IN SEARCH OF A RESPONSIBLE FREEDOM
IN A POST-CHRISTENDOM WORLD:
A Reconsideration of Karl Barth's Social and Political Thought
In the Context of His Overall Development

by

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Abstract

The work is one of detailed exegesis of Karl Barth's social and political thought, in the context of his moral theological development. It questions the emphasis placed upon the influence of socialism in the production of Barth's theology arguing that this emphasis has resulted in prejudicing the reading of his social and political thought as socialist. Summary examination of Barth's moral theological development, along with detailed exegetical analysis of Barth's most significant political writings reveals that Barth sought a theologically responsible account of responsible freedom (discipleship) in the context of the post-Christendom world he inhabited. The new developmental hypothesis offered shows the later Christological emphasis founds the moral theological alternative which the earliest Barth identified as requisite to meeting the challenge freedoms brought. It is also suggested that the application of a responsible Christian witness that Barth proffered was, in determination for application, nearer to that of a political aesthetic than ethic. The work does not deny a socialist tenor implicit in the works only the impression left by the later reception of his thought that it was socialist in intent.
It is with heartfelt thanks that I wish to acknowledge the role played in the production of this work by John Franklin; Dr’s John Webster, Donald Wiebe and Jonathan Chaplin each of whom were instrumental in providing the necessary encouragement and support for its completion. Yet none deserves acknowledgement more than the many years of devotion of my wife Maureen for her support through the three degrees necessary for its completion.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Political Barth: to Date</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Liberal Barth: Youth and University Days</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle Barth: The Safenwil Years</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tambach: The Christians Place in Society</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mature Barth: Göttingen and Beyond</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Community and the Civil Community</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barth's Later Political Thought: The Mature Ethics Applied</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-notes</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

It is in Berne in 1904 that Barth began his theological studies and, in a manner typical of the left-leaning university student, ‘for the first time stepped on political ground.’ While at Berne, he became an ‘enthusiastic member’ of the Swiss Zofinger (student) Union (elsewhere identified as Zofingia). On January 20th, 1906, he brought to the attention of the movement an issue that he claimed had ‘preoccupied [him] since the day [he] entered Zofingia and [had] become a matter very close to [his] heart.’ As evidence of the concern, he cited the increase in the broader social order’s political unrest over the growing economic disparity. However, as will be shown in this work, the social concern he addresses is really much more rudimentary.

In response to this unrest, Barth criticizes the movement for its high membership dues, which he believed only contributed to this social disparity. He contended it would be ‘among the higher tasks of the Zofingia … to work towards bridging the social gap.’ He warns that failure to do so would be to risk becoming a ‘clique of the good society,’ putting ‘a social activity at its center, i.e. the social education of its members … seriously at risk.’ He proposed that the movement ought to make an adjustment in its fees, to allow for greater ‘class diversification’ and that its current members ought to practice greater personal humility by not emphasizing their social privilege.

Thus already in the young Barth’s third semester of university studies, there is evidence of a social consciousness. Its theological character is manifested, in part, by his effort to draw upon the tradition in addressing issues of political significance. Depth in both areas would come with further experience in academic and pastoral settings, but even here there is evidence of elements that would not change. It is in the theological premise upon
which he locates the justification for his propositions that the impetus for the development that will follow is found.

The present work argues, through a detailed analysis of three of Barth’s most comprehensive political writings, each in the context of his theological development, that the most significant concern affecting the development of Barth’s social/political thought was how to address the modern social/political conditions that formed the current context of the Church’s life. What preoccupies Barth is how to accommodate, theologically, precedence for Divine sovereignty and respect for human freedom, in the exercise of human political and moral responsibility, in a way that neither distances the divine subject from the affairs of the human nor eliminates the human. I show that it is his addressing of this pressing cultural issue, in particular as it affects the interface of the Church and the broader social order, and not a particular political ideology that influenced his social/political thought’s development most.

In doing so, building upon what is a growing consensus regarding continuity in Barth’s theology, I affirm that ‘[o]ne of the major ways Barth was in conversation with his nineteenth century heritage was in his preoccupation with giving an account of the relation of God to humanity.’ What distinguishes the work from previous works is the attention paid to comprehensive exegesis in analyzing the major social/political writings themselves, with each also being understood in the context of his theological and moral development. The intent of the work is to allow Barth’s works to speak for themselves in the context of his development, showing how his attempt to address the identified concern affects his social/political thought.
Outline:

The work opens with a history of the reception of Barth’s social/political thought. Here the argument is made that, with its over-emphasis on the question of a socialist influence, research fails to appreciate the true nature of his thought’s development, in particular its failure to read his mature thought independently from his earlier work. In this way, both the received understanding and subsequent criticisms of Barth’s social/political thought are to be found wanting. As will be made clear in the remainder of the work, reception of his mature thought has been distorted, in particular by its narrow focus upon what was nothing other than a particular application of his later thought and no more.

The work then proceeds in three sections, each in two parts in which, following discussion regarding Barth’s moral/theological development, I turn to analysis of the relevant political writing. The first section covers his earliest development in the home and at university. Here he is shown to be very much a man of his times and of his faith. In his earliest lecture, he identifies the challenge freedoms represent to social order, but advocates a moral theological answer as essential to meeting it and not the political solution of the Social Democrats. It is a particular desire to be true to both the new social/political context and the theological tradition, I argue, that explains his attraction to Herrmann and him subsequently becoming subject to the influence of the Neo-Kantianism of the Marburg school. There, his appreciation for modernity’s challenge is deepened and his initial theological method adopted.

This examination of his earliest development is followed with an exegetical examination of the first political work, “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice,” in which I demonstrate that Barth’s support for Religious Socialism was tenuous at best.
Contemporary Religious Socialism is again criticized by Barth for its effort to achieve its aims through a political programme. With appeal to Christ’s life and ministry, the moral/theological position he had already advocated in 1906 once more serves to differentiate Barth from Religious Socialists. It will be shown in the subsequent section that the moral significance of Christ’s approach to those he ministered to reinforced Barth’s conviction and furthered his development.

The second section traces the origin of Barth’s rejection of his Liberal roots and of movements such as religious or Christian-socialism back to a common source. He comes to see that their negotiation of the Enlightenment heritage through the appropriation of its anthropology resulted in them becoming facile movements – movements that were, in fact, a betrayal of society. Thus, the influence of the Religious Socialism of his Safenwil experience on Barth’s political thought only serves to reinforce what he had already determined much earlier. His search for a surer negotiation involves a departure from contemporary modern theologies. It initiates a return to Scripture and a critical re-appropriation of the traditions of the past in preparation for his first Romans commentary, later revised in a second Romans commentary.

In the midst of the publication of these significant works, ‘Barth’s first major treatment of an ethical theme following his departure from the Liberal tradition’ is composed. It is the second political writing to be considered here. “The Christian’s Place in Society” addresses the question in the context of contemporary post-war Europe. Here his new direction is conceptually reflected in a recognized post-Christendom independence of the State and criticisms of prevalent approaches to Church involvement in State affairs, to which he offers an alternative conception of ecclesial participation in the social order.
In the opening to the third section, I review how the particular directions taken in the initial commentaries were informed by Barth’s concern to address the problem of a modern anthropology with its political implications, yet that the dialectical theology that informed them proves unsatisfactory. However, it is shown that under the influence of Calvin and other reformers, there is soon found the direction to be taken in Barth’s mature theology. In the brief survey of the development of this period, attention will be given to the part that election and covenant played. First, I will visit its genesis in the Göttingen Dogmatics then suggest the new direction’s influence on his Münster Ethics and politically in the Barmen Declaration. Finally, I will revisit the mature account of election provided in the Church Dogmatics. For it serves as the means of theologically accommodating the problem of human freedoms that John Webster correctly argues unified Barth’s theology.

In the opening of the exegetical material that follows Barth’s “Rechtfertigung und Recht” (Justification and Justice) will be given significant attention first. For it is there that Barth’s N.T. exegetical arguments in support of a relatively independent social order are provided. These arguments are presupposed in and provide the appropriate context for considering the last of the major works to be analyzed: “The Christian Community and the Civil Community.” In that work, Barth accommodates the ‘long recognized’ independence of the social order, now supported biblically, in an account of Christian social/political involvement in its most mature form.

In a further chapter, drawing upon the work of John Howard Yoder, I elaborate on the political implications of the post-Christendom yet non-secular nature of Bart’s last major political writing. The mature writing and what it argued, not how it was illustrated, are then analyzed in light of further dogmatic and ethical material from his Church Dogmatics. It is
made clear that what Barth advocated was an enlightened, personal, political responsibility in which the individual was encouraged to think *for* him or herself, but not *of* him or herself. For Barth, God’s relationship with humanity, as revealed in Christ, is the spiritual norm that shapes ecclesial participation in civil affairs by which it is enabled to support the cause of the civil community honestly and calmly in the patient expectation of that which it proclaims. Whereas, on the surface, Barth’s earliest work may be read as an apologetic for socialism, it is now made clear that he believes a general direction had been given in Christ, yet was not to be systematically applied in any one direction.16 Rather, God’s action in Christ is to serve as the source of direction for enlightened, independent social/political responsibility true to its divine master and relevant to the particular times.

The results of this study will then be brought together in a suggested alternative to the socialist-driven developmental paradigm and its value defended. The concerns raised regarding the perceived ethical lack in Barth’s writings are evaluated with an alternative understanding provided and proposed ecclesial reforms, conducive to embodying the radical alternative Barth provides, offered with reference to another of Barth’s works.
Apart from the Nazis – who, in July 1934, banned Barth’s theological response to the political crises of the day in his “Theological Existence Today!” – and those sensitive to their war machine, relatively little attention was paid to the significance of Barth’s social/political thought, until the last quarter of the twentieth century. Yet, interest in the political Barth was not unheard of. It was present from the beginning of Barth interpretation, but the reception over time was mixed. There were those whose interest was born of Barth’s union with the Confessing Church and the drafting of the *Barmen Declaration* against the German Christians. Yet, upon his failure to adopt an anti-Communist stance following the war, ‘His voice now sounded disappointingly equivocal and faltering to many who had become accustomed to look to him for a forthright lead...’ Few were very generous in their evaluations afterwards. And Reinhold Niebuhr’s assessment, according to which Barth ‘disavows political responsibility in principle,’ soon became the ‘standard view’ and remained so for the next quarter century and more.

That such a conclusion was reached of Barth, who took it upon himself to establish unions in his early pastoral work, who later produced the *Barmen Declaration*, resisted Western anti-communism and, in his occasional writings, applied himself politically more than in any other way, is hard to imagine. This eventually led Joseph Bettis to conclude that those prone to this evaluation were likely committed to a narrowly conceived political and social ethic and ‘what they really meant was that they didn’t like his socialist politics or
radical ethics.’ However, Bettis’ conclusions were made in retrospect. They were themselves formed in the light shed on Barth’s work by the interpretation that eventually challenged the standard view. This more recent interpretation was defined by the work of F.W. Marquardt, published as *Theologie und Socialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths.*

**Marquardt’s thesis:**

In 1972, F.W. Marquardt woke Barth scholars from their dogmatic slumbers with his proposal that Barth’s ‘theology must be understood as the conceptual side of a lifelong socialist engagement.’ Marquardt argued that Barth’s early works ‘exemplified conceptually a “contextual theology”’ in which Barth ‘conceives of “God’s revolution” as a principle of change in sociopolitical conditions.’ The particular context that it was believed most informed the socialist interpretation of Barth was Barth’s Safenwil pastorate in which he defended the need for socialist interventions in his parishioners’ lives. It was in this light that Marquardt then sought evidence for the influence of socialism in Barth’s theological writings. The work was initially submitted as Marquardt’s Habilitationsschrift to the Kirchliche Hochschule, but ‘the faculty ... graded the work as unscientific and refused to “habilitate” its author as a professor.’ When the work was eventually published, it aroused considerable interest among Barth’s interpreters.

Marquardt’s work immediately raised questions, in particular because of his privileging of the influence of this initial political context upon the whole of Barth’s theological development. Had Marquardt taken his own conclusions and imposed them upon Barth’s thought, even before letting it speak for itself? Was Barth’s theology, in fact, politically driven or not? These were the predominant concerns expressed in subsequent research. It is significantly limited to debating Marquardt’s thesis and the ‘attempt to define
that politics and its theological basis with renewed precision."26

The interpretive debate that was soon after ignited resulted in a split into opposing camps, ‘a “left wing” dominated by Helmut Gollwitzer and George Cosalis, and a “right wing” dominated by Hermann Diem and Eberhard Jüngel."27 This was, no doubt, a result of what George Hunsinger identified as the thesis’ main flaw: it ‘left the unfortunate impression that for Barth theology was something like a predicate of socialism, rather than the other way around.’28 As much as the socialist identifier may make it appear so, the initial thesis and the debate that ensued are not primarily concerned with Barth’s social/political thought. Rather, the concern is more with the question of a particular political influence upon his theological development. Those who begin with Marquardt’s thesis most often make too much of the socialist influence and want to find what Barth himself once described as ‘comrade Barth’ behind every action or remark that has any political significance.

Yet, there is no doubt that Marquardt’s thesis and the debate that followed advanced a long-ignored field of Barth research, for a dearth of research into the social/political Barth resulted from the earlier ‘standard view.’ The deficit was especially pronounced due to the significant amount of material dedicated to issues of political responsibility found in the man’s archives. From the very beginning of his academic career, during his student involvement in the Swiss Zofinger Union of Bern, social/political thought occupied a place in the life and work of Karl Barth. Occasional pieces occurred frequently throughout it and political writings are particularly abundant among his occasional writings in the decade leading up to and affected by the Second World War.29 The lasting significance of Marquardt’s work is perhaps best viewed in what he argued of Barth’s theological reflections: that they were at least in part contextually determined. Thus, John Howard
Yoder observes that, if nothing else, ‘Marquardt has done well to renew the proof that Barth never disavowed political relevance as some critics claimed, especially some Americans in the Cold War era.’

A void created:

Lacking from the growth of interest into the political Barth that ensued, however, is any detailed analysis of the man’s actual social/political writings. What attention has been paid to Barth’s political thought is subordinate to this narrower debate. Attention given to it is in the search of support for or against the side taken in the argument initiated by Marquardt. On the one hand, there are those who seek further support for Marquardt’s claim in the political writings. On the other, there are those who seek to contradict it arguing that Barth’s socialism is the product of his theology. Among them, Eberhard Jüngel does well to show how Barth’s socialist preference is theologically based. However, the presence of socialist themes in two of the more significant pieces, both of which will be considered here, appear to privilege the former of the aforementioned views.

The initial response to Marquardt’s work leaves the impression that, other than the insight into whether and to what degree his theology was driven by socialism or his socialism by theology, there was little else to be gained from study of Barth’s social/political writings. The majority merely seeks to consider its application in one way and not as illustrative of a general approach to political responsibility he may advocate. As a result, the available secondary material leaves the impression that Barth’s political thought is essentially socialist and that it might only be applied in a socialist direction. However, to assume that impression is true, especially of the later writings, would be to err greatly. Such a misinterpretation of those writings would be hard to justify with appeal to any significant
ambiguity in the writings themselves. Rather, it could only be due to a lack of detailed attention to their argument.

More recently, George Hunsinger better targeted the research with his return to concerns raised in 1931 by Dietrich Bonhoeffer ‘about the political relation between ethics and grace, or how God’s command and human obedience take concrete shape in the political contexts of the present.’ Hunsinger identifies the source of Bonhoeffer’s dissatisfaction as the lack of a ‘principle of concretion’ and believes him to have ‘put his finger on the weak spot in Barth’s political ethics.’ By a ‘principle of concretion’ is intended a means whereby the application of the Command of God to the particular might be directed. However, to reduce the application of Barth’s political thought to that of a principled or systematic ethic is to treat it in a form that, as has been well documented, Barth disavowed in principle. David Clough’s most recent treatment of Barth’s ethics attempts to explain why a systematic or principled ethic could not be expected. That this has a particular bearing upon his political thought will become clear in what follows. Robert T. Osborn, in his defense of a personalist account of Barth’s political ethics and what might be termed an incarnational ecclesiology, moved the discussion forward.

This less-than-consistent reception of the social/political Barth, along with the much-disputed reasoning that supports Marquardt’s interpretation of his thought in general, and the question of ethics and grace that continues to simmer, all suggest that what John Webster has observed elsewhere with regard to Barth’s moral theology is equally true of his social/political thought. ‘What is required more than anything else is detailed study of Barth’s writings which, by close reading, tries to display the structure and logic of his concerns without moving prematurely into making judgements or pressing too early the
usefulness (or lack of it) of Barth’s work for contemporary moral theology.\textsuperscript{36}

This work begins that process by looking to the works wherein Barth’s social/political thought receives its clearest and most exhaustive treatment. It is not so much intended to refute claims about the influence of socialism on Barth’s thought, although it explains that influence by putting it in its proper context. Its intent, rather, is to provide an analysis of the man’s most exhaustive treatments of social/political thought – three of which are expressly theological, the other more narrowly exegetical – in the context of his overall development, in an effort to show that there is far more to be gained from study of his thought concerning Christian involvement in the affairs of the social order than merely an insight into the question of socialism’s influence upon it.

**Barth and Socialism:**

Before launching into such detailed analysis, what is problematic about the strictly socialist reading of Barth’s political thought needs to be stated. To make the presence of socialism the primary concern when addressing Barth’s political thought is questionable at best, in particular because of the less than committed relationship he seems to have had with it. He clearly did join the Religious Socialist movement in 1915 while a Pastor in Safenwil, and he became a member of the Social Democratic Party later while in Germany. However, both moves were motivated by practical concerns, not a commitment to a political ideal. Barth himself declares in a letter to an engineer in East Germany in June of 1968 that, while in Safenwil ‘I was less interested in the ideological aspect of the party than in its organizing of unions.’\textsuperscript{37} The later Social Democratic Party alignment was with nothing more than the political body in Germany at the time which Barth believed best responded to the political concerns of the day. He joined it ‘in protest against the growing madness and the threat to
democracy.'38 His biographer, Eberhard Busch, further identifies the later involvement as a ‘practical political decision’ made in favour of what he believed to be the ‘requirements of a healthy politics’ and not the result of an ‘acceptance of the ideas and world-view of socialism.’39 Thus the two instances most readily identifiable as politically socialist in Barth’s career appear to be motivated more by pragmatic than ideological concerns.

However, the emphasis upon socialism is defended by its presence in two of his most exhaustive treatments amongst the occasional social/political writings, both of which will be considered here. “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice,” his earliest defense of socialist aims from Jesus’ teachings, is the most prominently socialist. His most mature political writing, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” is illustrated with political decisions which, when taken together, support a form of social democracy. Yet the two works appear at opposite ends of Barth’s career, are very different in their approach and it is a very different Barth who composed them. Perhaps the most under-appreciated element, for its significance, is the fact that the later work is only illustrated in this way.

Therefore, the question raised by John Howard Yoder of the difference he also observed between the early and the later Barth’s emphases is worthy of note:

The young pastor Karl Barth during the years from 1910 to 1915 was a socialist. He linked Jesus with the socialist cause, promoted the unionization of factory workers, and wrote open letters which were critical of factory owners. The Karl Barth of the Church Dogmatics, on the other hand, was no party member; indeed, to be engaged in the work of theology as an objective science was to be in the service of no partisan cause. Was the movement from the one to the other an organic growth, moving from one level to another within the same cause, or did the dogmatician outgrow the activist?40

What are the differences between the two works? And what developments in his thought lead to these changes? These questions will be addressed in this work. Here they lead into the debate regarding the general development in Barth’s thought. The debate’s results have,
as yet, to be satisfactorily applied when considering his political writings in particular.41

**von Balthasar’s thesis:**

The history of the enquiry into Barth’s development begins with one of the earliest significant studies of his theology by Hans Urs von Balthasar.42 In it, von Balthasar argues for a second significant shift in Barth’s development following that of his departure from the liberal theology of his theological mentors in 1915. This shift is manifested, he argues, in the turn from dialectic to analogy that occurred in the late 1920’s. It is argued that it occurs sometime during Barth’s study of Anselm, itself published in 1930 as *Fides Quae rens Intellectum*. It was a shift that he used to explain Barth’s abandonment of his first attempt of a theological prolegomena in his *Christliche Dogmatik* for that which would occupy him in his *Church Dogmatics*. And yet, ambiguity exists in von Balthasar’s work as it gives evidence of two possible locations at which the shift took place and, as Bruce McCormack has argued, and in reality he was ‘not at all sure where to place the *Christliche Dogmatik* in a periodization of Barth’s development.’43 More recently, however, several studies have challenged the validity of von Balthasar’s thesis. The combined witness of the different studies is that a greater degree of continuity exists in Barth’s post-liberal development than that recognized by von Balthasar.

