the work of the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere a wholly new thing. At each moment of its occurrence it is itself another change, a conversion, which calls for even more radical conversion.  

For Barth the life of the Christian is one of “daily penitence, a constant stretching after the new possibilities which are offered him, a never-resting striding in the light of the divine invitation and command which constantly encounter him afresh.” As Barth observes, “the goodness of God – including specifically the goodness of His work for our sanctification – is new every morning.” Thus we must always be open to the command of grace because it is an “openness which must be constantly renewed.” The command of God “cannot remain somewhere behind us as the past of an instruction and conversion already accomplished.” Barth presses further on this point by asking of the individual, “when does he not need to take new steps on the path of obedience and therefore to ask for new directions? ... Does not the beginning, and therefore the question of the will of God, always have to be a new event? The continuity of obedience can be guaranteed on man’s side only if he is not too proud always to begin at the beginning with this question.”

Growth, if there is any, is never linear. We cannot mark ourselves at one point and then in six months see how far we have come. We are constantly called back to the beginning to avoid any

251 Barth, CD IV/4, 39.
252 Barth, CD IV/4, 39
253 Nimmo, Being in Action, 63.
254 Barth, CD III/4, 629.
sense of self-congratulation; good human action is always trustful submission to the action of God. And though we will sin, the ethics emphasized by Barth in baptism is not one that seeks for assurance in ones actions. “Christian baptism looks first to God’s election, and only in the light of this (as its reverse side) to His hate and rejection. It looks first the victory of Jesus manifested in His resurrection, and only then and on this basis to the judgment which is passed on us men in this victory (‘I, I and my sins...’).” In Christian baptism, Barth tells us, we are not to be burdened by the anxiety that comes as consequence to our inevitable failures, nor are we to try and make amends for ourselves “which has long since been taken care of in Jesus Christ.” Put simply, we believe in the forgiveness of sins, in which the only response can be praise and rejoicing. Baptism is the repetition of new beginnings which will bear fruit in due season in the one baptized. When we are able to humbly return to the beginning, i.e. our baptism, then baptism cannot be a cheap grace.

While repentance through many beginnings solves the problem of cheap grace we are still left with the problem of beginnings in relation to a non-sacramental of baptism. If baptism is a beginning where is the place we encounter grace afresh? The answer should be the sacraments, but Barth abandons this. Had he kept to the secondary objectivity of the sacraments and the necessity of the sacramental area of the Church as we noted earlier, the view that baptism is one of continual beginnings would make more sense. Baptism is the beginning to which the Christian is continually recalled through which our continual participation transforms our very being.

At the trysting place of baptism, God addresses me with his word of promise. I must live from moment to moment by faith in that word, never daring to rely on a past to do so. To yield to that temptation would be to abandon the despised trying place of baptism in the search for a glory of my own.

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255 Webster, Barth’s Moral Theology, 159.
256 Barth, CD IV/4, 81.
257 Barth, CD IV/4, 81.
258 Trigg, Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther, 171.
Baptism, the sacrament of beginnings, is found in the sacramental area of the Church. However, while we return to the Church, the home of our beginnings, the Church too is in need of this same repentance. It too is in constant need of grace.

7.4.2 Baptism and the Church

Just as baptism is for the individual the beginning of the Christian life it is also the sacrament by which both individual and Church are reminded of their beginning and their continual reliance upon and reception of grace. Made up of individuals that are baptized, the Church is nothing less than the baptized Church and as such in Barth’s view it is also the repenting Church. The question of what we must do – the church’s witness – has necessarily also to do with the Church’s continual need for grace and repentance. No doubt, the practice of baptism and the call to be the *ecclesia semper-reformanda* are inextricably intertwined. Barth affirms with Luther that ‘there is no sinner so great as the Church.’ Just as with the individual Christian Barth maintains that holiness is never something the Church can posses because Christ himself is holy. In *CD IV/1* Barth gives a stark picture of the Church, who, like the individual is need of constant repentance and conversion

The community may sometimes be pushed to the wall, persecuted, suppressed and outwardly destroyed, as has actually happened to Israel in many of its historical forms both past and present. What is worse, it may, like Israel, be guilty of failure and error. It may deny its Lord and fall from Him. It may degenerate. Indeed it has never existed anywhere expect as a Church which has degenerated to a greater or lesser, a more serious or a less serious degree: not even in the New Testament period and certainly not according to the records of Church history, and, worst of all, where it has been most conscious and boasted most loudly of its purity – just as, according to the Old Testament, Israel does not seem at any time to have been – and, least of all, in the times of supreme self-consciousness – what is was ordained to be in faithfulness to its faithful God. The Church stands in the fire of the criticism of its Lord. It is also exposed to the criticism of the world and this criticism has never been altogether false and unjust. It has always needed, and it always will need, self-examination and self-correction. It cannot exist except as *ecclesia semper reformanda* – if only it had always understood itself in this light and acted accordingly!...Taking it all in all, the community of Jesus Christ in the world may at times be clothed with every kind of pomp and glory; but what a frail vessel it is, exposed to every kind of assault, and actually assaulted both outwardly and above all inwardly!²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Barth, *CD IV/1*, 689-90.
Repentance acknowledges that we are neither perfect nor satisfied with our imperfection. Repentance is the humble act that allows us in our imperfection to be vulnerable and sit in our dust and ashes at the foot of the cross and acknowledge together that we are nothing except by the grace of God. The Church which prays, ‘forgive us our trespasses’ is the Church that knows and confesses that it is in need of forgiveness of sins. In fact any Church that claims to be perfect in form and structure and doctrine cannot be a Church that needs repentance and in Barth’s view, is in fact a false church. Through repentance we humbly embrace our imperfection and brokenness, acknowledge that by grace God holds all things together in his loving hands. It is an acknowledgment that only when we are weak are we made strong.