Eberhard Jüngel’s ‘Von der Dialektik zur Analogie’ argues for a single break from his liberal student years.44 That which followed it Jüngel described as a ‘theology of the Word of God’, an expression which he believed to be ‘better suited [than the alternative ‘dialectical theology’] to describe the continuity in the path which Barth followed after the break with the theology of his teachers – though it was, to be sure, a winding path with several turns.’45 Jüngel admitted that a dialectical period began with the second edition of
Barth’s Romans commentary in which Barth refers ‘to the need to penetrate through the Bible to the “inner dialectic of the Sache” to which the Bible witnesses.’\(^{146}\) Which, Jüngel writes:

is intended to express the idea that not only speech about the Sache but also the Sache itself should be conceived of as dialectical. Accordingly, we are dealing here not simply with a dialectical knowing of being which in itself is undialectical; rather the dialectic in human knowing corresponds to a dialectic in the being to be known. The being to be known is itself dialectical.\(^{47}\)

Jüngel contends that the break with this dialectic would come following Barth’s reception of a pamphlet by Erik Peterson that challenged dialectical theology. In a written response to Peterson, Barth would contend: ‘The revelation of which theology speaks is not dialectical; it is no paradox …. That scarcely needs to be said’\(^{48}\) and then went ‘on to define “dialectic” in theology strictly in terms of a *Dialektik der menschlichen Erkenntnis* – a dialectic of human knowing.’\(^{49}\) With this change in his thinking, Jüngel contends, Barth would be able to move on to a non-dialectical theology of the Word of God. Thus, Jüngel’s work questioned the significance of Barth’s *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, but has its own problems, in particular the fact that dialectic remained a significant feature in Barth’s theology right on into the *Church Dogmatics*.

Ingrid Spieckermann would further challenge the von Balthasar formula in her *Göttserkenntnis*,\(^{50}\) wherein she focused on ‘the problem of identifying in detail where the truly new element in Barth’s post-liberal theology lay.’\(^{51}\) Two significant features were unveiled in her study. The first was the presence of a form of analogy as early as Barth’s Romans period. The second was a lack of evidence of any appreciable difference between the prolegomena of Barth’s first cycle of lectures on dogmatics, the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, and that of his second cycle of lectures, which is a revised form of the lectures first delivered
in Göttingen to be published in Münster. The particular significance of this finding was that ‘where interpreters in the past had at times been tempted to see the *Christliche Dogmatik* as the starting-point of a new phase in Barth’s development, [she] now saw clearly that any such new phase would have to be adjusted back in time, to begin in 1924 with Barth’s first lectures on prolegomena.’ These two material observations would lead her to claim that the post-liberal development was ‘a more or less continuous unfolding of a single material insight or intention …. to ground theology in the objectively real Self-speaking of God in revelation.’

McCormack once more criticizes the finding for the undue significance yet attributed to Barth’s *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, which is itself unnecessarily applied if analogical thinking is indeed already present much earlier.

Michael Beintker’s *Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths* is another significant contributor to the history of understanding Barth’s development. McCormack identifies this work as ‘without doubt the most important work to date on the period 1922-31.’ In the end, Beintker argues for the coexistence of dialectic and analogy. He also found evidence of ‘analogical moments’ amongst the dialectic in Barth’s earlier theology. He noted their presence as early as Barth’s Tambach lecture of 1919 and throughout the dialectical theology of the twenties. Their use, he argued, was “‘on the way’ to the later, more fully developed doctrine of analogy.” The earliest use by Barth of his *analogia fidei* is itself identified with the 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik*. Thus, the transition von Balthasar noted is found to be not nearly as defined or as critical as he believed. Beintker contends it was more of a gradual shift in emphasis than a wholesale abandoning of the one for the other. Yet, once more McCormack finds ambiguity in Beintker’s argument. For elsewhere he claims the dialectic wanes after its critical influence around the Romans II
period. However, this does not necessarily contradict what was earlier stated. The two can
indeed coexist and the one gradually lose its significance.

**McCormack’s alternative:**

What McCormack perceives as the inconsistent results of studies concerning Barth’s
theological development leads him to conclude that ‘as long as scholars seek to explain
Barth’s development in terms of dialectic and analogy the vacillation between locating the
more significant turning point at the point where it receives its final “deepening and
clarification” will continue.’58 Therefore, he offers his own argument concerning Barth’s
development, with the intention of refuting the Anglo-American neo-orthodox reading of
Barth. In it, he draws upon the varied results of recent research and builds upon
Spieckermann’s thesis that continuity governs Barth’s development after his break with
liberalism.

McCormack begins by clearing the minefield he believes to be created by von
Balthasar’s formula. Among other things, he observes that it doesn’t truly identify a shift,
for the concept of analogy is inherently dialectical. He also observes, however, that while
dialectic is a method, analogy is best described as a ‘conceptual tool.’ Therefore, the two are
not even at the same conceptual level to make a legitimate contrast. Above all, he believes
the ‘concentration’ on these conceptual resources fails in so far as it doesn’t ‘penetrate
deeply enough into the material theological conditions in Barth’s theology which gave rise to
[them] in the first place.’59 Therefore, he sets forth his own framework for interpreting
Barth’s development as an epistemological development. The development proceeds from
Barth’s beginnings as very much the disciple of Wilhelm Herrmann and the neo-Kantian
idealism he was influenced by. It continues through his break with the Liberalism of his
student years while in Safenwil. The development following the break is manifested in a turn to a ‘critical-realism’ and a ‘dialectical theology’ that is initially influenced by a ‘process eschatology,’ then by a ‘consistent eschatology’ and finally by an ‘Anhypostatic- enhypostatic Christology’ in two stages.60

The realism is not that of the ‘naïve metaphysically grounded realism’ of Medieval Thomism or the early reformers. What is intended, rather, is that Barth, in contrast to the idealism of the Ritschlian school, which treated God as a ‘postulated source of the moral ought, … now regarded God as a Reality which is complete and whole in itself apart from and prior to the knowing activity of human individuals.’61 The practical effect of this starting point was a complete 180 degree turn from the nineteenth-century attempt to ground theology in the subject ‘to theological objectivism.’62

Of further significance to the argument of the present work is the ‘critical’ element in Barth’s critical realism. It identifies the corrective to the naïve realism that didn’t take seriously the part played by the subject ‘in constructing the objects of knowledge’ and ‘simply identified first principles with the living God spoken of in the biblical witness.’ Barth, by contrast, is very much a child of the Enlightenment and presupposed:

1. the validity of Kant’s epistemology (where it touched upon knowledge of empirical reality), and 2. the success of Kant’s critique of metaphysics. The “real” for Barth was not the world known empirically. The truly “real” is the wholly otherness of the Self-revealing God in comparison with whom the empirical world is mere shadow and appearance. Moreover, there is no epistemological way which leads from the empirical world to its divine source. The metaphysical way taken by classical realism would remain forever closed to Barth.63

What is of note from the methodology McCormack identifies Barth to have grown into is its comparison with an earlier work of Colin Gunton in which it is argued that Barth provides a post-Christendom methodology.64 Its post-Ritschlian character reflects what
Gunton argues was the value in Kant for Barth. That is ‘he [compelled] theology to rethink its conception of rationality. Henceforward, theology [could] not depend upon some kind of consensus with philosophy …. It must rather recognize “the point of its departure for its method in revelation, just as decidedly as philosophy sees its point of departure in reason.”’\textsuperscript{65}

And the commitment to a Kantian epistemology reflects the challenge Kant posed: ‘theology would no longer be able to formulate its tenets, \textit{no matter on what foundation it might base them}, without having acquired a clear conception of the method of reason which it also uses in the construction of its tenets.’\textsuperscript{66}

In his own search for a foundation, Barth rejects the approach of experiential expressivism taken by Schleiermacher. Gunton observes that he comes to recognize, through interaction with Kierkegaard,\textsuperscript{67} that ‘Hegel’s programme was a repristination of Christendom.’ The death of such a programme would ‘require a rethinking of the relation of faith and reason.’\textsuperscript{68} Gunton argues that ‘Barth’s recourse to Anselm …. [and] “the method of reason which it also uses in the construction of its tenets”’ should be understood in this light.\textsuperscript{69} It is there shown that, along the way, Barth struggled to come to terms, in a theologically responsible manner, with the effects of the Enlightenment emancipation from external authorities.

\textbf{Towards filling the void:}

In the political writings to be considered here, the social/political implications of Barth’s evolving theological and methodological commitments are reflected in his efforts to relate the Church to the affairs of the emancipated State. It is reflected in his recognition of a necessary disjunction in the respective communities’ formative sources. It helps explain Barth’s gradual abandonment of modern ethical theory, which was based upon the universal
application of rationally derived moral principles. Moreover, it has a significant bearing upon his general conception of the Church and Society. This is first made clear in his 1919 Tambach essay ‘The Christian’s Place in Society,’ to be considered in the fourth chapter of the present work. It would come to its most complete expression in the pair of essays to be considered as representative of his mature social/political thought in the fifth chapter of this work. However, it is already evident much earlier and expressed in nuce in the criticism he makes of the religious socialists’ methods in the initial rendering of his political thought to be considered in the next chapter.

As his political thought matures, it becomes evident that he was striving to find a way to maintain a moral presence for the Church in the affairs of the social order without over-extending its call to represent Christ and slipping back into the confusion of its aims with those of the State. Such confusion is identified as the problem with Christendom, the collapse of which he welcomed. Under Christendom, the State imposed a Christian order upon the individuals existing within the Empire’s boundaries. Barth recognized early that this order presupposed a commitment that, to be real, had to be personal because humanity had been created free. Christ didn’t impose an order upon the society he inhabited, but promised blessedness to those who would follow in the way He called them.

Barth recognized that in this way, Christ was more socialist than the Religious Socialists Barth identified with early. He also knew that if ever a legitimate Socialism was to be realized, the free participation of a community of people of who all were wholly committed to its precepts would be required. Such a universality of commitment is implicit in the Kingdom Christ preached and promised to His followers. It is for this reason that Barth would later refer to the promised Kingdom as the only real State, one which was
indeed both nearest to socialist and democratic. Yet, the question of how to participate in the politics of one’s present social order, without becoming a reactionary seeking the recovery of Christendom or a revolutionary giving oneself over to a State in which all cats are grey, and not socialism per se is what pre-occupies Barth as his social/political thought matures.

**The developmental paradigm:**

To date, research into Barth’s development has been dominated by a particular developmental paradigm. In theology, it is determined by the splash he made in the academy and beyond with the publication of his first Romans commentary in 1919. The research devoted to the time before that event is largely confined to tracing the influence of the Liberal theology of his teachers and determining what led to his eventual break with their Liberalism. As a result, his development is described as beginning with the Liberal Barth, followed by the Barth of the Romans commentaries, and the later, mature Barth of the *Church Dogmatics*. Similarly, research examining the political Barth begins with his early comparison of Jesus Christ with the Movement for Social Justice in 1911. Again, apart from mention of the Liberal theological influence of his teachers, little more is said of the younger Barth. Then, in support of arguments made regarding Barth the Socialist, the majority proceed to examine only the material claims made in subsequent political writings.

This raises a significant question, the answer to which introduces the development followed here. First, what led Barth into the Liberal snare that is so often recognized and perceived to be pure error in his ways? Was it naïve judgement or did something specific lead him down that path? It is here argued that the embrace of the Liberal theology of his teachers was fuelled by interest in the moral/political liberation Modernity promised and the challenge it posed. It was a welcome liberation first personally realized by Barth in the
escape it allowed from the confines of his father’s positivism. However, for Barth, the challenge it posed could only be met with a moral/theological alternative. This can only be recognized if one gives sufficient attention to the earliest Barth and his personal moral development in its fullest sense.

This speaks to the issue concerning the nature of the development being traced here. It is not that of Barth’s political affirmations in isolation. It is here argued, as Webster observes of Barth, that ‘Barth’s moral theology cannot be grasped apart from its ontological force. His answers to the question: What shall the Christian do? is rooted in an answer to a prior question: what is moral reality?’ The answer to the latter question in particular is where the significant development occurs. The subsequent political affirmations, although similar in kind, are also markedly different. Thus without understanding this development, they cannot be properly understood. Not all of that development will be traced however, but only that which impacts upon his understanding of human responsibility.

The development being traced here is that of Barth the moral theologian, taking into consideration the appropriate political writings. First, there is the early Barth; the nascent moral theologian who embraces the freedoms of Modernity and subsequently the liberal theology of his teachers. This is followed by the middle Barth who, certain the challenge of Modern freedom could only be met with the Gospel, sets out in search of a more responsible alternative. The remainder covers the mature Barth who re-conceives how to accommodate theologically the acknowledged freedoms of a post-modern world without sacrificing responsibility to God. This permits him to conceive of what is best described as a truly modern theology of social/political responsibility, not a political theology.

It is best understood in that way, because the relationship between God and His
creation it presupposes is a living relationship in which ‘the power, the State as such, belongs originally and ultimately to Jesus Christ … in its comparatively independent substance, in its dignity, its function and its purpose, it should serve the Person and Work of Jesus Christ and therefore the justification of the sinner.’\textsuperscript{72} However, it remains a human institution, subject to the vagaries of human freedom. Thus, as Webster observes, ‘Barth laid special emphasis on the element of derivation and the dangers which attend the state’s renunciation of its proper role: “Caesar Worship, the myth of the State and the like.”’\textsuperscript{73} Moreover, Webster continues: ‘The element of the state’s relativity nearly always found its way into Barth’s political writing… This relativity is reinforced eschatologically (the heavenly city, he once argued, is ‘the only real state’); accordingly, Christian subjection is neither absolute nor direct.’\textsuperscript{73}
CHAPTER TWO

THE LIBERAL BARTH: YOUTH AND UNIVERSITY DAYS

In this chapter I argue that from the beginning, Barth was a man of his times and the theological environment in which he was raised. I show how from his earliest university days he was conscious of the social/political challenge that Enlightenment freedoms posed and how he drew upon his Christian heritage in arguing the solution was moral and not political. I argue that what attracted Barth to the liberalism of Herrmann was the attempt to accommodate the Modern world in the theology he represented. It was an attempt made in a methodological form Barth would initially adopt, but from which he would soon depart.

Earliest personal development:

‘WHEREVER THERE IS THEOLOGICAL TALK, IT IS IMPLICITLY OR EXPLICITLY POLITICAL TALK ALSO’

Upon entering study of Karl Barth’s moral theological development, it is worth noting a number of early biographical details that, if it weren’t for the topic and its particular manifestation in his life, might otherwise seem insignificant. The intention is only to suggest that the moral/theological soil, out of which would eventually develop remarks such as that cited above, was cultivated well before his university days.

He was born in 1886 at the conclusion of one of the most politically significant periods in Swiss history in which the benefits of its new constitution, forged in 1848, were finally coming to fruition. Similarly to Canada, the constitution made Switzerland into a federation out of its independent cantons (provinces), thus providing for a central authority, while allowing the cantons the right to self-legislate and so govern on local issues. Notably, this period of Swiss history was one in which a socialist ethos, rooted in the humanism of Ulrich Zwingli and others, had played a significant part.
Moreover, the evidence points to Barth’s upbringing in a context of at least two generations of engagement with the political concerns of the day. His parents’ household was one in which there was ‘… often a lot of political talk, of which they were fond.’ That this influence of political ideas in the immediate family context carried on into Karl Barth’s own experience is clear from his own reflections. He later wrote: ‘I still remember the sub-title of [Naumann’s] newspaper Die Hilfe (Help) [which read] “Help for God, help for one’s brother, help for the state, help for oneself”, which I sometimes saw on my father’s desk.’ These expressions, Barth recalls, ‘made an impression on me, though I could hardly understand them. I felt that something strong, great and new was on the way.’

That these impressions went deeper than a puzzled awe is reflected in one of his productive, youthful interests: that of literary composition, both poetry and drama. A common theme in the drama Barth wrote during this period is particularly noteworthy. It was drama ‘in which “freedom” regularly appears as a key idea.’ An implicit grasp of the political significance of this freedom is evident in one of his earliest plays. His first play was composed at age ten, another at age eleven or twelve. In the latter piece, ‘he gave vent unmistakeably to his heartfelt antipathy to the aristocracy of Berne. … It sets the devotion of the people … off against the arrogance of the aristocrats of Berne, who make mock of the “lowly plebeians” ….’ The social/political freedom of the Modern age has clearly already, even if only implicitly, made an impact on the young man.

Undoubtedly more significant to his personal development is the other formative aspect of the context in which such political influence was received. His father, Fritz Barth, studied theology, was later awarded a doctorate and became a lecturer at the College of Preachers in Basel and Professor at the University of Berne. This was not out of the
ordinary. Both of Karl’s grandfathers had lived similar lives. Thus, it is hard to deny of Karl Barth that ‘[his] upbringing groomed him to presuppose the primacy of theological norms.’

Given this decidedly Pietist familial context, his decision to pursue theology prior to his enrolment at the University of Berne is understandable.

However, a further significant influence behind this decision, the leader of his confirmation classes identified as Robert Aeschbacher, is worthy of note. The formative strands, theological and political, of Karl’s upbringing are clearly united in this one person. Aeschbacher was a Berne Pastor who studied under and became a friend to Fritz Barth, according to whom he not only had a reputation as one who ‘refused to evade problems of theological thought, but immersed himself thoroughly and conscientiously, even if this seemed to undermine much of the tradition.’ He was also very practical ‘[applying] the demands of the gospel to social life with such decisiveness that many anxious people … called him a socialist.’ It was following these confirmation classes that Karl Barth claims to have made the ‘bold resolve’ to study theology in order to reach a ‘proper understanding’ of the creed.

**Modernity’s challenge:**

Barth began his theological studies at Berne in 1904 and an indication of a political sensitivity comes to light as early as his third semester. However, Barth was never content with the “eccentric” faculty at Berne. Therefore, after passing his preliminary examination and in compromise with his father, he continued his studies at Berlin. It was there he was to become something of an avid student of Adolph Von Harnack for whom he had high regard. Kant and Schleiermacher also began to occupy a ‘clearer place’ in his thought. As a result, he ‘diverge[d] notably from his father’s “positive” line’ and began to see the Bible in
terms of the history of religion.83

Barth had been introduced to Kant while at Berne, but only now studied the first two critiques. While it cannot be documented, it is quite likely that Kant would motivate a search on Barth’s part. If the ‘known’ in Kant was arrived at only through the exercise of the noumena (mind) on the phenomena itself apprehended only through the senses, how was Barth to account for his own knowledge of God? God was not a being in the world that could be apprehended through the senses. Evidence of the discovery of an answer is reflected in Barth’s recollection of a reading of Schleiermacher’s speeches about the same time. It is upon doing so, he later exclaims, ‘Eureka! I had evidently been looking for “the immediate” and now found it ….84

How this reveals the answer to a search initiated by Barth’s reading of Kant is revealed in Schleiermacher’s second speech. In his reference to the importance of intuition to the entire speech, he writes: ‘It is the hinge of my whole speech; it is the highest and most universal formula of religion on the basis of which you should be able to find every place in religion from which you may determine its essence and its limits.85 How is this so? The answer to that question is found in the somewhat revelatory way in which the intuited brings about knowledge in the intuitior. ‘All intuition proceeds from an influence of the intuited on the one who intuits, from an original and independent action of the former, which is then grasped, apprehended, and conceived by the latter according to one’s own nature.86 Thus, knowledge is somewhat passively gained in a way that is less dependent on the activity of the mind as conceived by Kant.

Therefore, argues Scheiermacher, ‘what you intuit and perceive is not the nature of things, but their action upon you. What you know or believe about the nature of things lies
far beyond the realm of intuition.\textsuperscript{87} This is true, he argues, of our experience of light, weight and more. The same is true, he argues, of religion. ‘Thus it was religion when the ancients, annihilating the limitations of time and space, regarded every unique type of life throughout the whole world as the work and reign of an omnipresent being.’\textsuperscript{88} He then proceeds to define the limitations this places on knowledge so gained as that it cannot be positively defined, only labelled.\textsuperscript{89} Why was this so?

Intuition is and always remains something individual, set apart, the immediate perception, nothing more. To bind it and to incorporate it into a whole is once more the business not of sense but of abstract thought. The same is true of religion; it stops with the immediate experiences of the existence and action of the universe, with the individual intuitions and feelings; each of these is a self-contained work without connections with others or dependence upon them; it knows nothing about derivation and connection, for among all things religion can encounter, that is what its nature most opposes. Not only an individual fact or deed that one could call original or first, but everything in religion is immediate and true for itself.\textsuperscript{90}

Therefore, it can be argued that Barth believed he had found, in Schleiermacher’s experiential account of knowledge gained through the senses, a means to escape the confines of the limits of a Kantian epistemology in a way that avoided a slip back into the kind of positivism of his father’s theology.