7.5 Discipleship and Worship

That the Christian life is defined by constant conversion to repentance and humility is, perhaps, why prayer for Barth is the greatest act of witness for Church. By coming together we acknowledge that only God’s name and not our own is to be hallowed. In asking for God’s kingdom to come we acknowledge that the division in ourselves and in his body that is the Church has been overcome in Christ. In humility we come knowing that we are not worthy of even the crumbs that fall from the master’s table and yet boldly ask for daily bread.

We saw earlier in chapter one the importance Barth placed on the worship of the Church in forming disciples. By the end of the Church Dogmatics we come to discover that prayer is the life – the ethical task – that defines children of God. Furthermore, baptism is not just the beginning of this life but is itself a prayerful act.

7.5.1 Baptism as Prayer

Karl Barth ends his exposition on baptism by concluding that baptism is prayer, i.e. the prayer of hope in Jesus Christ. It is through the act of prayer that the Christian and the Christian community together witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our distinct action as Christians: “the community and the world move [toward Christ] only in the specific act of their prayer.”

Through prayer we encounter the true and present reality of God’s grace. Prayer as Barth

260 Barth, CD IV/4, 208.
defines it is not the kind that sits back with folded arms, nor is it the kind that desires to take control. Prayer with hope in Jesus, Barth tells us, “means an end of all idle gaping, the strongest possible break with all neutrality or passivity, and a going to it with the freest resolution. It is a prayer that the baptising and the baptized make together because they realize they are no match for dark and cloudy future and hazards the lie ahead. To take the step of baptism is for the Barth the very act of prayer that overcomes any worry about the future and as such it is an act of the most “calm, assured and cheerful hope in which they take this first step of the Christian life, just because and to the degree that it is prayer directed to the God who waits for them there in the person of Jesus Christ, and who has already come to them from thence in His person.”

The act of prayer conforms to the humanity of Christ and is appropriate to our relationship with God. It is our responsible action to the commanding God of grace. As Barth tells us “where there is prayer, man’s relationship to God is corrected and it is in order.” Baptism as prayer is the act in which we let God be God and God be our God. It follows the covenantal ordering of divine action followed by human response, in that in baptism we are called and we can call upon God in return. In prayer, i.e., worship, divine and human come together in genuine encounter:

The purpose of fellowship between God and man, and therefore of the relationship of command and obedience that characterizes it, is determined in the covenant of grace by the fact that God’s glory and man’s salvation, while they are so different, are not two things but one. God validates his own glory in his love, in being God as man’s Father and Savior, in being kind to man. It is up to man for his part to acknowledge the being, will, and act of God, and therefore as his beloved and elect child, judged, saved, healed, carried, and led by him, to praise him and to give him and him alone the glory.

Baptism as prayer is humble yet bold, “as prayer to God which raises no claim, as pure seeking, knocking, asking: Come, Lord Jesus! Veni Creator Spiritus! it is unequivocal obedience to God, an unequivocal answer to His justifying and sanctifying work and word.” Quite interestingly, prayer, even though it is a fallible human action is a saving action because it honours Christ in

261 Barth, CD IV/4, 210.
263 Barth, TCL, 30.
264 Barth, CD IV/4, 210.
His grace and freedom. Baptism as prayer is also the “constitutive action which makes a beginning and which is a model for all that follows. It is truly the first step of the Christian life in retrospect of which ethical reflection and ethical admonition are possible, necessary, permitted and commanded at every step which follows.”265 The image Barth gives for invocation and prayer is one of a child who encompasses all the themes we have to this point been discussing. Children not only most clearly exemplify baptism as prayer they also demonstrates how baptism is theologically fitting for the child, even, as I shall argue, according to Barth.

7.6 The Children and Their Father: the child as exemplar of invocation as genuine human action

Earlier in chapter two we determined that the relationship of affect to knowledge and faith is imaged most clearly in children. From this it was determined that Barth’s requirement that a person needs to have active faith when coming to baptism can, in fact, include the child. The child is also the best example of invocation as genuine human action in Barth’s view.

For Barth the call to pray the Lord’s Prayer is first an act of liturgical instruction. It is learning the language of worship. It is the type of worship Barth tells us that relies on fewer words because to use fewer words is to completely trust in the One the children of God call upon as Father who knows our needs in advance. It is to acknowledge that the Father knows better than we do ourselves. Our existence depends on the Father and to invoke the name means that the “one who calls on God know that he himself, along with everything and all things, is absolutely dependent and condition.”266

The very act of invocation that places us in relationship to the Father is our baptism.267 The God whose name we invoke is a personal God who hears and acts towards us.

He is a God who in overflowing grace has chosen and is free to have authentic and not just apparent dealings, intercourse, and exchange with his children. He is their free Father, not in

265 Barth CD, IV/4, 213.
266 Barth, TCL, 57.
267 Barth, TCL, 64.
a lofty isolation in which he would be the prisoner of his own majesty, by in his history with them as his free children whom he himself has freed. He does not just speak to them. He that he also be spoken to, that they also speak to him. He does not just work on and for them...he wills their work also. He for his part will not work without them.268

The God who comes into the far country is a God who desires to be in relationship with his children.

This personal God who is our Father is also the founder and head of the household of God, i.e. the Church. We become children of God by grace, which is the possibility of God and not ours, by the goodness of our Father in heaven.269 In Jesus Christ true reconciliation has been made between God and the whole world. In our baptism we die and are raised to new life in Christ. We piggy-back on the Sonship of Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead on our behalf and in our place. In Christ we can enjoy the intimacy and goodness of the Father.

Christian existence is the existence of a people who have no option but to cling, yet also wish to cling, simply to what he is for them, to what they already are in him, to what they may continually become from him and through him and to him. They are the children of God who are allowed and commanded to call upon God as their Father.270

However, while God is not, in Barth’s view an unchangeable, untouchable, immutable deity whose nature it is to do all the work, neither are the people he chooses for relationship with him destined for the life a marionette. The God who desires to be in relationship with his children also requires action on their part in order for the relationship to be fully realized. Indeed as Barth reminds us, the “movement of the children to the Father is, in very general terms, the commanded invocation.”271

### 7.6.1 Living as children of the Father: Beginning with Grace

The mode of Christian existence is one, Barth tells us, wherein we rely continually upon God’s grace to be fresh each day. We can only ask for daily bread that is promised afresh each day just

268 Barth, TCL, 104.
269 Barth, TCL, 73.
270 Barth, TCL, 76.
271 Barth, TCL, 86.
like the manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness. We are God’s possession; he is not ours. We are children of God by faith, which as we noted earlier is “a new act each day and hour, at war each day and hour with newly insurgent belief.” Christians never become but are always becoming, i.e. beginning again at the beginning. There is always something competing for attention in the Christian pilgrimage and thus we take our steps one by one only by grace.

The mode of existence for the Christian is one of being a beginner. As Barth says,

we encounter God “as those who are inept, inexperienced, unskilled, and immature, as children in this sense too – little children who are totally unprepared for it. The invocation “Our Father,” and all the Christian life and ethos implicit in this invocation, can never at any stage or in any form be anything but the work of beginners.”

We can never be virtuosos at the Christian life for to do this would be to cease to live by grace. If we are unwilling to assume childhood as Christians we cannot be children of God. In fact the spiritual life begins at the very point where spiritual skill ends.

In invocation to God the Father everything depends on whether or not it is done in sheer need (not self-won competence), in sheer readiness to learn (not schooled erudition), and in sheer helplessness (not the application of a technique of self-help). This can be the work only of very weak and very little and very poor children, of those who in their littleness, weakness, and poverty can only get and run with empty hands to their Father, appealing to him.

The paradox is that it is in this very weakness, this very smallness that we are strong. As immature babes we are dear children of God.

Precisely because of what the Son does, being human in this way – as a child – is not an ideal but a concrete reality. It is not something to be despised but lived. Whatever our age, our baptisms remind us that we are only ever infants of God, children on our way. As Augustine has said of baptism, “they went in as old men and came out as infants.”

272 Barth, TCL, 79.
273 Barth, TCL, 79. Baptism is not a skill to be learned but a relationship to be developed.
274 Barth, TCL, 80.
275 Barth, TCL, 80.
Not only do we discover our call to live as children of God through baptism we also learn the value of childhood. Barth tells us that Christmas is the birthday of every Christian. As such any Christological understanding of baptism cannot overlook an important aspect of Christology – Christmas. In the modern world that emphasizes getting through childhood, something merely to get through in order to embark upon ‘real life’ baptism – infant baptism – reminds us in the words of G.K. Chesterton, that “childhood is not a dull path to the bold highway of adulthood” it is a beginning worthy in itself. If Barth or any Christian believes in Christmas we should have every reason to believe in childhood.