\textbf{Early development expressed:}

It was at this significant period in his intellectual/moral development that the discovery of Wilhelm Herrmann came through a study of Herrmann’s ethics. Barth refers to that event as the birth of his ‘own personal interest in theology.’\textsuperscript{91} It certainly strengthened his resolve to go to Marburg where Herrmann was tenured. However, Barth first returned to Berne where he became president of the Zofingia to which he gave himself wholeheartedly; while at the same time living it up.\textsuperscript{92} Frank Jehle describes this student union as ‘in its outer and inner structure a mirror of the intellectual life of the Swiss people and of the Swiss state,
where church and theology had to fulfil their tasks not in separation, but in critical solidarity.'

The Zofinger Union was a movement Barth had been deeply involved with and was soon to be acting as its chair in the summer semester of 1906.

Earlier in that same year, Barth showed himself to be what Timothy Gorringe describes as ‘keenly aware of the political realities and especially sensitive to the question of class.’ This awareness is evidenced in an essay presented to the movement, ‘Zofingia and the Social Question.’ Bruce McCormack identifies the ‘immediate occasion’ for its composition as the union’s high membership dues. However, he pays no attention at all to the premise Barth argues is essential for addressing the broader problem of which they are indicative. A brief analysis of Barth’s demonstration of its necessity is revealing of his social/political thought of the time and, arguably, ever after.

Barth begins by referring to the topic’s ‘intimate connection’ with the Zofinger union’s purposes and the matter being brought to the attention of its members once before. What is understood by ‘social question,’ he observes, ‘is probably a superfluous theoretical discussion in these circles.’ However, Barth contends that each member present is daily affected by the issue, ‘if [he does] not even himself strike choices or such like are on the agenda.’ By way of illustration, he observes that upon opening the days paper, ‘some first pass through the report of an army or medical organization, of a moral restraint or unification, of a hospital or madhouse, yes of the columns in any daily – from between the lines emerges the social problem as a spectre of frightening reality.’ In this way, the social question is identified as not only one centred on choices made, even by the union’s members, but also as a disturbing problem.
He then proceeds to identify ‘Social Democracy’ as its ‘side effect’, in which ‘the Many come forward as the most significant to the social question.’ He refers to its rise in Germany, citing electoral statistics from the parliamentary election of 1903. He compares its presence there with the state of things in Switzerland where Social Democracy is ‘in as much as law’, but bears neither the ‘Tsarism and Cossacken lash as in Russia nor a Byzantine presiding ruler connected with an unbearable military as in Germany.’ He does question, however, whether such extreme forms might not become necessary also in Switzerland. As, he observes, ‘what is our boast also already becomes shattered even by cause of choice and strike … and that … little by little as well anarchistic tendencies … begin to make a spread.’ Therein he identifies potential anarchy with the ‘“social risk” that is not at a standstill, but from decade to decade takes on ominous form.’ As an example of the social problems created by choice un-checked, he refers to the contemporary increase of political unrest over the growing ‘difference between capital and work, between Mammonism and pauperism, briefly stated: between rich and poor.’

In Social Democracy, he suggests the social question is manifested from one side; the political. It is the one that gets the most attention, particularly of the bourgeoisie. However, he contends, ‘it is at the same time the standpoint least fitting to the so-called “Good Society,” of which, consciously or unconsciously preventative, great parts are defensively motivated by attendance to social works.’ This political response, Barth claims, is analogous to an event witnessed at a local menagerie in the feeding of the lions and tigers. Much the same, he writes, is ‘a lot of individual’s solution for the social question, they simply want to: “Throw something up to them; [thinking] with that they are appeased!”’
However, to approach the social question in this way, he argues, ‘is completely wrong: the social question is not united with the question of appetite, if just sometimes it may appear so.’\textsuperscript{106} Therefore, he criticizes the German Christian Social Democratic party and the idealism of Stocker. For: ‘Social effectiveness, with the secondary aim of preserving “Throne and altar,” is and remains an absurdity. It means “to sew a new cloth on an old garment” or “to pour new wine in an old wineskin.”’\textsuperscript{107}

Barth was not denying that something like the social equality sought in a social democratic State was desirable. However, to be successful he argues for the necessity that it be drawn from the right premises. First, it was important to correctly identify the cause of the problem. The ‘modern social question,’ he argues, is like that which once confronted Jesus and is reflected in ‘that problem which Jesus had formulated: “You should love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your neighbour as your self”; otherwise expressed as the problem of the individual’s double responsibility to God on the one hand, opposite humanity on the other hand.’\textsuperscript{108} Thus, he argues that it is a moral problem created by our freedom, in particular the failure to exercise it in a responsible manner. And it is the \textit{principled} fulfillment of these twin responsibilities, to God and Other, that he identifies as the ‘necessary premise to the attainment of those [socialist] ends.’\textsuperscript{109}

So understood, Barth argues that the social question is one of concern to the Zofinger union’s members on three levels. First, because of its political implications, it was likely to be seen as ‘a patriotic question first class.’\textsuperscript{110} Furthermore, since it is a question that, if ignored, the resultant chaos might lead to “Catastrophe” or even war, it was one of especial social significance. Moreover, a significant assumption for what he deemed the solution’s necessary theological/moral premise had a long heritage in the broader, social/religious
context. Barth observed that the Swiss Reformers Ulrich Zwingli, Johannes Oecolampadius and John Calvin had all ‘called [them] on the principle of the equality of all citizens of the State … only long before the French revolution.’

After an historical analysis of the Union’s own relationship to the social question, Barth argued for a reduction in its membership fees and an avoidance of class privilege in an effort to dissuade the growing social unrest in the broader culture. His prescriptions may have seemed naïve in terms of what they might achieve, but clearly reflect what he believed to be the necessary premise for addressing the broader, social question. As Bruce McCormack observes already ‘on the boundaries of Barth’s reflections there is evidence of a realization that the usual approaches to the social question would not suffice.’

However, that he both identified the source of the problem in the irresponsible use of freedoms and believed a principled exercise of responsible freedom, theologically determined, its only solution, is indicative of this much: As early as his third semester, Barth has not only exhibited an early social/political consciousness, but references a principled moral response theologically defined as necessary to addressing the matter.

What will change throughout his development is not this commitment. Rather, it will be how to relate the human and the divine in a fashion that takes into consideration the Modern emancipation from external authorities that led to the dissolution of Christendom, represented epistemologically in the Enlightenment, ecclesially in the Reformation, and politically in the French Revolution. That Barth welcomed emancipation from oppressive authoritative structures is evident from the remainder of his studies. That he was at the same time reluctant to abandon all authority is equally evident in his preference for the moral/theological noted above and, arguably, even in his choice of early theological mentors.
**Herrmann’s influence:**

Eventually, fed up with his son’s ‘wild goings on’, his father sent him on to Tubingin. It was there he was to meet Christoph Blumhardt, who would eventually provide a needed positive influence. The most significant, immediate outcome Barth could cite of his time there was that ‘[he] did not join the ranks of the “positives.”’

It was upon leaving Tubingen that he became the avid student of Herrmann, whom he later described as ‘the Theological teacher of my student years.’

Herrmann was a product of the Ritschlian school of thought, attracted by what McCormack describes as its ‘insistence upon the independence of religion from the natural sciences and philosophy.’ He perceived the impact of historical research upon the Ritschlian School to be approaching that of pure historicism. In response, Herrmann proposed his own answer to the problem of the relation of faith and history with a narrowed focus on the ‘inner life’ of Jesus. It was Jesus and not history that was to be determinative of his theology. This was supplemented with a Schleiermacherian form of appeal to religious experience in response to Modernity’s challenge.

Therefore, McCormack claims ‘Barth was committing himself to a Herrmannian/Schleiermacherian form of theology and not Ritschlianism.’ Whether it is accurate to claim Barth was *committing* to anything at this point is questionable. What is of greater interest is why Barth might have been attracted to Herrmann.

What has been shown thus far is the prior influence of Kant and Schleiermacher upon Barth, and so an awareness of the key metaphysical challenge of and a significant theological response to Modernity. In Herrmann, Barth found a theologian who attempted to be both responsible to the Modern challenge and remain faithful to the demands of the theological
discipline. Herrmann was what might be called methodologically liberal, but, Barth would later argue, he was not so liberal in his convictions. As evidence, Barth cites Herrmann’s attempt to give the theological tradition and its history a determining voice:

Herrmann was clearly no textual exegete, but rather an articulate independent thinker. That is not a reproach. There is need of such personalities in theology. It was precisely as such an independent thinker that we honoured Herrmann. The air of freedom blew through his auditorium. … Our rebellious minds, repudiating all authority, there found satisfaction. … But … as surely as it accorded with Herrmann’s predisposition and as certainly as it was his special mission to affirm the validity of this concern for freedom (he preferred to say ‘truthfulness’) in theology; he was equally sure that this concern cannot be the final and the only concern. … He did not merely carry over with blind courage a primitive philosophical idea of autonomy and apply it to the one theological subject. … He knew, at least fundamentally, that in theology there is also an authority over against freedom. Persistently again and again he pointed to history, not only to the inner life of Jesus, but also to the Bible, and even to the church tradition, as norms according to which one must be judged in dogmatics; exactly as he also saw the attainment of normative doctrine to be the goal of dogmatic effort.121

In the work from which these remarks are taken, Barth seeks, as a former student, to show that behind Herrmann’s articulated theology there lay profound convictions that need to be recognized in order for his full stature to be appreciated. In so doing, the work suggests an attempt by Barth to distance himself from the form, but not the intent, of Herrmann’s theology. This suggests there was more to Herrmann than the idealism that is so often identified as most profoundly influential on Barth’s thought. That something more, I argue, is the attempt to both embrace the Modern context while remaining responsible to the demands of theology. This is implicitly stated in a later remark of Barth’s to Eduard Thurneysen: ‘Already under the influence of Herrmann, I always thought of historical criticism as merely a means of attaining freedom in relation to the tradition, not, however, as a constituting factor in a new liberal tradition as apparently Wernle and his like want to have it.’122
**Herrmann and the Neo-Kantian Problematic:**

Herrmann’s theology was conceived within the halls of Marburg, which had gained a reputation as a place of Modern theology, due to the attraction to the Neo-Kantian idealism of Herman Cohen and Paul Natorp in its philosophy department. As identified by Simon Fisher, Neo-Kantianism under Cohen and Natorp ‘became a sort of meta-science, dictating what knowledge was cognitively and culturally acceptable and what was not.’

Definitive of the acceptable forms was their logical foundation. Cohen’s system – which was definitive of the Marburg school at the time of Barth’s entrance – consisted of three parts: logic, accompanied by ethics and aesthetics; both grounded in logic. The novelty of the system, suggests Fisher, was Cohen’s ‘deduction of these three branches of knowledge from three attributes of consciousness: thinking, willing, and feeling …’

This logically grounded system, restricted to three forms of knowledge, created the problem of where to find ‘epistemological value’ for religion. The system, Fisher observes, had already ruled out any place for ‘mythical consciousness (Bewusstheit) and sensation,’ so the question became: ‘Was … the cognition claimed by religion logical, ethical, purely aesthetic, or was it simply a product of mythical speculation?’

Influenced by the Neo-Kantian problematic, Herrmann rejected attempts to identify religion with an individual life force (Kaftan and Eucken), morality (Kant) or self-consciousness (Schleiermacher). Rather, he located its origin in the experience of despair that one’s ‘life is without truth and therefore impotent and null.’

This distinguishes his approach from that of Cohen, for whom religion was derived from a similar ethical inability to lead a truthful life, but supported logically, not experientially. Thus Herrman’s account bridges the differences between Cohen and Natorp, for whom religion was derived from a
more broadly experiential basis. Moving beyond the Schleiermacherian emphasis upon experience, Herrmann argues that, in order for experiences to be salvific, they must at the same time provide ‘the clear consciousness of our freedom or inward independence.’ These he identifies as revelations. To sum up: for Herrmann ‘the experience out of which religion may arise, then, is the realization on the part of any … man that he has encountered a spiritual Power in contact with which he has felt utterly humbled, yet at the same time uplifted to a real independent inner life.’

Herrmann believed that, upon an experience of said revelation, the individual was at a point where she is able to ‘settle’ for herself whether God is a reality. The experience embraced – for it may be denied – results in the birth of a reverence for that, which Herrmann contended, can only be living. This reverence is manifest in two ways; the identification of the reality of God in everyday life, and a response to divine ‘promptings in ethical demand and in the varied experience of life. In this way religion comes to fruition in us and our life becomes a life in truth.’ Thus, religion was not simply understood as what McCormack describes as ‘a God given ability to see the working of God in all of one’s life.’ As Barth later recognized, for Herrmann:

True religion carries within itself the energy of the moral purpose. It is inextricably bound to the moral will and it will itself be the moral will; but it is neither begotten by it (Kant), nor identical with it (Cohen), nor is it the objectless emotion which accompanies it (Natorp). It has also its own root and its own life.

This religious reality, Herrmann believed, could not be communicated to others, only experienced by them. Thus, Herrmann rejected out of hand a common paradigm in theology at the time; that of apologetic appeals to the sciences and philosophical argument. Therefore, in his desire to define theology as a science, the only claim to science that he allowed it was that of history ‘wherefore the science is to be cognized by the same means as
the science of history in general – not by the formulation of rules, but by the representation of a reality in which a man’s own experience participates." Theology could lay claim to universality in this way and serve those who hadn’t shared in the religious experience by ‘at least put[ting] him on the way to it. … However, only as his own unrecognized craving for religion emerges into consciousness." Making that clear is the science’s (theology’s) first task. Its second task was restricted to serving the members of the religious community. It was ‘to make clear and defend from distortion the religious experience of its members and the expression of religion common to them all.’ It was at this point that the authority of history and tradition, Barth later identified with Herrman’s theology, came into play.

**Herrmann’s influence in evidence:**

It is the conviction of this writer that what should be claimed of lasting influence of Herrmann is that, under him, Barth became aware of the depth of the challenge of Modernity while at the same time seeking to embrace the authority of the tradition. That upon the completion of his studies, Barth acknowledged the challenge of Modernity is revealed in a submission to the 1909 edition of *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*. In the work, Barth characterizes Modern theology as both individualistic and historically relativist.

In his affirmation of the individualist element, Herrmann’s understanding of religion is clearly evidenced. Barth writes:

> The nature of “Modern” Theology is religious individualism. Strong individual character already has, according to its opinion, the prerequisite of religion; morality. Obedience is not the standard to come from out of the man, but consciousness and direction of will from truth and authority, which is found in him. The religious awakening is individually caused, is how we understand it. Where a man comes to the realization that to him reality is impossible, when good’s demand is known to assert itself, here he is known to experience it, so that to him, in the tradition of the Christian Church or in its present life, a power is met to which he himself, in obedience and utter confidence, must submit."
The road to Faith is individually determined. Therefore, in the same way that Herrmann dissociates himself from any ability to communicate this experience, Barth contends ‘It is given no generally valid ordo salutis, but also no generally valid source of revelation that someone is able to demonstrate to the other.’ And so recognition of the modern epistemological challenge to metaphysical certainty is also evident in how the two address the birth of faith.

It is this phenomenon which by implication leads to the second challenge of Modernity: its relativism. Barth observes that ‘surmounting the standard to this world requires a peculiar faith to come from him, nothing different can be given him. Christian morality is not able to know normative sole rule, and it gives no normative Christian conception of the world.’

Finally, the identified historical sciences element of Herrmann’s thought is appealed to when addressing questions of the discernment of truth in one’s theology and a measure of relativity in its findings admitted. After which Barth contends:

I think whichever pupil is not to be mere schoolboy comes this way not wanting to escape into experience as he fills his student notebook with Herrmann and Harnack. The science becomes for him not material, but method and as an assumed application this method, not another one, is his moral honesty and with it his personality stands and falls.

At the same time, he observes:

We take this understanding for the best because it’s truest. However, we also turn to historical relativism in our own theology whenever we compare ourselves with another and look at it as one manifestation of the Gospel next to another. As, in their particular account of the faith we bestow Orthodoxy on the Pietist, the Rationalist, but also the Catholic Church’s charisma, no doubt it shall be like this in our case. We don’t find Christianity kata exokein (par excellence), but, with the inexhaustible force of the Christian religion, we trouble ourselves to bring forceful expression to the side, which has become particularly important for us.
Thus, very much a product of his times, Barth under Herrmann initially identified with the framework of a Modern Theology predicated upon personal religious experience. However, Barth would eventually come to regret Herrmann’s manner of addressing Modernity’s challenges, but not ignore them entirely. That Barth was already conscious of the significance of these challenges to publicly maintaining a personal faith is evident in how he concludes the work.

Religion is our intense individually composed experience and we feel it an obligation of ours to clearly and positively explain it according to its scientific side with common human cultural awareness. If we have to pursue the Kingdom of God in the narrow sense that is for us at the same time our strength, of which we please ourselves, as our weakness, which we recognize, but do not regret because we cannot do differently.\textsuperscript{140}

The lack of regret Barth here affirms would soon be heightened, and the foundation in a social sciences-based account of religion abandoned for what might best be described as a lifelong venture of theological re-conception from within the tradition and its manifold theological resources.
CHAPTER THREE

JESUS CHRIST AND THE MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In this chapter, I argue that Barth’s support for the Religious Socialist movement was precipitated by a pastoral desire to promote solidarity and justice amongst the parishioners of his first pastorate; not politics. I then reveal, from consideration of his first major social/political work, that Barth is at best critically supportive of the movement. Barth considers the purveyors of socialism’s exercise of their own freedom lacking in ways that subvert both his desire and their intentions, whereby he indicates once more a preference for the moral-theological over the political.

Real life challenges and the pursuit of Social Justice:

At the conclusion of his studies in Marburg and a number of weeks respite, Barth went on to Geneva where he served as pasteur suffragant in the German-speaking congregation of the église nationale. In the course of his time there, Barth, introduced to the abject state of his parishioners, became familiar with Hermann Kutter and the Religious Socialists through him who, Robert E. Willis argues, ‘represented an attempt to relate Christian categories to an awakened social consciousness and drive for justice among industrial workers.’ At this point in Barth’s pastoral life, he publicly criticized the movement believing that, despite their ‘views on society ... in practice they are the greatest subjectivists conceivable’; incapable of ‘really standing beside the rank and file of the poor.’

However, once in his first full pastorate in the largely industrial town of Safenwil in the Swiss Aargau region, Barth appears to make an about-face. Here he offers clear evidence of support for the socialist cause. ‘The new thing in the context was his face-to-face
encounter with industrial unrest, socialism, and especially trade-unionism.\textsuperscript{143} It is this personal experience that in turn prompted him to become involved in various social movements and the unionization of factory workers, his own parishioners among them.\textsuperscript{144}

Over the course of his time in Safenwil and as a result of his pastoral concerns, Barth ‘became less and less inclined to pursue his own course of research along the lines of liberal theology.’\textsuperscript{145} What preoccupied him now was his involvement with the Socialists. It came early and in apparent contradiction to his earlier dissatisfaction with those self-same Socialists once described as the ‘greatest subjectivists conceivable.’ Within six months of his arrival in Safenwil, he was not only working alongside them, educating workers and promoting the establishment of unions, but also giving a certain degree of religious sanction to their views.

In his later reflections on this period, Barth attributed the change in attitude to his responsibility for the care of his parishioners. ‘When … I saw the unjust situation of the workers, who were deprived of their rights, then I believed that as a theologian I could meet both them and the other members of the community only by taking their side and therefore becoming in practice a Social Democrat.’\textsuperscript{146} Although it was clearly born of his response to his parishioners’ concerns, his efforts to correct the injustices were far reaching. He confessed to being ‘taken up in disputes sparked off by my support for the workers, not only in the neighbourhood but in the Canton.’\textsuperscript{147}

Barth’s attempts to respond to his parishioners’ needs also precipitated a change in focus from the academic theology of his University days to materials that addressed the practical affairs he was confronted with. As has been shown, the relativism ingredient in Modern theology left him without much by way of resources to draw upon. ‘The result of
this was that my main study was now directed towards factory legislation, insurance, trade union affairs and so on’, and so the academic theology of his student days was replaced with books on economics. ‘I had to read Herkner and Sombart and also the Swiss Trade Union Journal and the Textile Worker.’\textsuperscript{148} Barth had already bought the work in Marburg in 1908.

These reflections clearly reveal that Barth’s expressed solidarity with and pursuit of justice for his parishioners was not motivated by readings in Socialism. Rather, those readings were motivated by his interest in responsibly showing solidarity and seeking justice for issues that were with him from the beginning of his university studies. That his personal involvement did not cloud his earlier judgement of the Socialists is still apparent when he later turns to the task of justifying his praxis in light of his theological commitments in a lecture ‘Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice.’ The work was delivered to the ‘Workers’ Association’ on the 17 of December, 1911, and immediately published in the socialist daily \textit{Free Aargau}. The essay is the first of the major political writings to be considered in this work.