The man [or woman] who believes in Christmas, in the Child of the Virgin, has the greatest possible reason for revering childhood. for...it was our true human childhood that the Son of God assumed and thus exalted. No man [or woman] should forget the time ‘when he was small.’ When seen in the light of Bethlehem, childhood has much to teach the adult. The child, the boy [or girl] I used to be or my own son [or daughter] at my knee, is a kind of icon of Christmas, a sling preaching of the kenosis. Of such is the Kingdom of heaven. Such is the King of Heaven.

The Word was made flesh, first, in childhood. And, the infant at baptism reminds us of the form in which grace comes: weakness and humility; first as a baby in wooden manger and then as immolated lamb on a wooden cross.

### 7.7 Infant baptism as sacrament

That infancy and childhood have sacramental significance can be drawn from Barth’s interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The exposition comes in CD I/2 §18 called “The Life of the Children of God” where themes of Church, Spirit and the Christian (moral) life are inextricably woven. In a rather profound and unconventional manner Barth interprets the neighbour in Luke 10:29-37 not as the one who confronts us in her need but as the one who “faces us as the bearer and representative of the divine compassion”! We encounter

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277 Saward, The Way of the Lamb, 73.

278 For a fuller exposition see Joseph Mangina “Stranger as Sacrament.”

279 Barth, CD I/2, 416.
our neighbour first as a gift of grace who summons us to joyful obedience to “go and do likewise.” In fact, in our encounter with the neighbour we are “actually placed before Christ. We repeat – actually” making it a sacramental event.

What is significant about this interpretation is that within it we see that the theological tenets Barth wishes to uphold are maintained while still holding to a sacramental view. For example, pertaining to the theme of divine grace followed by human action, Barth is strong to remind us that we are only able to love because God first loved us first. Yet, our love is a corresponding creaturely love which is not to diminish human love but to safeguard the genuineness of both divine and human action. The social aspect of the covenant also comes through. Just as we cannot baptize in isolation nor can we love in isolation: “love must always have an opposite, an object.” Finally, just as baptism with the Spirit demands gratitude through water baptism, so does God’s love not only rescue us from sin and death but claims us for the proclamation of God’s glory. Love to God, as in baptism and the entire Christian life, cannot be inactive.

Applied to the infant at baptism, we can understand the infant as our benefactor. Loved by God, she comes to us as a gift. And although prior to her baptism, she is not yet a member of the visible community, she is to be viewed by its already existing members from a Christian conception of humanity. In other words, it means that we are to regard the infant present for

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280 As Barth remarks, “[o]n His [Christ’s] lips the “Go and do thou likewise” is only Law because it is first Gospel. ...Before this neighbour makes His claim He makes his offer [of mercy],” CD I/2, 419.
281 Barth, CD I/2, 429.
282 Barth, CD I/2, 420.
283 Barth, CD I/2, 373.
284 Barth, CD I/2, 388.
285 Barth, CD I/2, 401.
baptism as one who already stands under the divine promise. We are able to do this because the Church regards the world as already changed by the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. We are able to do this because the Church regards the world as already changed by the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

Barth’s insight that we are to view humanity from the vantage point of Christ’s reconciling work helps with understanding indiscriminate baptism which asks the question of who among the baptized are the ‘true’ Christians. Barth notes that we can only accept one another as brothers and sister in Christ based on the outward sign of our baptism. We gather together in the name of Jesus Christ. We gather together in virtue of our baptisms because apart from Christ we have no other power by which we are able to take others and ourselves seriously as members of the body of Christ. Thus, Barth tells us that even though we might have every reason to think of fellow Christians as tares rather than wheat, we must take people at their baptisms and see them according to the verdict made upon them in Christ. For if it can be true of myself, says Barth, that I am a Christian, ‘in spite of everything against’ me then I am required to ‘accept that as a working hypothesis that other members as well as myself can be holy and not unholy.’ We see people as they are through the lens of the eschatological image of Jesus Christ through which we see dimly. However, in Christ through the foggy lens we can see the promise of perfection attained in and through Jesus Christ.

In fact, when we are able to see the infant as our benefactor we will also see that the primary gift she offers is her humanity. The infant encounters us in the very materiality of our existence – as

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286 Barth notes that our neighbour in posing the question towards us willingly or knowingly acquires a sacramental significance. I find this remark by Barth to be a compelling argument for an infant’s non-cognitive faith in that her being a neighbour and the grace being presented to us does not depend on the infant’s cognizance of the event.

287 “The Church would not take itself seriously if confronting the world it did not regard it as such a world already changed by this fact [i.e. that it has been encountered by Jesus Christ], if it did not find hope for man, not as such and before it has claimed him. ...It is only in the Church or from the Church that there has ever been a free, strong, truly open and confident expectation in regard to the natural man, a quiet and joyful hope that he will be my neighbour, a conception of humanity which is based on ultimate certainty.” (Barth, CD I/2, 423)

288 Barth, CD IV/2, 702.

289 Barth CD IV/2, 702.

290 Barth CD IV/1, 699.
human. Consequently she is our benefactor because she reminds us that we are exactly as she is: afflicted, weak, a sinner left for dead on the roadside in need of assistance.

The neighbour shows me that I myself am a sinner. How can it be otherwise, seeing he stands in Christ’s stead, seeing he must always remind me of Him as the Crucified? How can he help but show me, as the reflection of myself, what Christ has taken upon Himself for my sake? The divine mission and authority which the neighbour has in relation to me, the mercy which he shows me, is not to be separated from this revelation. But for that very reason it is a question whether I will accept this neighbour.  

The final thesis on the topic explaining who the children are is the fact that the child who calls upon God is not a singular child but the children of God, plural. The relationship that we declare in naming God as Father cuts across all other boundaries. As we are told in Ephesians the dividing walls have been brought down and our unified by calling God our Father. It is not a monolithic community Barth informs us but a “plurality of people” who called by the Father exist in responsibility to God and to each of the many members of the community. We worship together, we cry out “Father” as the communion of saints.

The knowledge of God who is Father, who is personal and through Christ puts us in relationship with him; and the knowledge that the children of God are those who in humility call upon the name Father; and the knowledge that the children of God make this invocation together as the communion of saints leads Barth to the third and final point of his section ‘The Children of God and their Father’. It is here where Barth explicates the relationship of responsibility and discipleship, i.e. ethics in relation to our vocation as the baptized community to worship God. It is also here that we can complete the bringing together of the arguments for the fittingness of infant baptism in Karl Barth and its analogous connection to attachment theory and what it says about our createdness to be creatures that love, i.e. creatures that worship and whose hearts are restless until they find rest in worship of the Father. It is to these conclusions that we now turn.

291 Barth, CD I/2, 431.
Chapter 5

“We’ve been running long before we learned to crawl” - Indigo Girls

8 Infant Baptism: A Baptism of Beginnings

The image of beginnings and returning to our baptism is for Barth the image of the child who calls upon her Father in heaven. Invocation – prayer – ventured in childlikeness is our primary act as children of God. The image of the child reminds us of our humble beginnings and our need to repent and become like a child as Jesus taught us. As Barth extensively shows in The Christian Life, we who are children of God remain utterly dependent on our Father in heaven. The paradox of the covenant of grace is that the freedom given through Christ is not one of autonomy but utter dependency, and children witness this most clearly because as the least of these it is their very nature to do so.

It is fitting that the primary image Barth uses for reconciliation is the image of God the Father who comes into the far country in order to reconcile with his children. And although Barth was wrong to reject a sacramental view of baptism, it is also fitting that baptism finds a place among Church practices that witness to this reconciling act. In order to demonstrate these connections I will draw on Barth’s imagery of reconciliation of God going into the far country, in the parable of the Prodigal Son in order to demonstrate how the ecclesial-affective dimensions of faith come together for a tenable view of baptism. Through the parable of the Prodigal Son, we will see how the themes presented in each chapter come together to show that Barth did not in fact need to reject a view of infant baptism.

8.1 Into the Far Country – The primacy of love in discipleship in the context of forgiveness and reconciliation.

We have noted that baptism is the place in which we are given new life through relationship with the Father. We also noted that infant baptism through the witness of the child reminds us that our humanity is such that we depend on grace for our existence. In baptism we give up the illusion that we know what is best for our lives. Finally, because in baptism we become a part of the community of the baptized, we also become responsible for those who are baptized; and for making ourselves accountable to the very same community of the baptized.
What follows will focus on the responsibility of the community but more importantly in keeping with covenantal ordering, that baptism is not about us but about God’s action towards us. To do this I will focus on the theme of the prodigal son as found in the ‘Invocation’ section of §76 of *The Christian Life*. It is in this parable that we see Barth’s concern for the primacy of divine grace followed by human action and how lives of obedience can only be ordered by the primacy of God’s love. Furthermore, it will link together the insights of the previous chapters that outlined the ecclesial-affective dimension of faith in order to show infant baptism in not only tenable but fitting within Barth’s own theology.

Retracing our steps briefly, we learned that baptism is our humble beginning. A beginning made possible through Christ and found in the church through the sacrament of baptism. It is the place of our birth; the place we are given our identity in Christ. The life we receive is by grace. Just as a child, by no act of her own, is born into this world neither do we by any initiative of ours become children of God. Our identity comes to us through Jesus Christ as mediated by the Christian community.

None of us ‘has’ our identity as something we own. All of us are in the position of having to integrate pain, frustration, and incompleteness into the overall fabric of our life’s story. Moreover, we also ‘suffer’ the actions of others upon us; while we like to pretend that we are strong, the fact is that we depend on others for our existence. The retarded [the infant, the least of these] bring this uncomfortable awareness to our existence.²⁹²

Just as a child relies upon her caregivers for strength and nourishment so too does grace teach us that we rely upon others for our existence. And, through this dependence we are made aware that our identity is found amidst the company of strangers.