The thesis and its objectors:

Barth opens with the affirmation: ‘Jesus Christ is the movement for social justice, and the movement for social justice is Jesus in the present’, but proceeds to offer a significant restriction by which he articulates ‘more precisely’ how he is able to make that claim. In a remark that truly reflects the influence of Herrmann, he claims he can do so upon acknowledgement that only ‘the real contents of the person of Jesus can in fact be summed up by the words “movement for social justice.”’\textsuperscript{149} It is a movement he considers ‘not only the greatest and most urgent word of God to the present, but also in particular a quite direct continuation of the spiritual power which … entered into history and life with Jesus.’\textsuperscript{150}
Barth then proceeds to address the likely criticisms to the claims he is about to make. The first comes from the Christian side. It expresses the unease of those who are likely to perceive him to be making the claim that Jesus was a Social Democrat. Barth responds to their likely objection with a denial of any motive to identify Jesus with a particular party or political expression. His non-ideological, non-partisan intentions are clear at this point. Rather, in a way that reflects an ethical idealism, his aim is to draw upon what this particular movement for social justice and Jesus share in common. That is, ‘to demonstrate the inner connection that exists between what is eternal, permanent, and general in modern social democracy and the eternal Word of God, which in Jesus became flesh.’

A second objection is anticipated from those in the Social Democratic camp who are likely to perceive him to be ‘trying to capture us socialists for an antediluvian world view or even for the church.’ Barth responds with an avowal that even if what he has to say should convince his hearers of the need to follow Jesus, the church – while it is able to serve them in their response – is not essential to it, nor is any form of ‘Christian world view.’ Much to the contrary, in a way that reflects his moral theological approach, he avers ‘what Jesus has to bring to us are not ideas, but a way of life.’

He continues with a targeted response to his possible objectors from both sides. He articulates just what are his true intentions in making the comparison in a way that suggests from the start that both sides might benefit: ‘I would like nothing more from my lecture than that you all, my dear listeners, would see this bridge [between Jesus and socialism] and attempt to go across it, some from this side to that, others from that side to this.’ Then he proceeds to identify just what characterizes this ‘bridge’ he believes connects Jesus with Socialism.
The proletarian comparison:

He begins with a most general observation summed up in the description of Socialism as a proletarian movement. That is, its character as a ‘movement from below to above.’

Socialism is the movement of the economically dependent, of those who earn wages working for someone else, for a stranger; the movement of the proletariat, as the literature calls it. The proletarian is not always poor, but is always dependent in his existence upon the means and the goodwill of his brother, the factory owner. Here socialism sets in: It is and wants to be a proletarian movement. It wants to make independent those who are dependent, with all the consequences for their external, moral and cultural life which that would bring with it.154

With the proviso that no such identification of this class existed at the time, Barth believes that ‘it must strike everyone who reads the New Testament without prejudice that that which Jesus Christ was and wanted and attained, as seen from the human side, was entirely a movement from below.’155 He was the son of a carpenter, who set aside his craft to bring a message of good news, particularly to ‘the poor and the lowly’ for whom He brought a message of hope that theirs was the Kingdom of God. Not only did He proclaim their blessedness, Barth observes, it was embodied in His relations with them: ‘One cannot reach lower down the social scale in the choice of one’s associates than Jesus did.’ Moreover, the promised blessedness is evident in Jesus’ attitude toward the lowest classes; fishermen, tax collectors and prostitutes: ‘To him there was no one underneath who was too low or too bad’ to receive the good news.156

At this point, Barth anticipates the objection that, despite the general similarity between the movement for social justice and that initiated by Jesus, the comparison fails upon more detailed investigation. On the one hand, there is the promise of an immanent Kingdom of material gratification through revolution that socialism offers. On the other there is the inward spiritual fulfilment through conversion, culminating in a transcendent heavenly
Kingdom of which Jesus spoke. Barth acknowledges that the view of the Christian tradition as spiritual in nature and of the heavenly Kingdom as a spiritual reality indeed appears to undermine the claim that the tradition and the movement for social justice are like in kind. Moreover, that this has been the generally accepted view of the tradition and not without biblical support. However, Barth questions the traditional view that the spiritual and the material are indeed in opposition. He asks if it is not in fact the product of a most profound error in the tradition’s history. In a rather non-dualist fashion, he asserts that among the tradition’s affirmations, ‘perhaps nowhere else has Christianity fallen farther away from the spirit of her Lord and Master than in precisely this estimation of the relation between Spirit and matter, inner and outer, heaven and earth.’ In fact, he argues, ‘the whole picture of the relationship between Spirit and matter, between heaven and earth, becomes completely different when we come to Jesus. For him there are not two worlds, but the one reality of the Kingdom of God.’

The real antithesis:

Rejecting the notion of a divine opposition to what is earthly, material or external, Barth identifies the real antithesis to God as evil. In the same spirit, he identifies redemption as ‘not the separation of spirit from matter; it is not that man goes to heaven, but rather that God’s kingdom comes to us in matter and on earth.’ Therefore, a life in the here and now oriented by the Kingdom of God should not be one of emphasis upon the Spiritual and denial of the material. Rather in a manner that anticipates his later emphasis on the ethical as John Webster interprets it, a corresponding life is one of a right ordering of the material, the here and now, by the Spiritual. Therefore, Barth argues,

All those sayings which are often employed against socialism about the unsurpassed significance of the Spirit and its inward testimony are completely right: Jesus knows
and recognizes only the kingdom of heaven that is within us. But the kingdom must obtain dominion over the external—over actual life—otherwise it does not deserve the name. The kingdom is not of this world, but of God. It is in this world, however, for in this world God’s will is to be done.160

Barth already conceives of moral responsibility at this point, in a way that suggests what John Webster identifies as true of Barth much later. ‘On Barth’s terms, moral responsibility is not defined by reference to an inner deliberative sanctum, but by the closely allied notions of “response” and “correspondence”. “We live in responsibility, which means that our being and willing, what we do and what we do not do, is a continuous answer to the Word of God spoken as a command.”161

As Barth understands it, the promised Kingdom is not ‘purely spiritual.’ For those who share in it shall ‘inherit the earth’ and sit at table with their God. Nor is the way to the Kingdom ‘a merely spiritual and inward imploring of “Lord Lord”!’ Rather, it is a question of the Spirit bearing fruit through a willing heart. Fruit, which he contends is ‘nothing but social help in material terms.’ Thus, he concludes: ‘The spirit that has value before God is the social spirit. And social help is the way to eternal life. That is not only how Jesus spoke but also how he acted.’162 So it is that Barth finds a ‘bridge’ between Jesus and the Movement for Social Justice. In its aims, he believes it is a movement that is ‘one with Jesus,’ a movement made necessary because of the Church’s divergence from its source.

One might well say that for eighteen hundred years the Christian church, when confronted by social misery, has always referred to the Spirit, to the inner life, to heaven. The church has preached, instructed and consoled, but she has not helped. … She has accepted social misery as an accomplished fact in order to talk about the Spirit, to cultivate the inner life, and to prepare candidates for the kingdom of heaven. That is the great, momentous apostasy of the Christian church, her apostasy from Christ.163

That socialism should make the Church conscious of its responsibility for the ‘material needs of the proletariat’ is enough for Barth to speak of the significance of the movement in
what can be described as prophetic terms. ‘It calls us back from the hypocritical and slothful veneration of the Spirit and from that useless Christianity which intends to come only “in heaven.”’ It tells us that we should really believe what we pray every day: Thy kingdom come!164 Therefore, how it could well be dismissed as ‘unchristian and materialist’ he cannot understand. For, even if one grants that, in its materialist emphasis, it may be grounded in a message that is clearly not of Jesus, in its aim to redress social disparity it certainly is ‘in his Spirit.’ To further demonstrate how this is so is what occupies Barth throughout the remainder of the essay.

The obstacle to justice identified:

First, there is the question of the obstacle standing in the way of social parity. From the perspective of Socialism, the problem is identified as Capitalism, to which it offers its own economic theory in response. Neither economic theory nor anticipation thereof, admits Barth, is to be found in scripture without much searching: searching he himself was not then prepared to undertake. However, in the issue at the heart of the conflict between the two, he found a basis for comparison with Jesus’ teaching. ‘In these modern phenomena’, he writes, ‘we have to do with a problem that is as old as humanity, namely, the question of private property.’165 It is not private property in general that is attacked by Socialism, but ‘private property as a means of production’ whereby ‘the materials necessary for production (investment capital, factories, machines, raw materials) are the private property of one of the co-workers, namely the boss, the factory-owner.’166 Yet, it is quite possible to discern a congruence of the Socialist movement’s criticism with that of Jesus’ attitude toward private property.
Here is a notion, ‘what’s mine is mine’, which in Church and State and even in law has been shrouded, Barth observes, with an ‘aura of sanctity.’ So firmly impressed upon the human psyche is this notion even in the Church, Barth contends, that Social Democracy is met with dismay largely for the way in which it seeks to ‘eliminate private property and to transform private capitalism into social capitalism.’ In a manner that reflects his earlier criticisms, he argues, ‘the dismay could well be on the other side’ for the Socialist might be described as seeking an equitable share for all, themselves included. Yet from the mouth of Jesus ‘“what’s mine is mine” is condemned with a greater force than perhaps found anywhere in all of socialist literature.’ In this regard, contends Barth, ‘Jesus is more socialist than the socialist.’

**Exegetically rejected:**

Barth continues with significant exegetical support for the claim that, in fact, ‘Jesus rejected the concept of private property… He rejected precisely the principle that what’s mine is mine.’ In what can be claimed as at best moderate support of the Socialist, Barth cites the parable of the steward in Luke 16:1-12 as illustrative of the appropriate attitude toward ‘material goods.’ Which, he articulates as: ‘We should not possess it, but we should be faithful with it. And being faithful in this context means quite clearly: We should make others into its common owners.’

From Christ’s own teachings, he shows that ‘private property is and remains precisely the mammon of un-righteousness.’ That this was indeed Jesus’ attitude toward it, ‘is finally most clearly illuminated,’ Barth contends, – citing Luke 9:57-58; Mark 3:31-35 and Matt. 10:9-10 – ‘by the position which he himself adopted in practice and which he also enjoined upon his disciples.’ Citing Joseph Dietzgen, Barth then goes one further in defining what was at issue in Jesus’ condemnation of private property:
‘The real original sin, from which the human race has suffered up to now, is self-seeking.’ To which Barth comments ‘This despiser of Jesus has understood Jesus correctly. … Property is sin, because property is self-seeking. What’s mine is absolutely not mine!’

**The promise of solidarity:**

Yet in their condemnation of the capitalist attitude toward private property, the Socialists are affirmed as in line with Jesus. However, Barth continues, ‘social democracy does not only say that the material situation of the proletariat must become a different and better one. It does not only say that for this purpose human work must cease being a way to increase private capital. Rather, it seizes and employs a means to lead this goal to its realization.’ Social Democracy brings it to the worker’s consciousness and promotes it with the aim that ‘as a socialist [one] no longer thinks and feels and acts as a private person, but rather as a member of the forward-striding, fighting totality. **Solidarity is the law and gospel of socialism.**’ In this, Barth believes Socialism is truly in line with Jesus’ teaching. Yet the compatibility of this emphasis with Jesus’ teaching is easily missed, he argues, because of the individualist ‘misunderstandings’ of religion current at the time, especially in Germany.

…we act as if Christianity as a whole were a matter of the closet, and indeed our private closet. One finds oneself together with other persons in the church in order to secure the consolation and joy of the gospel, but the community extends no farther. Religion beforehand and afterward remains a matter between God and the soul, the soul and God, and only that.

In stark contrast, Barth argues that those who support such a view are in clear contradiction with the teaching of Jesus for whom ‘there was only a social God, a God of solidarity; therefore there was also only a social religion, a religion of solidarity.’ Not only is this emphasis upon solidarity evident in Jesus’ teaching, he argues, but it is ultimately
embodied in his suffering and death upon the cross, which he endured for the sake of the many. Barth questions the possibility of finding something higher in life than this ‘giving of one’s life for others’ and concludes:

Let him take it in who can, that one must lose one’s life in order to find it, that one must cease being something for oneself, that one must become a communal person, a comrade, in order to be a person at all. “But to those who are being saved the word of the cross is the power of God.”

It is something of this power that Barth sees manifested in Social Democracy’s emphasis upon solidarity and in just ‘the way in which it must be worked out in our time.’ It is this that leads him to conclude: ‘Real socialism is real Christianity in our time.’

**The problem in the Socialists’ means:**

From the human side in a straight comparison in terms of ends sought, Barth draws something of a comparison between that which Jesus sought and promoted and the aims of the Socialist. However, that Barth’s support of socialism was by no means uncritical is immediately apparent in his response to those who might believe him to have said ‘the socialists are right.’ In anticipation, Barth continues: ‘About what they want, I say: That is what Jesus wanted, too. About the manner in which they act to attain it, I could not say the same thing.’ That Barth believed contemporary Socialism had much to learn from Jesus is clearly stated at various points in the document. Moreover, the source of the criticism lay in the One to whom he was making the comparison. Consider his earlier remarks regarding how Jesus sought to alleviate social misery and in so doing serves as an example: ‘He worked from the internal to the external. He created new men in order to create a new world. In this direction the present day social democracy still has infinitely much to learn from Jesus. It must come to the insight that we first need men of the future to create the state of the future, not the reverse.’
Here once again the moral standpoint of the earlier Zofingia essay is clearly evident. The question is one of exercising one’s moral responsibility, not simply one of promoting a political alternative. As such, what is required is an inner moral transformation, not simply an external political one. That this is indeed how Barth distinguished the politics of his comrades from the ways and means promoted by Jesus is clear. In the concluding exhortations directed specifically at the Socialist members of his audience, he writes:

I hope you have also heard the rebuke in the distinction I have made between Jesus and yourselves! He wanted what you want – as you act to attain it. There you have the difference between Jesus and yourselves. He wanted what you want, but he acted in the way you have heard.179

The Socialists indeed had very praiseworthy goals in mind, but they sought to achieve them through political ends rather than sound moral praxis. Barth observes:

That is generally the difference between Jesus and the rest of us, that among us the greatest part is program, whereas for Jesus program and performance were one. Therefore, Jesus says to you quite simply that you should carry out your program, that you should enact what you want. Then you will be Christians and true human beings.180

That he believed those he was speaking to had much need of improvement in this respect is further evident from the remarks that immediately follow. First, discouraged from those forms of behaviour that were in contradiction with their stated aims, they were encouraged to show greater humility. ‘Leave the superficiality and the hatred, the spirit of mammon and the self-seeking, which also exists among your ranks, behind. They do not belong to your concerns.’ Then they were encouraged to follow through courageously in their daily lives with those aspects of Jesus’ teaching and example that served their stated aims. ‘Let the faithfulness and energy, the sense of community and the courage for sacrifice found in Jesus be effective among you, in your whole life, then you will be true socialists.’181
Concluding analysis:

It is easy to dismiss Barth’s criticisms of the Socialists in this essay as off-hand remarks, but that is to overlook their significance. That he referred to the difference it would make for the Socialists to take their direction from Jesus in this way, as Shelly Baronowski observes, suggests that, even at this early stage, Barth ‘conformed his political activity according to dominant, if not yet maturely formulated theological norms.’ Busch summarizes Barth’s analysis, ‘True socialism was the true Christianity for our time. However, true socialism was not what the socialists were doing but what Jesus was doing. This was also the socialists’ ultimate aim (but only their aim).’

In addressing the question whether Barth’s theology was politically motivated (Marquardt) or his politics theologically motivated, Jüngel justifiably argues: ‘The “great cause” for which [Barth] lives, and for which he works as a pastor, is also that which allowed him to become a socialist.’ This is accurate insofar as it correctly orders Barth’s commitments, first to the theological and only subsequently to the political, but it deserves to be strengthened. For if anything, what this essay reveals is that Barth’s moral theology interpreted a meaningful commitment, Christian or otherwise, as one that necessarily shows itself publicly and is thus political. Therefore, in this context, his theological commitments did not only ‘permit’ his involvement in the Socialist movement, he believed they required it.

Thus, I contend that Barth’s support of the Religious Socialist movement was not offered out of political interest, but as an act of responsible Christian discipleship. As is evident in what is common to the criticisms made in the course of this work – the application of the same divine standard. At this point in Barth’s life, because of the influence of his
mentor Herrmann, that standard was what might best be described as critically correlated with the given political ethos. Barth’s preference for the divine would only increase over the course of his remaining years in Safenwil. In that way, Barth’s Safenwil experience would influence his theological development, but only to reinforce commitments already arrived at much earlier. Barth sought to recognize the value in the humanly constructed political ethic, while at the same time challenging it to improve in ways that were, in fact, consistent with the criticism of the political approach offered in his earliest Zofingia essay and the avowed moral alternative. At the heart of those criticisms was the implicit anthropological difference exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus and that ingredient in Religious Socialism’s political means. It was a difference with significant political implications that was about to be made most clear to Barth.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE MIDDLE BARTH: THE SAFENWIL YEARS

In this chapter, I begin by reinforcing the evidence already provided to show that Barth’s alignment with Religious Socialism was pragmatic at best. I then show how the actions that led to Barth’s loss of confidence in his theological mentors are paralleled by actions of the Religious Socialists and betray a common source. Their actions combined, I argue, served to precipitate the new trajectory in his thought as what was a growing confidence in the Word of God leads to greater attention to its teaching in matters theological and consequently anthropological. The result is the publication of his first Romans commentary, which I show reveals the impact of the new trajectory taken in his social/political thought.

Growing incongruencies:

It has been shown that to read the earlier essay on ‘Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice’ as a blanket endorsement of what was contemporary Socialism is to do the work an injustice. The work certainly reveals that Barth was familiar with and supportive of the movement’s aims and not at all naïve with regard to its socio-economic theories. However, upon closer analysis, it is also clearly evident that at the same time as Barth was giving support to Socialists’ aims, he clearly recognized a critical difference between the political movement and any movement rooted in the Gospel and Jesus Christ. While the latter clearly had political implications, he was well aware of the significant differences. Over the course of his pastorate in Safenwil while working among the Socialists, the significance of that difference would become that much more real to him and, in that way, affect his social/political development.
Barth later claimed to have had some concerns with a particular Religious Socialist from the beginning.

[Leonard] Ragaz and his Religious Socialists interested Thurneysen, and they interested me too. But I kept my distance. … Ragaz developed what [Herrmann] Kutter meant to be a view of the current situation and an interpretation of the signs of the time, *not a programme*, into the theory that the church must regard socialism as a preliminary manifestation of the kingdom of God. In other words he made it a true system of “Religious Socialism.”

The two individuals identified here were among the primary influences in Swiss Socialism at the time. Ragaz was not all that different from Kutter, in terms of general Socialist disposition. Both were socialists. Both were influenced by Christoph Blumhardt’s eschatological orientation. Both were prepared to identify the Socialist ideal with the coming of the promised Kingdom of God. What distinguished them were their convictions regarding its promotion.

Although an initiator of the movement in Switzerland, Kutter had not committed to any participation in its political forms. He was something of a quietist for whom Socialism was to be nurtured through the cultivation of its virtues in community. Ragaz, by contrast, was the social activist; he sought its promotion through political programmes. Although Barth’s activity in the establishment of unions, lecturing to trade union workers and at conferences suggests sympathy with Ragaz, the politicization of Socialism had already faced criticism by Barth. Over the course of his time in Safenwil, through interactions with the Socialists and the challenge of preaching, those criticisms would only strengthen.

By January 1914, just two and a half years after claiming that ‘Jesus Christ is the movement for social justice and the movement for social justice is Jesus in the present,’ Barth was not nearly so bold in his affirmation of the movement. In a sermon to his parishioners on Romans 1:16, Barth claims that for modern society science has been exalted
as ‘a full substitute for that which Jesus is to you.’ However, science’s position was being challenged on the margins with a new movement. ‘Presently’, he continues, ‘man hears from another “the liberating teaching of the Socialist can and must these days step into the place of Jesus and his gospel.”’

Barth continued to identify socialist values – ‘the struggle against the power of mammon, solidarity of all men, peace on the earth, justice in all ordering and proportions’ – as congruent with those of Jesus. He now acknowledged, in the same context, a restriction upon that which humanity is able to accomplish independently: ‘…we are not alone permitted to go to the sky ….‘ In light of this more-restricted sense of what humanity is able to accomplish independently and in stark contrast to his earlier affirmation of Socialism, Barth now claims ‘Man also cannot say, as man today often hears, that Socialism is able to replace Jesus and his gospel.’

As Barth continues, it is clear he does not want to completely dissociate Jesus and the Gospel from Socialism. He argues, rather, that ‘Socialism is a very important and necessary application of the Gospel; an application that man as I am persuaded cannot evade. If individuals make serious with Jesus they come, willing it or not, to the basic social ideas of justice, solidarity and peace.’ However, Barth immediately proceeds with a significant qualification ‘that names the idea in the head, posed when man says: “we did will these thoughts; we will Socialism,” but not the source from which it flowed and must flow if it will be something of genuine depth.’ The reason for the qualification, Barth contends, is the lack of congruency between humanity’s Socialist claims and how they’re manifested, and those of Jesus. ‘Man does that, then right away appears the outrageous difference between the thought of Jesus and these thoughts.’
His qualifications here are already made in a spirit that anticipates his reflections on ‘The Righteousness of God’ that came two years later. In a manner that reflects the challenges of modernity, Barth argues in this text that, reflecting upon the righteousness of God being revealed in threatened unrighteousness, humankind seeks, out of pride and despair, to re-interpret the divine call to righteousness into forms of its own making.\textsuperscript{199} In so doing, he asserts, ‘The righteousness of God which we have looked upon and our hands have handled changes under our awkward touch into all kinds of human righteousness.’\textsuperscript{200} The forms in which such transformation has been observed in history, Barth contends, are ‘our morality,’ ‘the State and its law’ and ‘religion.’ In each case, he argues, justice has been corrupted.

A more solid foundation:

Thus it is evident that already in early 1914, there is a clear distancing of contemporary Socialism from Jesus and the Gospel. Barth is no longer prepared to align the two. Before the year is over, Barth was firm in his conviction that to simply underwrite the Social Democratic programme with a religious foundation was theologically unacceptable. What was required was for the Socialists to do more, as he clearly articulates in a letter to Eduard Thurneysen:

Our difficulty in addressing the Social Democrats became clear to me once more: either one strengthens them in their party loyalty by providing a religious foundation and all manner of Christian aims for their political ethos – or one tries to lead them out beyond themselves and thereby, as I had the impression yesterday, one lays upon them a burden, which is too heavy for many of them to bear. In spite of everything, the latter is the right thing to do if one is going to give such lectures at all. Indeed I hold it to be certainly the right one if the question is asked.\textsuperscript{201}
That something more, which Barth believed to be too much for the Socialists and yet essential for Socialism to succeed, he was convinced only the Gospel and Jesus could provide, and in congruity with his earliest work it was moral.

That much is revealed in a work conceived earlier in the same year in which he briefly sought to relate the Gospel and Socialism once more. Barth identifies by ‘Socialism’ that which was central to the various contemporary movements that shared the name. ‘The great modern movement … found to be replacing the human social system based on egoism and disdain by means of a new one based on solidarity and justice.’ By the Gospel, notably, Barth states his intentions as ‘what Jesus brought into the world … not what humanity made out of it.’

The work opens in a manner consistent with the essay comparing Jesus with the movement considered in the last chapter. ‘A true Christian ought to identify with Socialism and act for the social advance.’ However, from the start it is much firmer in stating the need for the Gospel as the foundation of a true Socialism. ‘A true Socialist ought to identify with the Gospel both taking direction from and finding support in it.’

In this work, Barth identifies two things that contributed to his becoming a committed Socialist. The first was theological, a study of Calvin’s ‘idea of the City of God on Earth.’ This had enabled him, Barth confesses, to conceive of the Kingdom of God as involving not only love of God, but brotherly love as well. The second is less clearly identified in Barth’s claim that it was ‘through S, I became familiar and meticulously thought and studied the things which drive socialism.’ This “S” is identified by Marquardt to be the work on Socialism of Sombart that Barth had in his possession from 1908. However, as I argued in the last chapter, it was more likely the need for justice among his Safenwil parishioners and
not Socialist theory that convinced him of the value of Socialism with its emphasis on economic justice. Thus, the S more likely stands for his experience in Safenwil, as is suggested in the edition of the Gesamt Ausgabe from which this translation of “Evangelium und Sozialismus” was made.207

Upon laying out the objections to his proposal from the right and the left and his responses in brief, Barth next identifies what Socialism and Christianity each had to contribute to the other. What the Socialist brought that the Christian was encouraged to embrace was ‘the different premise’ upon which to conceive of a social order. Barth does not identify Socialism with the ‘new world’ that Jesus promised, but argues its emphasis on justice and solidarity was ‘still of a piece’ with it. However, he also contends that ‘without the cast of mind and the power of the Gospel we will not come into the Kingdom of God, not even up to the socialist ultimate aim.’208 Barth identified how he believed that, in the sufficient moral strength it provided, the Gospel was to be necessary to the achievement of these Socialist aims.

This can only happen as we Christians supply the conditions which our ability to struggle and the right to hope give to the socialist goal. … Socialism needs thoughtful, pure, strong, self-denying men, needs a great pull in this direction, a great love for mankind. What we find in the Gospel and need badly as Socialist.209

Thus, Barth contends that the Gospel was able to provide what was lacking in the movement. That is, individuals of sufficient moral resolve; a resolve forged in the strength of the hope and the promise the Gospel provided. Therefore, not only was Barth now ‘Using the Gospel for an important piece of support’ for his Socialist views, he also believed ‘that [Socialism] itself cannot be realized without [it].’210

The conviction of the necessity for the moral transformation rooted in the Gospel had been growing in Barth’s mind for some time now. It was intuited in the student essay, noted
in the Safenwil essay and is reflected in remarks he made already in June 1913 in a sermon: ‘Without this security against our natural instincts, without this connection with God, Socialism is empty talk and affection.’ Clearly there are other remarks made in support of Socialism, but this support is not rightly understood apart from these very clear assertions regarding its dependency for its success upon that which he believed only the Gospel could provide. As Timothy Gorringe sums it up ‘[S]ocialism without a solid theological foundation was to him a way of losing everything through a lack of substance.’

**A crisis that leads to a new direction taken:**

To this point, Barth had not even joined the Social Democratic party. He had been encouraged to join as early as 1913, but would only do so after the party ‘had become just as hopelessly compromised as liberal theology.’ It is well known that Barth traced his departure from the liberalism of his teachers to a manifesto they all signed in support of the chancellor’s war policy at its beginning (August 1914) at which point ‘a whole world of exegesis, ethics, dogmatics and preaching, which [he] had hitherto held to be essentially trustworthy, was shaken to the foundations, and with it all the other writings of the German theologians.’

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that Barth’s response was a wholesale rejection of their example. In fact, he would later applaud nineteenth-century theology, of which they were a part, for its ‘confrontation with the contemporary age and its various conceptions.’ This was nineteenth-century theology’s virtue. It ‘exposed itself to the world’ and, argued Barth, theology should do so: ‘It must be engaged in conversation with the contemporary world, whatever the means of the dialogue.’ Where they had
compromised their theology was in allowing the contemporary age to dictate the terms of engagement.

Barth had not only been disappointed by his teachers’ support of the war. Barth later recalled that, in light of one of Hermann Kutter’s earlier works, *Sie Mussen*, he ‘had more or less definitively expected that socialism would prove to be a kind of hammer of God.’

It was a belief that had only recently been strengthened with respect to war at a Congress in Basil on November 24, 1912. At which, Barth later recalled, ‘the Socialists of all lands had solemnly assured each other and the world that they would be able to offer effective resistance to the outbreak of any new war.’

Yet, with the onset of the war he recalls witnessing with disappointment the ‘apostasy of the party’ because ‘all along the national war fronts we saw [Socialism] swinging into line.’

In the end, as Willis describes it, the Social Democrats proved to be ‘of a piece with nineteenth century theology.’ If his teachers’ actions revealed a desire, consistent with nineteenth-century theology, ‘to have God at [their] disposal,’ it may be said that the Socialists’ response revealed a desire for the same of justice. Both would manipulate their ideals in support of a nationalist war effort. Barth’s commitments to God and social justice, which from his youth had been held in tandem, proved to be much more profound.

**Principled objections:**

Ironically, it would only be after such actions by the Social Democrats that Barth would officially join the Party on February 5, 1915. In the justification he gives for doing so, it is clearly evident that his moral/theological convictions prompted his actions.

Just because I set such emphasis Sunday by Sunday upon the last things, it was no longer possible for me personally to remain suspended in the clouds above the present evil world but rather it had to be demonstrated here and now that faith in the
Greatest does not exclude but rather includes within it work and suffering in the realm of the imperfect.\textsuperscript{222}

This gesture toward the Socialists was one of “qualified solidarity” only, however. That much is revealed in how Barth continues in his letter to Thurneysen: ‘The socialist in my congregation will now, I hope, have a right understanding in my public criticisms of the party.’\textsuperscript{223}

The nature of these criticisms is revealed in a sketch “On the Intrinsic Future of Social Democracy” composed just a few months later\textsuperscript{224} in which he argued that Social Democracy’s failure was due to ‘its own shortcomings.’ That is, its abandoning of its ideals at the very point the existing social structure was ‘yielding its most horrible harvest.’\textsuperscript{225} However, it is the three principles that Barth proposes that are essential to Social Democracy’s future and that are of greatest interest to the present work. In the first, Barth argues that ‘The innermost essence of socialism should surely be a passion for justice for each and every person, in opposition to the concessions on the level of “works” which was just where the party was compromising itself.’\textsuperscript{226} As a means of promoting their cause, the Socialists were challenged in a second principle to ‘reflect a trust in the power of its truth for victory’, drawing their strength from somewhere other than the ‘struggle for political and economic power.’\textsuperscript{227} He does not, however, identify the source. Finally, Barth determined Socialism’s aim in principle ‘must be the free pure personality, and the future state only a means to the attainment of that end … freed, indeed “redeemed,” from bourgeois egoism, with its false idealism and half-serious Christianity ….‘\textsuperscript{228}

It is here argued that Barth’s appeal for a source of strength in support of a universal application of justice indicates a strengthening of what was a nascent understanding already in 1906 that what is necessary – to fortify the breadth of justice and depth of mercy that the
application of a Socialist ethic demands – is nothing less than the freedom born of grace and mercy that is found in the Gospel and so fortifies Christianity’s members. This conviction has been shown to be developing in strength over the course of Barth’s time in Safenwil. It is, arguably, the very premise upon which Barth in future argues – in the reversal of the common paradigm ‘law and Gospel’ as ‘Gospel and law’ – that the impetus behind Christian moral action is not obligation to prescribed laws, but thanksgiving for the grace and mercy they have been shown in Christ Jesus.\textsuperscript{229} That Barth was now more committed to the support the Gospel offered than any humanly contrived social ethic is clearly revealed in his response to Pastor Hans Bader’s assessment of Ragaz’ and Kutter’s different approaches to the Socialist cause.\textsuperscript{230}

At a conference in Pratteln later that same year (1915), Bader portrayed Ragaz as something of a Humanist with an optimistic evaluation of Social Democracy. He begins on the side of Socialism and the demand for action, in order that development in social justice will occur. Thus, he actively promotes the Religious Socialist Party, its conferences and new ways in opposition to the Church. Kutter is presented as more resigned in orientation. He is more of the traditional Pietist who begins with insight into the enslaved condition of man without God, the needed experience of God and the Kingdom of God as promise. Therefore, he promotes the creation of circles of friends for spiritual deepening that concentrates on working with pastors.

Barth stated that his sympathies lay somewhere on the horizon where the two might meet. Consistent with earlier developments: ‘in general [he] was forced to place the emphasis where Kutter did.’\textsuperscript{231} However, ‘[he] was able at no point of importance to regard Ragaz positions as having to be excluded; … especially Ragaz’ endeavor to put principles
into practice, an indispensable though secondary element in spite of its evident “danger.”

In the same document, there is a conclusion stated. It indicates the road Barth would take in his search for a way forward. ‘Conclusion: The religious-socialist “concern” is finished; the taking of God in earnest is at its beginning.’ It was in the same month these remarks were composed that Barth would leave the Party, although he would not leave behind the concerns for social justice entirely.

Blumhardt’s influence:

Therefore, as Willis observes, while Barth had been positively influenced by the Socialists’ emphasis on the social and ethical question, it was an influence that in the end would prove to be largely religious in nature. What had impressed him most of the Religious Socialists, especially Kutter, was their willingness to take God seriously and so start with God. He was further encouraged in the same vein by a visit with Christoph Blumhardt, son of Johann Christoph Blumhardt, whose theological writings had been influential among the Socialists, primarily for their emphasis on eschatology.

During the visit, Blumhardt spoke of the need to recognize that ‘world is world, but God is God.’ Remarks such as this precipitated Barth’s turn to the writings of both the elder and the younger Blumhardt in what was becoming his search for a new theological foundation. As influences, they came at just the time he had begun to realize that ‘what we need is something beyond all morality and politics and ethics.’ Evidence of the recognition of this need can be found in a criticism of Leonhard Ragaz that Barth made in a letter to Thurneysen:

I read [Ragaz’] article thoroughly last night and find it very instructive, in the sense that he makes very clear what he is lacking vis-à-vis Blumhardt and Kutter … Decisive for me is … the starting point. Why plunge immediately into ethics (“What should we do?”), the old question which avoids the real subject-matter, as if there
were nothing more pressing! Is it self evident that “we” “represent” the Kingdom of
God? … Have we comprehended, experienced the Kingdom of God in its radical
seriousness? … Not a word of the “knowledge of God”, or “conversion”, of
“waiting” on the Kingdom of God, which is the a priori of all “representing”! – In
short, when I read this papal decision of Ragaz’, I am very happy to know Kutter ….

While it is certainly true that the following period of development in Barth’s theology
involves a shift away from the ethical idealism of his teachers, it is here suggested that the
more significant development is found in his turning away from the modern optimism
regarding humanity’s autonomous freedom. It is that which precipitated the appeal to the
particular idealism in the first place. It had also come to reign in theology and was proven
misguided in the actions of his professors and the Socialists in so far as it elevated the
individual responsibility from that of one for the ethical decision to one of the determination
of the ethical.

What is intended here is something like the change in the agent’s relationship to order
implicit in Charles Taylor’s description of the transition in ethics that occurred with
modernity and served the emergence of an exclusive Humanism. That transition, Taylor
argues, ‘can be conceived as one which takes us from an ethic grounded on an order which is
at work in reality, to an ethic which sees order as imposed by will.’ In the latter, ‘Forms and
their expression belong exclusively in the domain of minds.’ In the context of a study of
Barth – who will eventually define sin as that of seeking equality with God, – the Cartesian
remark Taylor cites in the context of his analysis of this change is particularly noteworthy:
‘Now freewill is in itself the noblest thing we can have because it makes us in a certain
manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects; and so its rightful use is the
greatest of all the goods we possess, and further there is nothing that is more our own or that
matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but freewill can produce our greatest contentments.²³⁸

This period of Barth’s development does not involve a return to a pre-Enlightenment naïveté, however. Rather, he was also ‘busy making extracts from Kant … as though [he] were once more getting ready for an examination.’²³⁹ A profound appreciation of Kant would develop out of this study that, arguably, influenced the moral epistemology which became the foundation of his thought.²⁴⁰ It is, I believe, this direct appropriation of Kant that would serve him, permitting him to, as Markus Barth describes it: ‘set out to find and formulate a concept of God that would be true to God and relevant to the world at the same time’ directly from the Word of God. Such, as articulated by Marcus Barth, was one of the two motivating factors in Barth’s search for a new way that Marquardt identified. The other, which is not necessarily disputed in the current work, is that ‘K.B. was looking for a new way to call for and establish social justice.’²⁴¹ A much more modest, theologically responsible account of the freedom humanity realized in the Enlightenment will be Barth’s eventual achievement. Its challenge, for most, lay in the ethic proffered.

A new trajectory:

This would be a long road of discovery involving Barth in a return to the Reformed and earlier theological traditions, but above all and most immediately to the Word of God itself. He had been duly influenced, through his preaching, by the challenge of presenting the Word of God in a responsible manner, which forced him ‘to face directly the question of man’s prerogative and ability to speak as man of God, and so call into question the whole thrust of nineteenth century liberal theology.’²⁴² Thereafter, as Thomas Torrance observes, he was ‘determined to hear the Word of God out of itself, as it came straight from above,
unfettered by a masterful culture, uncontrolled by the needs and satisfactions of bourgeois society, and before it had been sifted and diluted by being passed through some general frame of thought already worked out by modern man. Clearly, for Barth, the Word of God became the metaphysician’s hand book, insofar as the Word of God, not outside sources, was determinative of the parameters of what was possible, and all secondary reflection upon the Word of God was open to criticism from it.

The results of this new direction in his thinking, although piecemeal, are manifested in a number of ways. For example, in his essay “The Righteousness of God” referred to earlier, he writes, regarding the human condition, of the human propensity out of anxiety and fear to translate the call to divine righteousness heard in the conscience into human forms. As Willis observes, in each case ‘the result remains constant: a domestication of God and a loss of seriousness.’ The new direction also results in a change in his understanding of the source and nature of theological reflection. In his essay “The Strange New World of the Bible”, he writes of discovering that ‘it is not right human thoughts about God which form the content of the bible, but right divine thoughts about human beings.’ Finally, and most significantly in the context of the present work, ‘over and above the group of problems associated with liberal theology and Religious socialism,’ Barth recalls, ‘I began to be increasingly preoccupied with the idea of the kingdom of God in the biblical, real, this-worldly sense of the term.’

There is a measure of truth to Marquardt’s claim that Barth came to see the ‘new world’ being created as one entailing ‘the revolutionary overthrow of existing middle class society.’ However, it is important to recognize that Barth did not foresee an active role for
the Church in the process of overthrowing the State. (see below) As Thomas Torrance rightly observes,

It is significant, ..., that when the young Barth made his discovery of the supernatural nature of the Kingdom of God and of the Word of God as the mighty act of God that comes breaking into the midst of life, he took pains not to mislead his congregation by confusing the Gospel with politics or muffling the Word of God by overlaying it with discussion of secular issues from the pulpit.248

At the same time, what this meant for Barth was not abstention from the realm of the political, but the need to approach it ‘solely on the ground of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.’249 This is manifested in exhortations to his parishioners like the following in a sermon: ‘You should all say to yourselves the prerequisite: our citizenship is in heaven. You should also indicate in yourselves the human things not from the side of humanity, but from the side of God.’250 Its significance is evident in the first major works he penned in the midst of the profound theological transformation that occurred in this most significant period of his development, namely the Römerbrief which was completed in 1918, and a social/ethical piece titled “The Christian’s Place in Society”251 delivered at a conference on “Religion and Social Relations” in 1919.

The Römerbrief:

Barth’s Römerbrief was written while coming to terms with the discovery that God addresses us in Scripture. For, ‘if that is what the Bible is,’ as Torrance observes, ‘then the theological faculties had got it all wrong.’252 In it, Barth tries to recover a sense of the transcendence and holiness of God in order that his readers might, in the words of Blumhardt, ‘let God be God.’ In the preface, he writes: ‘If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his
answers, those answers must be our answers.” Thus, he clearly demonstrates a belief in Scripture’s moral significance.

There also remains within the *Römerbrief* a presupposition of divine immediacy. ‘Really the most marked feature of the new theology,’ argues Gorringe ‘is the vivid sense of the reality of God, engaging with the world …,’ a feature of the realism that McCormack identifies as characteristic of Barth’s new theological direction. However, Gorringe rightly observes that it is to be contrasted with the liberalism of his early theology in that it does not place God within our grasp, rather it is ‘God’s grasping of us.’ In the new work, God is portrayed as very much active in the world creating ‘new life’ out of the old.

Sin depicted as the human desire for autonomy over against God McCormack rightly identifies has political overtones. To so identify sin ‘was at the same time to strip the bourgeoisie preoccupation with self-realization through acquisition of money and power of any ideological justification.’ Redemption’s establishment amounts to ‘the fulfilment of a human life in the immediacy with God which had once again been found’ in the reversal of our pride through Christ’s life of obedience to God. In the resurrection, the victory of God (Blumhardt) was revealed. Already here there is evident in Barth, argues Gorringe, appeal to the resurrection as ‘the divine verdict on Christ’s obedience’ that will one day occupy his *Church Dogmatics*.

Christ’s victory is an accomplished yet eschatological (heavenly) reality that breaks through periodically into history in anticipation of its full realization on earth. The metaphor of ‘breakthrough’ is common in the new Barth. It is in this way that Barth speaks of the divinely sanctioned, ‘actual’ history’s revelation in the midst of ‘so-called’ history. This emphasis upon ‘actual history’ in contrast to ‘so-called’ history may be interpreted as a
desire to focus on those events where life is fully realized by the truly enlightened individual. In the language of the later Tambach lecture, it denotes those locations where ‘Life enters into life.’ Thus, it is not an historical event in the sense of that determined by time’s progress, but of ‘moments when real history becomes visible.’ The cross is one such breakthrough. ‘God’s faithfulness breaks through the inescapable necessity of God’s wrath against humans, and creates righteousness on earth and the possibility of eternal life. In Christ, “God’s reality [Sache] becomes our reality.” A great deal more could be said, but with this grounding in his new theology I turn to the material in the commentary that most concerns the argument of this thesis.

When turning to the ethical material in chapter 12, acknowledging the shift in Paul’s emphasis, Barth observes ‘Now we are in the position, also in agreement about it, to say and hear what we should do because we’re now under the rule of the Spirit of life (8:2).’ As he comes to chapter 13 and the material that concerns the present work, he picks up again: ‘And now in this rambling towards the light the mysterious-ambiguous appearance of the State and with it the problem of politics also enters naturally for us.’ Moreover, he argues, ‘consider carefully that what we are able to say about it is meant in the Spirit and must be heard in the Spirit.’ Thus, one must continue in a vein that reflects his new theological direction.