### 8.1.1 Learning our Identity

Identity is learned through community. And while the truth that baptism establishes relationship with Christ and is maintained and developed in the life of the Church is true, an essential point needs to be made. That point is that in order to learn our identity as children of the Father, in order to learn that we are loved and how to love one another we must sit at the Father’s table. As those who have been baptized and identify with the risen Christ the place where we primarily

learn about God’s love and how to live it out is in our weekly worship. Barth tells us that our prayer “is the movement in which the children bring themselves to the attention of their Father and cry to him in recollection, clearly reminding themselves that he is their Father and they are his children. It is not God, of course, who needs reminding but the children who need to be reminded who he is and who they are.” We are reminded through our baptism and through worship, that we are children of God, marked as Christ’s own forever. We learn what it means to live out our first and primary vocation, to be human, as Barth puts it, “to be what we already are”. The gathering together of the community every week is not just some boring thing Christians do. It is a testimony to the world of God’s love for it and a reminder to us of that same love. Furthermore, as we noted in chapter two worship of God orders our desire towards him. Baptism because it is both the act and place wherein relationship with God is established, is also the place where we learn our identity and to whom we belong.

8.1.2 The necessity of worship

That learning the truth of who we are in Christ requires immersion in the community is exemplified in a story narrated by psychologist Gordon Neufeld. He tells the story of an adolescent who is unattached to his parents that love him and as a result has been filling his desire for love with what society tells him will. Neufeld, who worked with the youth in his practice knows his family and says that Nicholas’s family loved him very much. “But” he goes on to say “[Nicholas] wasn’t feeding at their table; he was looking to his peers to fulfil his attachment hunger.” The truth being communicated is that it is impossible to feed someone who is not sitting at the table. It is impossible to satiate or fulfil the needs of a person who is not actively attached and oriented towards the person willing and able to provide those needs. And what is true in terms of the relationship of Nicholas and his family is also true of our relationship with God. Eating together is one of the most significant attachment rituals in all of human history. Thus it is not surprising that God chose it as one of the main means in which we come to know and share in his love. Not surprising either that the Eucharist has historically been the

293 Barth, TCL, 85.
294 Neufeld, Hold Onto Your Kids, 156
meal of the baptized. Because of this, it is imperative that we not give up meeting together because it is impossible to know God’s love, to have it penetrate our beings and inform our lives if we are not partaking in his feast and showing up for the party. In fact by not coming to the table, we deny ourselves the nourishment needed and offered through fellowship together, in order to sustain us in our spiritual journey which as a Christian is nothing less than your everyday life.

Furthermore, we must be willing and humble enough to sit at a table made up of tax collectors and sinners, Christians lukewarm and hot. We cannot be like the elder son who refused to sit with his brother at the table. Barth puts it this way, “Christians who regard themselves as big and strong and rich and even dear and good children of God, Christians who refuse to sit with their Master at the table of publicans and sinners, are not Christians at all, have still to become so, and need not be surprised if heaven is gray above them and their calling upon God sounds hollow and finds no hearing.”

Reflecting upon the parable of the prodigal Son we learn that both sons, one in wandering and the other in not participating in the feast, refused to take part in their Father’s love for them. It is only through the life and relationships of the Church that we can hear and experience that we are loved. However, to know this and to experience this we must show up at the table, we must return to the grace of our baptisms. As we participate in the life of the Christ’s body that we learn that we are God’s children. We learn and are reminded of the truth that as God’s children we are always welcome and always have a place. However, the truth that God loves us, so much in fact that he died for us and offers to us the bread of life, the cup of salvation and a family that numbers more than the sands on the seashore, cannot be known if we are not present. If we are not there to receive it cannot nourish us. Each time we choose not to come to Church it becomes increasingly easier and easier to replace God’s love with the world’s which does not and cannot

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295 Barth, TCL, 80.
satisfy. We do well to hear the words of one theology professor who has chided that “there are no lone-ranger Christians.”

Worship, gathering together, is not only necessary for learning our identity it also necessary as the place where can find grace. For not only is baptism the place of our beginnings as Christians, it is also the home that many of us at one point or another have, or will leave. As Barth reminds us in the *Christian Life*, the work of invocation is the work of “naughty children of God who have willfully run away again from their Father’s house, found themselves among swine in the far country, turn their thoughts back home, and then – if they could – returned to their Father.”

As we noted earlier, baptism is the sacrament of many beginnings.

And while we will leave and come back the amazing thing is that just like the prodigal son who upon leaving home never loses his identity as his father’s son, so too, we also cannot be unbaptized or cease to be children of the Father. Nimmo describes the power of grace presented in Barth as follows:

> In the priority of the Gospel over Law in the Word of God, no matter to what extent the self-determination of the individual is perverted by his sinfulness, it will be the grace of God which triumphs. Barth concludes of the individual, ‘He may let go of God, but God does not let go of him.’