**A politics revised:**

The theological character of Barth’s treatment of the political comes to the fore immediately as he places the State within the context of divine judgement.

Humanity through its fall has been removed from the immediate leadership of its earthly affairs by God’s justice. This normal state must once more be established in Christ first. Provisionally, and apart from Christ, is the history of the field of the divine wrath. However, even in these days all its positions and provisional tasks are
dependant upon God. War, hunger and pestilence (c.f. Jer 14:12 ff) take their course, as they must, estranged from God’s kingdom, although God’s will is not withdrawn from the world. This power, in its present day manner of existence, is not of God’s creation and establishment and its highest leadership is still also subject to the degeneration of divine intentions; so was Pharoah (9:17). So the present State, as it stepped into the place of the original and, in Christ, yet to be renovated State of God.262

Thus, for Barth, the present State does not exist in its present form as an institution of divine creation. Rather, he characterizes its nature in a manner that is consistent with his renewed theological convictions regarding the human condition. ‘Its name is called “power,”’ he contends, ‘because it is sheer power marked and recognized as characteristically compulsive in contrast to the justice and freedom of the Kingdom of God. The evil, namely the will of men foreign to God, has the power on earth ….’263

As such, in its exercise of power, the State functions in a manner that ‘is diametrically opposite to the [created] intentions of God; it is evil in itself.’264 This is not to say, however, that it does not serve the purposes of God. Rather, even in its fallen state, in its perverted exercise of power, the State is an instrument of the will of God in its negative expression or judgement. ‘It is at the same time a revelation of the wrath of God, humanity’s punishment of which it has to become aware (1:23ff), in which the (still to be defeated through the good in Christ 12:21) evil rules by means of evil to discipline and maintain order.’265 (502)

Barth now characterizes the essence of the political in a rather dark light that might best be explained by the impact of the war on his thought and his renewed biblical understanding of the human condition. He now believes it is according to God’s will ‘that through evil, the evil in this age will be fought and defeated.’ For Barth, this was not just a matter of a poor choice of representation in the ruling State. Rather, as he now understood
things, ‘as the diabolical art of majorities all politics is a thoroughly filthy struggle for power.’ And there was not to be any thought given to the possibility of changing ‘the contrariness to divinity of its nature.’

However, this was not a reason for despair, only acknowledgement. Despite all evidence to the contrary, for Barth:

[T]he wisdom of God triumphs in this errant wisdom of these times, his relentless law in the still unredeemed humanity. The “power” in itself and the “powers”, which even as “powers” are first of all actually internal to the relaxed thought of God, are chips off of the original [Ursprung] power, which have become particularly magnificent, only godless, sinful, worldly powers. Still, even as chips off of the power of God, they stand in borders, position, permanence, and prospect, with their full effectiveness in accordance to the divinely appointed disposition, – the divine leading that they themselves cannot elude.

Thus, in spite of its fallen nature and perverted exercise of power, which to all appearances seems to stand in opposition to God’s will, the State serves it nonetheless. ‘[E]vil itself it must avenge evil. That is the divine purpose and office of the State, every State, which is not the State of God itself. That is the divine essence of politics.’

For the purposes of the present work, the real significance in how Barth understands the role of the State is in the effect it has on how he conceives of the Christian’s relationship to it. In contrast to the Church’s past domination of the political sphere, he contends that ‘as with Christ you do not have to manage the state’s power.’ Rather, as Barth conceives of things, Christian participation in the State is to be defined by the Kingdom they serve. They do not belong to the present State which, by nature, ‘wills to preserve and strengthen’ and so they cannot give in to it as Christians, whose lives are to be lived in openness to the State, they await in the coming Kingdom of God. This Kingdom’s coming is not connected with moral and political development that is the result of human initiative. Rather, it is only ‘[o]f God in and through God’s power [that] it breaks out with the aim not to improve but to
replace the present State, to remove through the power of justice the power of the injustice from above and below.\textsuperscript{270} Therefore, in the context of the present State that seeks to preserve order, their lives are to be lived in humble anticipation of the Kingdom of God, which advances and will one day replace the existing broken State.

This does not mean that the Church is to remove itself from the State or any responsibility for the State. What it means is that Church members should differ from those outside the Church in the nature and extent to which they will identify with the State’s ways. Christian identity is to be rooted in Christ alone, and not with the physical borders within which they reside or with ‘national identity.’ Christians will have no part ‘of [the State’s] “positive esteem,” of its serious deliberate civil cast of mind, of its patriotism’ of the kind that only recently led to the atrocities of war.\textsuperscript{271}

In contrast with those who glory in national identities at the expense of others, Christians will ‘keep peace with all of humanity.’ Their interests are to serve the One to whom, in Christ, they belong. ‘[They] have no “fatherland” [they] seek it (Heb. 11:13-16).’ Therefore, argues Barth, ‘the formulation of the question that must pass between Nero and the rabble, between Germany and England, between the bourgeois and the proletariat is unable to pass between them’, because as Christians they still ‘stand, through God’s mercy not more, under the angry shadow where it can be defeated only through evil.’\textsuperscript{272} However, Christians are to serve a higher purpose. Their concern is not political, but to serve the reunification of men with God and in that way they serve a moral purpose. Barth contends:

\begin{quote}
For you the concern is to overcome [evil] through the good and only through the good. Through the new unification of men with God initiated in Christ the good shall come once more on Earth to a separate power. And you should not, out of outer, relative necessity of the immediate, turn away from your task to receive and to strengthen this separate power of the good (12:21).\textsuperscript{273}
\end{quote}
Thus, as Christ’s, they are not to ‘work the unrighteous “laws” of the State. The law of the State is incorrigible.’\textsuperscript{274} Rather, they shall only work with it, and not earnestly, where unavoidable. That is why, argues Barth, when one turns to the question of Church and State or ‘Christianity and Fatherland’ in Romans, ‘There is no trace of political thought or political interest perceptible.’\textsuperscript{275}

In contrast to the perspective of contemporary social revolutionary movements, Barth contends that ‘except that what can come near to cause for political struggle can also come near to encounters between Spirit and flesh. Never ever will you fight the decisive encounter between old and new in the political arena.’\textsuperscript{276} Rather, Christians are ‘to concentrate on the absolute revolution of God, and to leave the whole area of the penultimate dissolving process, which is to die then anyway.’ And they are to do so ‘naturally without an interest in the preservation of the present, but also without interfering in its destruction as such.’\textsuperscript{277} In the meantime, there is to be a clear separation from political means of overcoming (power). To seek otherwise, contends Barth, is to compromise their very identity.

Christianity improves on all others, while it includes them in itself; it is not suitable to change into a battle motto. As a special party it operates on a similar base opposite the State (“Christ against Caesar”), so it would forfeit its original dynamic. It cannot appear as power against power, it calls the power to its godly origin left behind.\textsuperscript{278}

In this way, Barth argues, politically Christianity is ‘more than Leninism. Christianity in action trades itself for the programme “all or nothing” in the sense that the completion which it anticipates is not a (relative or absolute) goal and result, the development of a gradual ascent of humankind, but the revelation of a new creation or the content of a new knowledge. This program cannot become subject to an Ethic.’\textsuperscript{279} ‘Your state’, – Barth argues in a remark that deserves special attention, – ‘and its revolution are in heaven, “in the hidden-ness of humanity [im verborgen menschen]” (2:16).\textsuperscript{280}
The revolution of God:

These references to ‘revolution’ here and ‘revolution of God’ above have elicited a fair amount of controversy and deserve attention. They appear to support Marquardt and others who wish to identify a politically revolutionary, even anarchistic, intention in Barth. That this is clearly not the intent is evident when the references are taken in their context. The use made of revolution is rightly interpreted in light of what McCormack and Hunsinger identify as the in-breaking of the eschatological dimension, which Hunsinger describes as follows:

Through the presence of his kingdom, God brings something concretely and socially new out of that which is passing away. He is at large in the world through radical change, bringing life from death, justice from oppression, and permanence from decay. As established by Jesus Christ, God’s kingdom is this drastic and organic process, the process which discloses God’s sovereignty by overcoming the corruption of the world. The organic unity of God, man, and the world, which was lost through sin and death, has been restored, and is being restored, through Jesus Christ.

I suggest that there is evidence of a form of the dialectic Webster identified in Barth’s early ethics at work here, which leads Webster to conclude that ‘[f]rom the beginning Barth believed that, because of who God is, we may not pursue talk of divine action in isolation from talk of the human ethical realm.’ Politically, the New Creation (Kingdom) may be revealed, but only through the activity of lives deeply rooted in the transcendence of God. The Kingdom is indeed ontologically real. However, as the reference ‘in heaven’ elaborated with ‘im verborgen menschen’ (in the hiddenness of humanity) implies, (and Bruce McCormack rightly observes), its presence in the world ‘is actualistic in character, constantly needing to be made real “from above.”’ Thus only from God’s side is the relation real and possible. That it has political implications is suggested by the use of revolution. The question is how best to understand Barth’s intentions. McCormack observes that ‘It all too
easily connoted the existence of a continuous relation of God to humankind.\footnote{286}

Jüngel identifies two uses of revolution that may apply: ‘either (a) the long-lasting process of a basic transformation of, e.g., the social or cultural order; or (b) the political upheaval through which a group or class previously excluded from the political process gains power, or attempts to do so, by breaking down the old order.’\footnote{287} That the latter is clearly not supported by Barth is evident upon returning to the \textit{Römerbrief}. Barth contends, rather, the location of the Christian’s State and its revolution ‘in Heaven’ should influence their action in just the opposite way.

It is exactly why you can and must wait, you can and must personally “undergo” (not out of respect, rather out of radical contempt of the present, not out of opportunism, rather “by conscience will” the matter of God’s will. 13:5). You cannot allow and will the act of God according to the “plans of these ages” in the form of moral experiment before taken and compromised (12:2). You exercise self-restraint and do without curious personal solutions, because the godly world revolution, the redirection of God’s state, is not a matter of individuals.

In fact, competition with the State, whether conservative or revolutionary, even at the individual level, only ‘gives the evil power to the State’s principal law …’ \footnote{288}

It is for this reason, argues Barth, that Paul exhorts his readers to subject themselves to not fight the governing authorities. For, ‘the evil is overcome only in the good, namely through the peculiar power of the good which, in Christ, is already effective, and in you, his members, will grow to the fullness of time.’\footnote{289} As Busch observes, earlier in the \textit{Römerbrief}, it is stated that ‘the revelation which has taken place in Christ is … the power of God which sets in motion the creation of a new Cosmos.’\footnote{290} It is in how Barth describes the power of God affecting change that Jüngel’s alternative form of revolution is suggested. It is best described as the effect of an organic, inner, divinely initiated moral transformation that is contrasted with activity that might be associated with that of social revolutionaries.
He is concerned with the great work of building a new world, which can manifest itself well in storms and catastrophes, internal and material, but must take place in secret [durch ein stilles]. He accustoms all men together (in Christ!) to the godly atmosphere through becoming one together in the godly order. It’s not through individual anarchistic outbreaks, externally [ins Ausserliche] penetrating and causing disturbance.

Thus, argues Barth, it is ‘through the good you shall and will be victorious, not through individuals’ bungling [Pfuschen].’

With that acknowledgement – and in remarks that clearly support the argument that it is divine not human agency that lay behind the revolution Barth sees playing out in history – he exhorts his readers to abandon all forms of revolution against the current State. They are urged to allow the tensions that exist to remain, and to not ‘spoil the productiveness of the moments through ill-considered letting out and going on about the secrets of God.’ Rather, they are encouraged to ‘let the healing restlessness in the heart, which is given by God, to deepen of itself, to intensify, and the universal flood of the godly to come, to rise as reinforcement, once the dam is broken.’ In the meantime, he exhorts them once more to ‘subject yourselves!’

Therefore, when Barth concludes his instruction at this point with the admonition ‘The measure and kind of your participation in the shape of the political life are not to be prejudiced through this sign,’ it is reasonable to conclude that he is referring to the progressive revolutionary attitude he anticipates might be initiated through the use of “revolution” to describe the anticipated State’s arrival. This does not exclude a long-lasting gradual transformation of the other kind of which Jüngel speaks. The Church may be instrumental in what Jüngel called a ‘long-lasting process of a basic transformation,’ but it is not to consider itself an agent of transformation. It is indeed true, Barth continues, that your involvement ‘can be very broad according to the measure of the circumstance,’ and ‘it
scarcely becomes you to be able to stand elsewhere than on the extreme left hand. But above all,' he continues, ‘you must consult the ethic in the particulars,’ not in some presupposed ideological superstructure. Moreover, they are encouraged to be conscious at all times that the ethic ‘is an ethic of the muddled situation.’ They inhabit a mixed-up world and are to remain sympathetic to that fact in all of their dealings. In light of their calling to promote the good, Barth argues in a manner that will remain with him until the end of his days that they are to begin with the particular and respond accordingly.

Barth then proceeds to draw out the political implications of this ethic determined by analysis of the particulars in a way that parallels the opening to “The Christian’s Place in Society”, a lecture delivered at Tambach in 1919. He first discourages any ideological identification with a particular political form or principle. He argues that ‘it is as natural as it’s not exhausted to say it’s tradition that Christians have nothing to do with Monarchy, Capitalism, Militarism, Patriotism and Liberalism. “We are dead to sin, how are we able to continue in it?” (6:2).’ At the same time, he is conscious that the temptation to identify with the ruling fashionable principle is real and discourages identification with it. ‘The matter of the godly renewal may not become mixed with the matter of humanity’s advances. The godly may not become politicized and the human theologized, Democracy and Social Democracy are also not to be favored.’ Clearly Barth has moved away from a stance that might allow him to continue with his earlier identification of the Social Democratic movement with Jesus Christ.

With this warning against identification of the godly with the political, Barth proceeds to put Christian efforts in their proper perspective. He identifies them with their standing amongst the penultimate things, in which the Church is described once more as
something of a transformative presence, but not an agent of transformation.

You yourselves must be what you will, like your position in the penultimate things, free for the last. In no case are you allowed to decide to look for the victory of God in what you are able to do against the present state. *That comes through that which God himself does in you* to bring forth a new Heaven and a new Earth, in which justice lives (2 Pet. 3:13).  

Thus Christians are also warned against believing they possess the political answer to the world’s problems. Theocracy was no more approvable than over-identification with any political form or principle, ruling or otherwise. To either over-identify with or to seek to supplant the governing authority was to enter into “the dangerous region in the order of God of force, which is used by the evil authoritarian powers for punishing evil.”

At the same time, this did not mean political activity was not permissible. Barth discouraged fear of the State and encouraged Christians to take their part in its life when and where necessary and encouraged moral purity and realism as they do so. He writes:

Like the rulers, take the responsibility for its method upon yourselves. You have not given it the power it now has over you. “What it is now, for a start, it is through God’s order” (13:1). You have only to watch over the purity of your method and over the undisturbed continuity of your flowing conduct. See that your good conscience triumphs over the “inferior” that you, as political humans, must also still exhibit now, so you can wait the development of things in the innermost courage and confidence. To the ground of the matter then: on the side of realistic, decisive conduct, and not that of the great scene shifter over here and over there, even you are in the work after all. … “To them that love God all things must contribute to the good” (8:28). Also the political things!

Thus, Barth’s confidence in both his theological mentors and the Religious Socialists was shaken. What became evident was the manner with which their actions, linked to a common source in their modern anthropology and its unrestrained autonomy, were corrupted. The reality of what he’s experienced is clear in his Romans commentary’s portrait of politics as power, the effect of human leadership estranged from divine intentions. Out of this existential crisis, what was a growing confidence in the Word of God and the
necessity of the Gospel in matters moral takes precedence. Among the most significant consequences of the new trajectory is that of a chastened anthropology. The combined effect of the period is further evidenced in his emphasis on a much more modest ecclesial social/political involvement. Both are carried over into Barth’s first major social/ethical writing to be considered next.
CHAPTER FIVE
TAMBACH: THE CHRISTIAN’S PLACE IN SOCIETY

In this chapter, the impact of Barth’s reformed theological epistemology and consequent anthropological commitments on his social/political thought is unveiled in the second major political writing to be considered in this work. The deepening in theological commitment is evidenced in his generalizing of the anthropological deficit, in particular, his criticism of past ecclesial attempts at promoting social order. However, it is also manifested in his much more modest portrait of the social order alienated from its divine master. What is now depicted of the two communal forms is a difference of commitment with epistemological distinction, upon which Barth recommends that the Christian exercise a non-ideological social/political responsibility, rooted in hope and faith, and applied critically in the particular.

Preliminary considerations:

“The Christian’s Place in Society” is the first major ethical treatment following Barth’s Römerbrief, written in a very troubled period of European history in which the optimism of the Modern Enlightenment project had been dealt a serious blow. It is a difficult work with many twists and turns, and John Webster rightly suggests that ‘the reader has to think of Barth as struggling to make sense of, and get out from underneath, a set of conventions about ethics in bourgeois Protestantism and in Socialism.’ Barth might best be described as promoting a ‘spiritual and intellectual process,’ rather than a conception of ethics as that of another deontological system.

In contrast to much received interpretation, Webster argues that the true force of the work’s dialectic ‘is not an absolute contrast between superior divine action and (at best)
inferior or (at worst) eliminated human action', nor is it a return to past thought forms. Of the essay, Bruce McCormack observes that '[Barth] had clearly not yet departed from the conception of eschatology which had governed Romans I.' In effect, the work seeks to articulate how the revolution of God may be seen to advance in the context of the social order, in a more theologically responsible negotiation of the conditions of modernity that acknowledges the emancipation of the social order and embraces the dissolution of Christendom.

**An optimism based in hope:**

In opening the reflection, which Barth admits ‘fills one with a curious blend of hope and questioning,’ he sets out by identifying those Modern conditions. Independently, society’s various aspects may each ‘take their familiar course in accordance with the laws of their own logical inner workings.’ It may be more obvious than ever that the ‘familiar course’ is a wrong one and one might just as soon ‘turn away … in utter scepticism and discouragement.’ However, there is no escaping it. Withdrawal is not an option. In the context of such disturbed times, Barth writes – and in a manner consistent with earlier reflections – ‘If out of this situation we ask, Watchman, what of the night? the only response which carries any promise is “the Christian”’ response.

However, in a very clear distancing from the nineteenth-century theology of his teachers, Barth identifies ‘the Christian’ as ‘that within us which is not ourselves but Christ in us.’ In this way, argues Willis, it ‘functions as a transcendent designation predicable of, but not reducible to, individual Christians.’ For the nearest approximation of how it is
manifest at the individual level, Barth claims the predicate of ‘a presupposition of life,’ an orientation toward all that oneself is engaged with.

There is in us, over us, behind us, and beyond us a consciousness of the meaning of life, a memory of our own origin, a turning to the Lord of the universe, a critical No and a creative Yes in regard to all the content of our thought, a facing away from the old and toward the new age – whose sign and fulfillment is the cross.311

This, for Barth, is what it means to move the orientation of faith from the periphery to the centre of Christian understanding. In this, he believes, lies the source of our hope in such troubling times. ‘But if Christ is in us, then society, in spite of its being on the wrong course, is not forsaken of God. The “image of the invisible God,” the “first born of every creature” in us (Col. 1:15), indicates a goal and a future.’312 It is on the basis of this hope that a resolution of the social crises is to be found.

Clearing the groundwork:

With this, Barth raises the question of the place of the Christian in society, setting aside past approaches of overcoming the distance between the two. First he acknowledges ‘How foreign, how almost fantastic the great syntheses of the Epistle to the Colossians seem to us today!’313 Ultimately, Barth considered Christendom a false synthesis of the two, but recognized with its dissolution that the question of the Christian’s place in society had become especially pressing. Thus, he clearly indicates a consciousness of the conditions creating the problem of Christian participation in the social order in the post-modern times to which he belonged.314 In turning to discussion of how to negotiate the problem, he first clears the ground of the more recent revolutionary (liberal) approaches and any reactionary (conservative) responses because of their false presuppositions and the theological risks of a Christian domestication on the one hand or a social intolerance on the other.
The problem of this separation was first approached from the perspective of the post-Enlightenment bourgeois egoism evident in the Neo-Kantians and Barth’s Liberal professors. The result was undue affirmation of the existing social order predicated upon the bald fact of the peculiarity of Christianity itself. ‘… whether we explain it in terms of metaphysics or psychology,’ writes Barth, ‘Christians seem to us to be special people apart from other people, Christianity seems a special fact apart from other facts, Christ a special manifestation apart from other manifestations.’\textsuperscript{315} Those schooled in the post-Enlightenment egoism had become suspicious that behind this lay ‘religious indigence.’ The lack of any philosophical argument to counter their suspicion resulted in those approaches that led to the belief ‘that the meaning of so-called religion is to be found in its relation to actual life.’\textsuperscript{316} The outcome was uncritical identification with various forms of thought like the experiential-expressivist theologies of Schleiermacher and others, the historicist methods of the nineteenth century, social scientific movements like “Religious-Socialism” and a whole host of other like-hyphenated forms.

In a way that indicates his distance from both the theology and ethics of this school of thought, Barth now acknowledges the gulf that separates the Christian and the social, and that the gulf cannot be overcome by simple identification with the social. The various unions of Christianity with social movements he now describes as ‘dangerous short-circuits’ that are more likely to result in ‘secularizing Christ.’ For, as he had become convinced through his more recent study, and already to some extent through his ministry of the Word in Safenwil, ‘the Divine is something whole, complete in itself, a kind of new and different something in contrast to the world. It does not permit of being applied, stuck on, and fitted in. It does not permit of being divided and distributed, for the very reason that it is more than religion.’\textsuperscript{317}
When viewed from the perspective of faith, the same conditions typically precipitated reactionary responses. With its emancipation from State-sanctioned rule by the Church, society was now a ‘whole in itself, broken within perhaps, but outwardly solid.’ Those who objected to its independence reacted to it in longing for the conditions of a pre-Enlightenment naïveté. However, such conservatism could not thereby eradicate the ‘autonomy of social life.’ Reflecting the particularly acute nature of modern developments, Barth observes: ‘If today, with all propriety, though to our grief, the Holy asserts its rights over against the profane, the profane asserts its rights over against the Holy. Society is now really ruled by its own logos; say rather a whole pantheon of its own hypostases and powers.’ There was no denying it; society had broken free of the Church’s influence.

The reactionary alternative was evident in attempts to patch up the ‘old garment’ with pieces torn from the new one, resulting in nothing more than attempts to ‘clericalize’ society. Such was the way of Naumann’s Social Democrats, which Barth had long ago criticized in the Zofingia essay. In the end, all such attempts were futile because, ‘for all our new patches, the old garment still remains the old garment.’ Such efforts were to be avoided because it was God’s help that was sought and, Barth argues: ‘we shall deceive society about it if we set to work building churches and chapels and do not learn to wait upon him in a wholly new way.’

A dilemma is reflected in the essay’s theme defined by an inherent separation of the world of the Church from that of the broader social order. There is ‘on the one hand a great promise, a light from above which is shed upon our situation, but on the other hand an unhappy separation, a thorough-going opposition between two dissimilar magnitudes.’ Resolution of the current crisis, Barth argued, could be found in one place only: ‘That is in
God himself.’ This effectively relativizes the Christian position, limiting it to the ‘priestly agitation of this hope and this need, by means of which the way to the solution, which is in God, may be made clearer to us.’ Therefore, Barth limits himself to suggesting the ‘points of departure’ from which this priestly agitation might proceed.

Laying the groundwork for a response in faith:

First, an understanding of the ‘general standpoint’ was required. Reflective of the emerging eventist character of the divine in his theology, and congruent with the eschatological perspective of the Römerbrief, Barth likens it to an ‘instant in a movement’ as in ‘the momentary view of a bird in flight’ apart from which it is ‘absolutely meaningless, incomprehensible, and impossible.’ By movement, however, he is not speaking of any particular earth-bound movement, religious or otherwise. Rather, it is ‘a movement from above, a movement from a third dimension, so to speak, which transcends and yet penetrates all these movements and gives them their inner meaning and motive; …, and yet is not a movement apart from others.’ Expressed more positively, the eschatological position of the Römerbrief is clear: ‘I mean the movement of God in history or, otherwise expressed, the movement of God in consciousness, the movement whose power and import are revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This must be the gist of all our thinking about the Christian’s place in society, whether that thinking arises from hope, from need, or from both alike.’

In the spirit of his theological mentor Wilhelm Herrmann and a renewed understanding of the transcendence of God accessible in history only ‘through deeds and evidences,’ Barth professes an inability to convey a full understanding of that of which he speaks. ‘What I must give you here I therefore cannot give except a miracle should
happen.’ The divine origin and not its temporal forms, religion or a form of Godliness, is what he speaks of. It cannot be conveyed to others, but must make itself manifest.

‘Christ is absolutely new from above; the way, the truth, and the life of God among men; the Son of Man, in whom humanity becomes aware of its immediacy to God.’ However, Barth in a particularly modern spirit argues that no mental apprehension of ‘the form of this truth can replace or obscure the true transcendence of its content.’ Rather, he contends, ‘this new life is that from the third dimension which penetrates and even passes through all our forms of worship and our experiences; it is the world of God breaking through from its self-contained holiness and appearing in secular life; it is the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead.’

Dogmatically speaking, the issue was one of divine sovereignty. We must return, argues Barth, ‘to that reserve maintained by the divine over against the human.’ However, he writes, ‘[t]here must still be a way from there to here. And, with this “must” and this “still” we confess to the miracle of the revelation of God.’ Barth describes this ‘miracle of revelation’ as a dialectical process of spiritual enlightenment by which humanity becomes conscious of its immediacy to God. This is not an innate capacity; it ‘is not the act of man but the act of God in man. And for this reason God in consciousness is actually God in history – and no mere figment of thought.’

First manifested in a conscious affirmation of life’s ‘connection with its creative origin,’ the wholly other in God, ‘drives us with compelling power to look for a basic ultimate, original correlation between our life and that wholly other life.’ That this ultimately consists in the eventual ‘annulment of the creature-hood in which… we live our life on earth,’ Barth affirms is the intention of Romans 8:23. Yet, he contends, it has a more
immediate impact upon the life of the creature here and now. For, as the individual awaits his or her redemption, in what is a ‘new compulsion from above’ the counterpart to revelation, faith. The individual becomes more conscious of life’s connection to its divine origin and so is placed in ‘critical contact with life,’ by which society’s laws are no longer accepted as ‘ultimate independent authorities.’ This occurs neither out of ‘shame’ nor ‘exhaustion’ nor ‘in scepticism and disillusionment,’ but ‘because our souls have awakened to the consciousness of their immediacy to God.’, Barth argues.332

This awakening of the soul is the vivifying movement of God into history or into consciousness, the movement of Life into life. When we are under its power, we can but issue a categorical challenge to all the authorities in life; we cannot but test them by that which alone can be authoritative.333

All that is abstracted from its divine source can no longer be perceived as life, but as death and is in turn rejected. Such is the general standpoint from which one must proceed.

So considered, Barth identifies ‘the real situation’ of the day as one in which ‘Life has risen up against life in death.’334 In its various revolutionary movements, he argues, whether against authority, family, art, or work for its own sake, ‘what is being called in question today at more than one point and very seriously is the deadly isolation of the human from the divine.’335 Even against the Church, ‘as religion for its own sake … in its Catholic and Protestant forms,’ he contends such protest needs to be directed and ‘we must be the first to understand it’, because of ‘what today’s poor church-baiters themselves manifestly do not understand, that the divine can by no possible means be managed and administered in the form of a thing for its own sake.’336

The Christian’s part in this entire process, described as an ‘unbroken movement of life into death and out of death into life’, Barth argues is to be one of understanding, by which he intends, ‘to have the insight of God that all of this must be just as it is and not
otherwise … to take the whole situation upon us in the fear of God, and in the fear of God to enter into the movement of the era.’ 337 Barth argues it is this healthy theological realism, ascribing meaning to rather than attempting to explain away or palliate the times, ‘which brings us into critical opposition to life.’ Out of it, he believes, ‘the most constructive and fruitful work conceivable is done.’ It is only in this way that one can return to a positive position and give ‘meaning to our times.’ For the ‘negation which issues from God, and means God, is positive, and all positives which are not built upon God are negative.’ 338

Therefore, one should not be bewildered by the times, but understand them in the light of the movement of God in history made manifest in the resurrection. ‘The hope rather than the need is the decisive; the supreme moment … God applies the lever to lift the world. And the world is being lifted by the lever which he has applied.’ 339 With this understanding, Barth writes:

Our life wins depth and perspective. We live in the midst of a tragically incomplete but purposeful series of divine deeds and evidences. We live amidst transition – a transition from death to life, from the unrighteousness of men to the righteousness of God, from the old to the new creation. We live in society as those who understand, as those who undergo, and as those who undertake. We are surrounded by the holy, but not completely surrounded; pressed back by the profane, but not completely pressed back. The great syntheses of the Epistle to the Colossians are not wholly strange to us. They are manifest to us. We believe them. They are fulfilled. We fulfill them. Jesus Lives. 340

**A Kingdom perspective applied:**

With the general standpoint or the Christian perspective on the world defined, and its benefits identified, Barth goes on to consider its application in the particular. The first thing to be understood is that, due to the profound affect of the resurrection upon God’s relation with the world, all temporal movements of reform and revolution need to be viewed in the shadow of the Kingdom of God. ‘It is the revolution which is before all revolutions, as it is
before the whole prevailing order of things. The great negative precedes the small one, as it precedes the small positive. The original is the synthesis. It is out of this that both thesis and antithesis arise.\textsuperscript{341} With this insight, Barth insists, is born a general affirmation of life out of which the ‘genuine, radical denial’, earlier referred to, might follow.

Included in this general affirmation is an affirmation of even the most ‘simple acts and facts of human life,’ not for what they are in themselves, but for their relation to God. ‘In all the social relations in which we may find ourselves, we must perceive something ultimate in the mere fact of their being and having come to be; we must affirm an original grace as such; we must accept orders of creation in the natural world.’\textsuperscript{342} This is the philosophical perspective of Ecclesiastes, argues Barth, with which he likens Socrates’ ability to find even ‘in the streets of the Athens of the Peloponesian War, … a direct indication of a general original knowledge of the meaning and aim of life.’ In adopting this perspective, Barth writes:

We thereby commit ourselves not to what is mortal and godless in the world but to the living and divine element which is always there; and this very committing of ourselves to God in the world is our power of not committing ourselves to the world without God. “Created by him and for him.” In this “by him” and “for him” by Christ and for Christ, lies our victory over a false denial of the world and also our absolute surety against a false affirmation of the world.\textsuperscript{343} (300)

In light of the significant potential of its misapplication as ‘mere regard for the creation,’ he concludes that one can only protect against such false affirmation through recalling ‘the very mind of Christ in regard to the events, the necessary and in their way the right and proper events, of the daily round.’\textsuperscript{344}

Barth argues it is ‘only out of the keenest consciousness of redemption,’ that one can ‘recognize in the worldly the analogy of the heavenly and take pleasure in it.’\textsuperscript{345}

Illustrative of a right affirmation of creaturely existence, Barth refers to Jesus’ use of
parables, – how in them ordinary events were considered illustrative of the Kingdom of Heaven. Acknowledging the ‘farseeing, happy patience’ with which Jesus compares what is transitory with the eternal, Barth emphasises how he viewed it only in parabolic terms, seeking ‘their original and creative element not in the things themselves, but in their heavenly analogue.’ Finally, he refers to the miraculous nature of such vision arguing that it ‘is not a rational, obvious self-evident procedure, but is the nature of revelation.’ Thus, in the nature of the parables themselves, which Barth defines as ‘pictures from life as it is, pictures that mean something’ he finds support for the view that simple participation in the World might have meaning beyond the particular.\(^{346}\) Here, he finds evidence of the analogical potential of the \textit{regnum naturae}.\(^{347}\) ‘When one does his work well, there comes into evidence not the kingdom of heaven itself but the possibility of it; it is then, as it were, penetrating its World-foreground and entering into consciousness, into fact.’\(^{348}\)

Viewed in this light, simple participation in the world cannot only be affirmed, but believed to be potentially significant. For, ‘[h]owever true it may be that everything we do within the limits of mere particular things and events is only \textit{play} in relation to what really should be done, it is none the less \textit{significant} play if it is rightly engaged in.’\(^{349}\) Therefore, aware of one’s limitations, the potential to be found in ‘honest objectivity’ and ‘good, sound, finished work’ is acknowledged and so encouraged. Therefore,

A humble but purposeful and really happy freedom of movement will always, to some degree, be allowed us even in this age – the freedom, that is, of living in the land of the Philistines: the freedom of going in quiet strength in and out of the house of publicans and sinners; in and out of the house of mammon of unrighteousness; in and out of the house of the state, which, call it what you will, is the beast of the bottomless pit; in and out of the house of secular social democracy; in and out of the house of falsely heralded science and the liberal arts; and finally even in and out of the house of worship.\(^{350}\)
In this way, Barth has shown how affirmation born of this ‘biblical perception of life’ prevents the error of a denial of life – and so of life lived in separation from the world or reactionary conservatism – from becoming ‘a theme in its own right.’

In the next section, he intends to show how that same affirmation carries within itself that which prevents the error of the same affirmation from becoming a ‘theme in itself’ as in a progressive liberalism. First, he corrects the misinterpretation that the objective is some form of ‘harmonious balancing of affirmation and denial,’ some sort of equilibrium. We must not overlook the fact, he argues, ‘that the antithesis is more than mere reaction to the thesis; it issues from the synthesis in its own original strength; it apprehends the thesis and puts an end to it, and in every conceivable moment surpasses it in worth and meaning. Rest is in God alone.’

We, as those who exist this side of that ultimate rest, he argues, ‘must honestly confess, even when we seek to comprehend our situation from the viewpoint of God, that we know the element of tragedy in it better than the element of sovereignty which might reconcile us to it.’ For it is through honest acknowledgement of the tragic that legitimate denial is able to arise. In this way, he argues:

Our Yes toward life from the very beginning carries within it the divine No, which breaks forth as the antithesis and points away from what but now was the thesis to the original and final synthesis. That No is not the last and highest truth but is the call from home which comes in answer to our asking for God in the world.

Barth interprets the unrest, which such tragedy evokes, as evidence of God’s grace and judgement in so far as it indicates the ‘promise of unfolding life’ and a ‘warning’ we cannot escape. For through it

[to]o conscious are we, when we make and must make our affirmations of Life, that our work in this age, though analogous to, is also disjunct from, the work of God. Too real to us is the very presupposition of those affirmations – the thought that it is
all vanity of vanities, vanity. Too solemn is the insight that it doth not yet appear what we shall be.\textsuperscript{356}

Therefore, there is no room in this life for bald affirmation or for ‘Olympian ecstasy’ either. Rather ‘true perception of life is hostile to all abstractions. It may say Yes, but only out of the Yes still more loudly and urgently to say No.’\textsuperscript{357}

Tracing the two movements of this dialectic of affirmation and denial to a common source, Barth suggests will lead one on to a whole new depth of understanding.

So the free outlook upon the order of creation is the very thing that presently leads us on to the region where light is locked in arduous but victorious \textit{struggle} with darkness – leads us from the regnum naturae over into the regnum gloriae, where, in Christ, the problem of life becomes at once serious and full of promise. … and with the same necessity with which we perceive that God is the eternal beginning and the eternal end, we must now discover that the present, the medium in which we live, is transitional in character. At the point where society becomes a mirror of the original thoughts of God, it becomes a mirror of our need and of our hope.\textsuperscript{358}

Moreover, Barth believes it is in this way that ‘the kingdom of God advances to its attack upon society.’\textsuperscript{359} Thus, this attack is one into which he believes the Christian is at once ‘irresistibly drawn,’ yet this ‘does not have its source outside of us but rises within our own freedom.’

For God the Creator, of whom we have been thinking, is also God the Redeemer, in whose footsteps we must follow \textit{of ourselves}; and the onward march of God in history, in which we are \textit{voluntarily} taking part, necessitates our advancing from the defense to the attack, from the Yes to the No, from a naïve acceptance to a criticism of society. We may deny ourselves the universal No no less than the universal Yes, for both are one; or rather, rebus sic stantibus, we may deny ourselves the No even less than the Yes, for it follows after it.\textsuperscript{360}

\textbf{The perspective applied:}

For Barth, the realization of something greater in the context of a fallen world in transition (one’s medium) will still involve much criticism and protest, ‘subversion and conversion.’ However, in a movement away from the past separation of the theological from
the ethical that reflects Barth’s criticism of the Socialists’ idealism, he now locates the impetus behind such action in the very truth that invites the individual to embrace life.

Christ’s truth contains both a warning to us to keep to simple objectivity and an urging which prompts us rigorously to look in our personal and social life for a far greater objectivity. We cannot rest content with seeing in things transitory only a likeness of Something Else. There is an element in analogy that demands continuity. … To all our thought, speech and action, there is an inner meaning that presses for expression; we cannot satisfy ourselves with pictures and parables.  

Also in rejection of those ill-conceived approaches to the faith, which sought comfort solely in the promise of a life in the hereafter or separation from the world, Barth writes:

No relegating of our hopes to a Beyond can give us rest, for it is the Beyond itself … that is the chief cause of our unrest. Nor will any pessimistic discrediting of the here and now give help for this unrest; for it is by the very fact of our living here and now that we are conscious alike of our fall, and, in the likeness of the eternal, of the promise to us.  

With both escapism and outright denial eliminated, the one response left is to serve that critique, ‘to enter fully into the subversion and conversion of this present and of every conceivable world.’ In these times, Barth thought it was regrettable that the Church might not see this, but instead interpret its task as the consolation of souls. Whereas, he argued, ‘… the demand of the day is for a new approach in God to the whole of life, …by frank criticism of particulars, by courageous decision and action, by forward-looking proclamation of truth and patient work of reform.’ The need, in other words, was for a theologically responsible discipleship.

Building upon the metaphor with which Barth above describes the present as a “medium,” it is here suggested what he envisions in this dialectic of affirmation and denial is an activity not unlike that of the artist who, upon intuitively grasping in the medium at hand both the potential for something greater, as well as his or her and the medium’s limitations, does not remain in passive contemplation, but strives against those limitations toward as near
a representation of that something as possible.\textsuperscript{365} In the same way, the Christian existing in the penultimate is made equally conscious of both potential and very real limitations in light of the ultimate, yet strives against those limitations in his or her participation in the here and now.\textsuperscript{366} The aptness of the metaphor of a “medium” is that it conveys the understanding that no matter how accurate the representation, it is not the ultimate in itself. Thus, while the Christian’s actions may be for the better, they do not amount to the true perception of or advancement of the divine Kingdom’s coming and should not be interpreted as such. This is a conviction that Barth will emphasize again and again, although it does not come across as clearly at this point in his development as he would one day wish it had.

Barth does assert, however, that in the same way one must guard against allowing affirmation from becoming an abstraction, one must now protect against ‘expecting that our criticizing, protesting, reforming, organizing, democratizing, socializing, and revolutionizing – however fundamental and thoroughgoing these may be – will satisfy the ideal of the kingdom of God.’\textsuperscript{367} Rather, in something of a reversal of the Hegelian dialectic, Barth writes:

The other, which we try to represent by parable in our thought, speech and action, the other, for whose actual appearing we yearn, being tired of mere parables, is not simply some other thing, but is the wholly other kingdom of God’s. It is the original and spontaneously productive energy of the synthesis from which the energy of the thesis and the energy of the antithesis both derive.\textsuperscript{368}

There is no continuity between human parabolic representation and the Transcendent reality that it seeks to represent, ‘and therefore no objective transition, to be thought of in terms of development.’\textsuperscript{369} With this, Barth asserts once more the eschatological nature of the Kingdom of God:

The goal of history, the telos of which Paul speaks (I Cor. 15:23-28) – which means goal rather than end – is not one historical occurrence among others but the
summation of the history of God in history, its glory being veiled to us but manifest to him and to those eyes which he has opened. The kingdom of the goal, however, is confessedly an order of things which is not to be comprehended in the category of time and contingency. The synthesis we seek is in God alone, and in God alone can we find it. … The creature-hood of the sons of God and the manifestation of the sons of God are mutually exclusive.\footnote{370}

However, the synthesis can be found in God, argues Barth, borrowing a line from Troeltsch. ‘The energy of the life here is the energy of the life beyond,’ to which he adds, ‘this is the energy of affirmation and the greater energy of denial’ represented in the ‘naïve acceptance’ and ‘criticism,’ both of which ‘take their rise in the higher order which in God, but in God alone, is one with the lower.’\footnote{371} The point at which the two planes intersect is in the power of the resurrection; ‘which moves both the world and us, because it is the appearance in our corporeality of a \textit{totaliter aliter} constituted corporeality.’\footnote{372} In the hope born of this breakthrough perpendicularly from above one is, I summarize, enabled to embrace life, open to the development that may come; motivated to act in both ‘humdrum’ and significant ways; freed to both bear one’s ‘limitations, chains and imperfections’ and to break free from them in anticipation ‘of the new age in which the last enemy, death, the limitation par excellence shall be destroyed.’\footnote{373}

Barth contends one need not fear either criticism or affirmation of life here if ‘with Calvin we fix the Christian in society within the \textit{spes futurae vitae}.’\footnote{374} Indeed, such a restricted approach has good reason: ‘When we look from creation and redemption toward perfection, when we look toward the “wholly other” \textit{regnum gloriae}, both our naïve and our critical attitude to society, both our Yes and our No, fall into right practical relation to each other in God.’\footnote{375} Thus, fixing attention upon this future hope frees one from the danger of abstraction, from running aground on ‘either the right bank or on the left.’ Instead of such bias, Barth writes:
We shall make our decisions from the viewpoint of the regnum gloriae; and though this will take us far away from things, it will for that very reason give us perspective upon them – and our short circuits to the right and to the left will gradually become fewer. Without being disturbed by the inconsistent appearance of it we shall then enjoy the freedom of saying now Yes and now No, and of saying both not as a result of outward chance or of inward caprice but because we are so moved by the will of God, which has been abundantly proved ‘good, and acceptable and perfect.’ (Rom. 12:2) … That man can find eternity in his heart is the synthesis. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today – and forever.\textsuperscript{376}

In conclusion, Barth returns to the one question he anticipates remains at the forefront of his readers’ minds, ‘What ought we to do?’ The answer? ‘The one thing which we do not do. What can the Christian do but follow attentively what is done by God?’\textsuperscript{377}

Conclusion:

Thus Barth’s experience in the pastorate and involvement with the Social Democratic party indeed had an affect on him. However, they only deepened what he initially criticized in the movement and it came to be recognized as what made the movement antithetical to any Christian identification with it. It was not the aims of the movement, but the vehicle by which they sought to realize them that set the two in opposition. Barth had come to identify its overestimation of human capacities in the political sphere as but another overly optimistic anticipation of human realization of divine intention.\textsuperscript{378}

What should guide Christian participation in the political sphere is, for Barth, a realistic ethic of the particular grounded in faith and hope in the eschatological promise of the Kingdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ. He believed its application can and often will be quite broad, but contends that it should not pre-determine a left-leaning ideology. Rather, in general affirmation of that which God has provided, the appropriate response was one of critical participation in the social order.
Thus, at this point in his development, through a strengthening of what Barth intuitively grasped already in 1906, he might be described as Socialist in his moral intentions, justice being the ruling principle, but he cannot be identified as ‘politically’ Socialist. Rather, his Socialism is attributable to his appreciation of the moral significance of the breadth and depth of the grace and mercy shown humanity in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Hunsinger believes the Tambach address can be seen as Barth’s ‘decisive break with religious socialism. God and revolution were no longer conceived in relational synthesis. … Henceforth, the socialist task, would receive its ground, limit, and orientation in terms of God’s revolution alone.’