Here relationship is reconciled permanently because from God’s end it can never be severed. The love of the Father is perfect.

### 8.2 Baptism as secure base: Discipleship as ordered by love

The parable of the prodigal son which teaches us the dependent nature of our lives, the importance of community for finding identity and the need for a way home so that growth is possible, are the very same truths articulated by John Bowlby’s attachment theory and the

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296 Margaret O’Gara. Here, it should be noted the imperativeness of taking our children to Church. Just as children are unable to feed themselves so also children are unable to get themselves to Church where they are nourished and fed as God’s children. As the least of these it is our responsibility as those who are able to ensure that the whole body of Christ is receiving the nourishment that it needs.

297 Barth, *TCL*, 80.

concept of the secure base. Bowlby believed that the secure base, from which a person goes out to explore and return from time to time is crucial to how an emotionally stable person develops and functions throughout life. In a similar way, the Church (the sacramental or ethical sphere) is crucial for the development of the Christian, particularly in the lives of infants, children and adolescents.\(^{299}\) Baptism can be seen as the secure base in which we have our beginning and the place that we return to again and again and find forgiveness and discipline within the context of unconditional love.

Attachment theory emphasizes that discipleship and growth, are only possible within the context of right relationship and unconditional love. This emphasis on the primacy of love (right relationship) means that discipleship as it relates to baptism and the Christian life “is not primarily a matter of getting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into your head in order to guarantee proper behavior; rather, it’s a matter of being the kind of person who loves rightly – who loves God and neighbour and is oriented to the world by the primacy of love.”\(^{300}\) Love in connection with baptism means that discipleship within the community is not primarily a skill to be learned but a relationship to be cultivated and developed. Discipleship is not about making a list of what we should and should not do as Christians. The Church is called to be the place where a person can return to and be picked up and have the bruises dusted off and tears wiped away, with the assurance that they are still loved. It is the secure base – the place called grace.

To say that discipleship is not first about skill is not to neglect its importance, it is simply to say that immersion in and teaching of skill is meaningless without love. Theologian Stanley Hauerwas has noted that training is important for the Christian life “because training involves the formation of the self through submission to authority that will, \textit{if done well,} provide people with the virtues necessary to be able to make reason judgment.”\(^{301}\) The operative phrase is “if done

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\(^{299}\) Studies have shown that as early as two years old will be exact replicas of how they themselves have been treated. As Bowlby notes, “Indeed the tendency to treat others in the same way that we ourselves have been treated is deep in human nature; and at no time is it more evident than in earliest years!” (A Secure Base, 91). If this is the case in ‘secular’ human life, how much more so is it the case in our ecclesial life together?

\(^{300}\) Smith, \textit{Desiring the Kingdom}, 33.

\(^{301}\) Hauerwas, \textit{After Christendom}, 98.
well” because as Hauerwas also notes churches must also be communities of *care* and discipline. Attachment theory takes this further to say when we become communities of care we will become a place where discipline is possible because it is done within the context of secure loving relationship. The apostle Paul reminds of this in the famous love passage in 1 Corinthians 13.

For a long time Church and society has modelled discipleship on the behavioural approach, an approach that rewards right behaviour andpunishes wrong behaviour. It is an approach that denies relationship unless one acts rightly. In the Church it means that grace becomes the reward for right behaviour rather than the free gift offered that could bring about transformation in one’s behaviour. The problem is that right relationship is needed before right behaviour can be acted out. This is precisely the Gospel message that Barth wishes to express, in that God first puts us in right relationship, and then only after this does grace become a command.

The question that inevitably arises from a model of love and right relationship is the question raised by the older son in the story of the Prodigal who asks about the injustice of the grace imparted to his delinquent brother. It is the question that often surrounds indiscriminate baptisms. The scandal of the Gospel, however, is that the prodigal does not seek repentance after his Father tells him to shape up nor is the feast offered after he proves himself worthy. The feast was thrown and forgiveness was offered simply because he was his Father’s son. The same is true of our baptisms. We are welcomed because we are marked as Christ’s own. We are loved because we are God’s children. And the way back home to the baptismal tank is not marked by a list of do’s and don’ts but by grace. It is marked by the love of the cross.

A question to be asked of the Church is whether or not we are willing to do the hard work of forgiveness and reconciliation. It takes work and it costs something to disciple a member of the community. The cultivation of relationships does not happen overnight. It takes years and it is only a maybe that after these years true formation might begin to take place. A model of discipleship based on love and relationship, however, is not conducive to Churches that are concerned only with numbers and immediate results. And while it is true that our lives as Christians and as the Christian community are fragile they are firmly and gently kept in the hands of the One we call Father. Thus we can in confidence approach the throne of Grace to find
help in time of need, to find forgiveness when we have erred and reconciliation when we have wandered.

8.3 **Baptism as witness: An alternative way of being**

The last thing to be said about baptism in Barth is that in the context of the Church, baptism is the practice and place where we live out our calling as witness to be an alternative society. Invocation of God the Father is the work of the people; it is our spiritual act of worship. And for Barth as we have seen, baptism, within the sphere of the Church is the reason that discipleship can happen and the grace through which loving one’s neighbour is a possibility. Through the grace at baptism a new family is established in contrast to the world for the life of the world.

In our baptism we are chosen for a life of witness. It is a calling necessary for our own life as the baptized community and the life of the world

The world needs this witness, and its content has to do with the world’s salvation. Christians are ordained, engaged, empowered, and separated to declare this witness in its midst. They owe it to their Lord, the world, and not least their existence to do this. (Barth, *TCL*, 97)

The worship of the community is the place that witnesses to what is real. When we call upon God our Father we declare to the world that the way in which it lives is not how things should be. The work of our worship, i.e. liturgy, is purposed to be ordered to God and order us to God instead of the world. It is also to witness to the world that Christ offers something different and more satisfying.

In the nexus of human history as a whole, Christians in their special nature are not outsize figures, not prodigies. They are certainly not miracle workers or world-renewers. They are indispensable ordinary little people with the task of doing here or there, in this way or that, what is entrusted to them and demanded of them, namely, passing on the news of the mystery and miracle of the renewal of all things which has taken place in Jesus Christ and which in the last time of ours is moving toward its definitive manifestation.  

As we saw in the beginning chapter the life of the Church is for the life of the world. Barth is adamant, that the invocation of God is “a supremely social matter, publicly social, not to say

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302 Barth, *TCL*, 98.
political and even cosmic.”\footnote{Barth, \textit{TCL}, 95.} It is not only for our sake but for the sake of the world that Christians cry “Our Father”

Finally, in this extension the very odd thing that a few Christians do (whether they are few or many makes little difference), namely, their invocation of God the Father, acquires the character of a serving function in the life of human society, of a contribution to world history that is indispensable as an antidote. In all quietness and concealment, expecting no recognition or thanks but also fearing no disappointment or futility, they do what is not just in their own interest but very much in the general and public interest.\footnote{Barth, \textit{TCL}, 100-101.}

8.3.1 Conclusion

The first is the claim of attachment theory that we are created as persons of desire who need to be loved and in right relationship with those around us. Augustine famously summarizes this truth when he says, “our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee’ and theologians for centuries have written on this very truth. Theologian C.S. Lewis named this longing or ache, \textit{Sehnsucht} which is a profound, unquenchable yearning that we all try to deal with in various ways. Karl Barth also refers to our restlessness as humans and our desire to be ordered to the God which is Jesus Christ. The second claim of attachment theory and related to the first is that as beings ordered by love and our need to be in relationship an understanding of human cognition must include the role of affect (emotion). Most of our knowing and formation happens before we can ever articulate it; however, it has the ability to have significant impact later in our lives. Finally, the third main claim also related to the previous two, is that our affect or our loves are ordered by the practices of the communities and relationships in which we find ourselves. All of these claims are related to the image of the secure base where all of these are to some degree, supposed to be provided in the life of the child as well as the adult.

Each of these claims has significant implications for how the Church understands its practices in relation to the life of her members, particularly in terms of teaching and discipleship. The truth that we yearn for love and that formation happens primarily at the level of our emotions means that we need to have more of an awareness of the practices in which we engage. Furthermore, because formation at the ‘non-cognitive’ level, happens in community, it is crucial for there to be
good mentors and loving communities in order for good formation to take place. Finally, just as attachment theory is a prophetic call against the present way in which we have been living – believing that we do not need community, tradition or authority – that goes against the created order, so too must the Church’s practices and her members witness against the non-reality of the world by witnessing the reality that is the Kingdom of God. The practice of baptism does just this. Rooted in the liturgical life of the community, it witnesses to the reality that we are liturgical beings oriented to be in relationship with one another; that as the baptized community of God we are called to be responsible for the life her members through discipleship for the purpose of witness to the world.

In the theology of Karl Barth we have an ethic of creation by which we are called to take seriously the way in which we are created as human beings – including our potential and limitations. The theology of the covenant as analogous to the theory of attachment demonstrates that Barth’s belief that the love of God witnessed and revealed through Jesus Christ is so profound it cannot not transform a person. Furthermore, this love is to be witnessed and modeled by those who have been called by this love in the calling of their baptisms.

Baptism for Barth is the sign in which we recognize the other, and our connectedness to them as essential for our own human existence, as well as our ability to carry out the command to love as Christ loved us. Thus the Church is called to be the secure base (the Father’s House) where people are loved unconditionally and trained in the way they should go. It is the very place where loving intimate bonds are created which allow for discipleship to take place.
Bibliography

Karl Barth

Primary Resources


Secondary Resources


**Baptism and Liturgy**


**Neuroscience and Attachment**