In fact, for more than a decade from this point in his development Barth is least likely to identify with any political movement. The reason is not that he has abandoned all political interest, but rather that he views all humanly conceived forms of obtaining or maintaining a particular order as theologically suspect. They are a confusion of divine intention which, because of his metaphysical commitment to God as ‘Wholly Other,’ cannot be clearly defined and so ascribed to any human activity, even Christian.

The concern raised by some of Barth’s critics at the point in his development marked by his *Römerbrief* was that created by Barth’s eschatology. As Hunsinger observes, ‘[it] implied a relational nexus between God’s kingdom and external historical experience.’ The actualism went unnoticed and it appeared that ‘God had been conflated with revolution; Jesus Christ, with eschatology; eschatology, with an immanent historical process; the praxis of God in Christ with that of man in the world.’ Thus, some perceived the growth of the Kingdom of God as the result of a dynamic historical process.
In fact, Hunsinger identifies two significant problems Barth’s theology had needed to address. First, God had not been conceived of objectively enough, but ‘seemed to be a secondary derivation from the concrete reality of revolution.’\textsuperscript{382} Secondly, Socialist politics still had the ‘directly religious sanction’ he had intended to avoid. As I’ve shown, the latter concern was accounted for in the Tambach lecture, insofar as Barth is more sober in his emphasis on political action and, argues Hunsinger, ‘moves to a more strictly dialectical eschatology’ such that ‘no objective transition between human praxis and divine could be posited.’\textsuperscript{383} Support for socialism might be provided in a particular instance, but religious sanction was not afforded any political movement.

Thus, as Barth’s theological presuppositions deepened, a greater realism with regards to anthropological limitations ensued, whereby theological and anthropological convictions produced a greater measure of humility with regards to the potential of ecclesial social/political involvement. What Barth aimed at was a more chastened anthropology, contingent upon divine action, which neither necessitated the acceptance of historical determinism of the past nor allowed the kind of social/ethical triumphalism that infected the Religious Socialists. The result was the affirmation of a free yet critical participation in the social order rooted in faith and disciplined by hope in the promised, but to be divinely realized Kingdom of God. Yet, there remained the problem of a less abstract theological epistemology.\textsuperscript{384}
CHAPTER SIX

THE MATURE BARTH: GÖTTINGEN AND BEYOND

Introduction:

In this chapter, I show further how the development in the tumultuous transitional period from Barth’s middle to mature thought may be interpreted as the search for a more appropriate theological foundation with an eye to his anthropological concerns. I argue that it concludes with Barth’s appropriation of a Reformed Theology and an anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology. How it serves Barth’s interests is demonstrated from his account of election in the early Göttingen Dogmatics. Its effects on his ethics are revealed from the Münster Ethics, his social/political thought from the Barmen Declaration of 1934 and its mature form is provided from his account of election in the later Church Dogmatics.

Summary and recapitulation:

If Barth’s mature political thought is to be defined, I believe it is as an attempt to account for a politically responsible ecclesiology in the context of the changed world he inhabited. It was a world no longer defined by reigning authorities, ecclesial or monarchical, but increasingly by the collective will of the autonomous Nation State, a will that does not necessarily acknowledge the divine claim on the constantly changing social life that exists within its boundaries. In the initial commentary, Barth laid emphasis upon a process eschatology through which the transformation initiated in Christ is in process of realization in history. Thus, Barth’s appeal to the ‘revolution of God’ in the work is best interpreted by what Timothy Gorringe describes as an attempt by Barth ‘without endorsing liberal ideas of progress … to emphasize the sense of real movement and change in both human and cosmic history.’
In that regard, as Yoder observes, Barth introduced a challenge to the ‘Thomistic/Greek vision [which] claims reliable “natural” knowledge of what the civil order shall be, thereby privileging things as they are ….’ Three things characterise this ‘revolution of God.’ It was divinely initiated and organic in growth and so, argued Barth, ‘needs no more mechanical building up.’ Therefore, it was not intended as a rallying call to the revolutionary troops of radical Religious Socialism. Its progress was to be served, rather, through ‘Solidarity with the enemy’ predicated upon ‘the mercy of God.’ ‘The coming world,’ it was asserted, ‘comes organically not mechanically.’

However, to its initial critics Barth’s commentary appeared to support what David Clough describes as ‘pantheistic relations between God and the world.’ The work was criticised for an all-too-ready association of the divine with revolutionary historical development and could read like an invitation to participate in the revolutionary Socialism Barth resisted. Therefore, when considered in the context of the revolutionary events of the day with their violent outcomes, it is of no surprise that revisions were already in process at Tambach.

Such revisions are already evident in the Tambach lecture’s emphasis upon transformation at a personal, existential, rather than social/historical, level. What most distinguishes Tambach is the realistically avowed recognition that the social emancipation from the Church realized in the Enlightenment could not be undone, either through religious accommodation resulting in secularism, or religious transformation through clericalism. Revolutionary movements were now described as social responses to oppressive false gods, manifestations of the work of God through critique of history or divine judgement. They are
but glimpses of ‘the bird in flight,’ God actively engaged in bringing about the true goal of history. Thus, Tambach reflects both a greater historical and theological realism.

Religious Socialism is now considered to be insufficiently radical. Yet, as Timothy Gorringe observes, ‘Barth believes heart and soul that reality can be changed because God is at work in reality.’ However, the only means with which it was believed possible was through individual commitment involving personal enlightenment and “willful” engagement, hence the Tambach essay’s emphasis on personal existential transformation. No doubt this element in the work led to ‘Barth’s alienation from Leonard Ragaz, who felt that he had vitiated the influence of [Religious Socialism] in Germany by dialectical distortion.’

**Second Romans commentary:**

In the preface to the work in its revised form, his Romans II, Barth suggests that a complete re-working of the original has occurred, although neither had its ‘chief weakness’ been identified as yet nor was it provided by Barth. Given, rather, are some of the intellectual developments that provided the impetus for its revision. A critical re-examination of Paul was precipitated by the reception of the earlier work. It was also philosophically informed by attention to Plato and Kant initiated by his brother Heinrich, with attention to Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard’s ‘inexorable criticism’ as well. Perhaps most theologically significant is Overbeck’s warning against ignoring the ‘essentially eschatological character of the Christian religion.’ As Bruce McCormack observes, one way to characterise the difference between the two editions is that Barth abandoned the earlier process eschatology ‘in favour of a radically futurist “consistent” eschatology.’

Barth identifies the work as a theological investigation in light of the events of the present day and criticizes the hermeneutics of the largely historical/critical readings prevalent
At the time. For Barth, ‘the question of the true nature of interpretation [was] the supreme question.’ 396 He does not deny historical/critical exegesis, but contends these works fail to take the further step necessary for a responsible exegesis. In a key remark identifying a significant stage in his development, he argues for the hermeneutical need to allow the text to speak. ‘True apprehension, can be achieved only by a strict determination to face, as far as possible without rigidity of mind, the tension displayed more or less clearly in the ideas written in the text.’ 397 What he believed necessary may be summed up as a genuine hearing:

Intelligent comment means that I am driven on till I stand with nothing before me but the enigma of the matter; till the document seems hardly to exist as a document; till I have almost forgotten that I am not its author; till I know the author so well that I allow him to speak in my name and am even able to speak in his name myself. 398

Already implicitly evident in these remarks is perhaps the most significant aspect of the work: Barth’s repeated emphasis upon a faith predicated upon grace as one characterised by humility. In a clear shift to a more classically Kantian epistemology, the work challenges the presumptuous self above all. This can be attributed to his appreciation of sin and what McCormack identifies as the problem at the heart of the work, what is here defined as the reservation of a place for ‘the divine Subjectivity in revelation.’ 399 Even in religion, Barth argues:

Our relation to God is ungodly. We suppose that we know what we are saying when we say ‘God’. We assign to himself the highest place in our world: and in so doing we place Him fundamentally on one line with ourselves and with things. We assume that He needs something: and so we assume that we are able to arrange our relation to Him as we arrange our other relationships. We press ourselves into proximity with Him: and so all unthinking, we make Him nigh unto ourselves. We allow ourselves an ordinary communication with Him as though this were not extraordinary behaviour on our part. We dare to deck ourselves out as His companions, patrons, advisers, and commissioners. We confound time with eternity. This is the ungodliness of our relation to God. 400
Consistent with the existential emphasis of Tambach, conversion is now described as born of a crisis that initiates a questioning of the viability of this presumptuous self, leading to an eventual death to self and faith in a transcendent ‘Other.’ A humble faith born of grace which, in contrast to the pre-crises self, confesses its divine Subject shall be put first. The divine subject who, here identified with the true and the good as ‘Wholly Other,’ cannot be fully known.  

Therefore, when turning to the question of obedience born of grace, Barth writes that ‘as the man under grace, I am created and quickened and awakened. But I am also disturbed, for the demand bids me take up arms against the world of men and against men of the world.’ However, Barth does not articulate the battle with sin, or disobedience, as one with others. Rather, ‘the object which I, as the subject, am bidden to attack is – myself.’ The battle is described as one between the old and the new or the known and the unknown self.

The old man, the man of human possibilities, indissolubly united with the sinful and mortal body, is assuredly an EGO; but what he is has no validity for who I am under grace … I can no longer recognize the dominion of sin which dwells in my mortal body, nor can I admit sin is the characteristic sphere in which my mortal body exercises its functions. … From the relation of my body to me as I am, must emerge its relation to me as I am not. I and my body do not form the unchallenged domain of sin, nor even the unchallenged base from which sin operates: we are the battlefield in which sin has to fight for its victory. I am the warrior under grace, the new man, who can neither admit nor submit to the tyranny which sin exercises over me and over my mortal body.

Although sin is identified with a ‘… tyranny exercised over the circumstances in which I live….’ In a manner consistent with his epistemological and hermeneutical developments, escape from this tyranny is not found in isolation from the world ‘because, existentially speaking, there is no “without” which is not also “within.”’ That is not to say that there is not a genuine physical effect of this tyranny.
Yes indeed, the lusts of my body, all of them, effect this exposure: my hunger and my need of sleep, my sexual desires and my longing to ‘express myself’, my temperament and my originality, my determination to know and to create, the blind passion of my will – and finally, and presumably supremely, my ‘need of religion’, with which is linked a veritable macrocosm of social lusts.\textsuperscript{405}

However, the exposure in and of itself is not the problem. For Barth, rather, the issue is with the response to the world perceived through the senses.

What is surprising is that I should authorize a definition, in terms of such lusts, of what I am under grace; that, failing to recognize the relativity of this life, I should obey it and ascribe to it transcendent reality, that – employing a metaphysical term – I should “hypostatize” it, transmute it, dedicate it, and pronounce it to be holy and religious.\textsuperscript{406}

Clearly targeted here is the transcendental privileging of the self’s understanding of the world inhabited. All forms of materialism or naturalism with their asserted dependence upon empiricism in deciding metaphysical matters are included by extension. Thus, religion as it was currently understood in the academy and which influenced much of the theology and practice in the Church of Barth’s day (and arguably still today) was targeted. However, Barth also should be read as targeting all theological, ecclesial and ethical forms – that he now recognized as no more than interpretive – which emphasize their representative forms above their true object. For, argues Barth, ‘The power of obedience which says “Yes” to God and “No” to sin does not exist in any concrete fashion.’\textsuperscript{407}

Second Romans ethics:

This is evidenced in Barth’s description of ethics as a problem at the beginning of his exposition of Romans 12. In it, Barth argues the recognition of the problem is based upon the fact that the concepts used are but abstractions from an existence in which all are participants and thereby should not be taken as definitive. In all our attempts ‘to be sincere, our thought must share in the tension of human life, in its criss-cross lines, and in its
kaleidoscopic movements. Thus, by default, our presuppositions are derived from this life and our thought ‘cannot be justified,’ hence the emphasis upon humility.

Barth writes, ‘the problem of ethics reminds us of the Truth of God, which is never actually present or actually apprehended in our act of thinking, however sublime’; whereby he draws a link between our theology and ethics arguing ‘our conversation about God is not undertaken for its own sake but for the sake of His will.’ And again later:

It is our pondering over the question ‘What shall we do?’ which compels us to undertake so much seemingly idle conversation about God. And it is precisely because our world is filled with pressing practical duties; because there is wickedness in the streets; because of the existence of the daily papers; that we are bound to encounter ‘Paulinism’ and the Epistle to the Romans.

As Clough accurately observes, theologically ‘Barth rejects the cosy and sentimental formulations that make God the ultimate comfort blanket, the answer to all our fears and insecurities.’ That is, the formulations that result in false theological certainties constantly challenge by historicism on the left and defended by superficial accounts of textual infallibility on the right; neither side taking their Subject seriously. Rather, as Clough continues, for Barth ‘God is the Unknown God, and our belief that Jesus is the Christ is an assumption, “devoid of any Content.” We go badly wrong in referring to God if we ignore God’s hiddenness.

Among other things, therefore, exhortation is shown to be allowable only when universally applicable and predicated upon the mercies of God, not human justification. Repentance is identified as the definitive Christian moral act. And, for Barth, ‘The question What shall I do? is capable of no material answer. It simply raises the question of the ground and purpose of all human action, and then … is transformed into a question to which the action of God Himself provides the only answer.’
When turning to the question of governance, Barth writes in a way that reflects this emphasis upon the transcendence of the true and the good: ‘Men have no right to possess objective right against other men. And so the more they surround themselves with objectivity, the greater is the wrong they inflict upon others.’ Although he recognizes that established forms of governance are often unjust and even oppressive, he now argues against revolutionary responses – in a way that leads to this work being identified with an anti-revolutionary turn in his development – although it would be more accurate to say he’s become fully non-partisan, or as Gorringe has argued ‘against-hegemony’.

Revolution is indeed now discouraged because, he writes, ‘[t]he sense of right which has been wounded by the existing order is not restored to health when that order is broken.’ However, for Barth, reactionary conservatism is just as theologically and morally irresponsible as radical revolution. In his exposition of the Pauline command ‘Overcome evil with good,’ Barth continues with a challenge to the very triumphalism inherent in all partisan systems, established or revolutionary. ‘What can this mean,’ he writes ‘but the end of the triumph of men, whether their triumph is celebrated in the existing order or by revolution? And how can this end be represented, if it be not by some strange “not doing” precisely at the point where men feel themselves most powerfully called to action. However nearer to the truth is the revolutionary seeking to bring change, as well-intentioned as the revolutionary may be and although there is no ‘approval of the existing order’ in the Pauline command, at the same time there is ‘disapproval of every enemy of it.’ Because, Barth argues, ‘It is God who wishes to be recognized as He that overcometh the unrighteousness of the existing order.’

Politically, therefore, Barth now argues for the one ‘negative possibility.’ That is, the Pauline exhortation to be ‘subject’ to the governing authorities. This means, he writes, ‘to withdraw and make way; it means to have no resentment, and not to overthrow.’\textsuperscript{420} This was to be complemented ethically on the positive side with the one most revolutionary thing, love.

We are not now thinking of a single act, but of the combination of all positive – that is to say, protesting possibilities; we are thinking of a general ethical manner of behaving. We define love as the ‘great positive possibility’, because in it there is brought to light the \textit{revolutionary aspect} of all ethical behaviour, and because it is veritably concerned with the denial and breaking up of the existing order.\textsuperscript{421}

\textbf{Second Romans reception:}

Through a one-sided distortion of its dialectic, Barth’s second Romans commentary was first considered apolitical and so subsequent reviewers consistently determined his theology likewise. Barth was often perceived to have argued for a wholesale disempowerment of the human subject. However, I believe he attempts to more accurately reflect the true limitations of the Creature before the transcendent Subject.

Human conduct is related to the will of God neither as cause nor effect. Between human responsibility and the freedom of God there is no direct observable relation, but only the indirect, underivable, unexecutable relation between time and eternity, between the creature and the Creator. (355)

More recently, Clough observes what John Webster has shown – namely that there exists ‘even in Romans II, the proclamation of positive human possibilities lived in accordance with God’s “Yes” to humankind.’\textsuperscript{422} As Webster argues, ‘[r]ather than making the second Romans into an eschatological incapacitation of human action, it would be more precise to say that – as in Tambach – Barth is at the beginning of a process of reconstituting human action on grounds quite other from those to which appeal was made in the dominant
Protestant tradition of his day,’ that is on grounds other than an inherent ‘religious consciousness.’

Barth’s intentions may have been obscured by what Webster describes as a ‘fierce iconoclasm’ and ‘overcorrection’ in the dialectical method and emphasis upon God as Wholly Other. The perception left was of a more philosophical deity. This led Ragaz to ask ‘what if it should issue in a new justification of the autonomy of man and thus of secularism in the sense of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms?’ As Webster suggests, however, this emphasis ‘can also be seen as a deliberate ploy to ensure that properly theological affirmations about what human beings do can be grasped as what they are: theological, uncorrupted by the expectations which have been shaped by a disorderly moral tradition.’ Nevertheless, as Barth later acknowledged, this particular dialectical approach to emphasizing divine transcendence was not the solution to a troubled theology and those who adopted it were only ‘partially in the right.’

Moreover, the approach resulted in the theological problem with the work, which was its major criticism. Consistent with his definition of God as ‘Wholly Other’, Barth wrote: ‘The Epistle moves round the theme (1:16, 17) that in Christ Jesus the Deus absconditus is as such the Deus Revelatus.’ Barth erred in his attempt to remain consistent with the work’s theme and maintain God’s hiddenness, while at the same time attempting to speak of His revelation. The error was in his focus upon the resurrection as the point of revelation. The focus was consistent with his intentions, yet when combined with the limitations placed upon the creature, it appeared to impede any significance being applied to the Incarnation.
Analysis:

Consistent with his growing theological interests and his alienation from the Liberalism of his teachers, Busch now describes Barth as having begun to understand his task as one of ‘attempting a theological exegesis.’ As I’ve argued, this was not out of ‘fundamental opposition to interpretations interested predominantly in historical questions, but as a “necessary corrective.”’ Where Barth can be seen to be lacking at this point in his development is in the resources needed to express himself theologically. As von Balthasar summarizes, the initial commentary’s emphasis upon a divine immanence was conceptually indebted more to ‘Plato, right-wing [that is religious] Hegelianism and religious socialism than it [was] to the Bible, Luther or Calvin.’ It in turn gave way in the later edition’s apparent over-emphasis upon transcendence and a much more existentialist tenor owing to ‘Overbeck, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard (and the Reformers, who by now in this light look a bit strange).’

To understand what, among other things, he had been seeking to achieve, I return to his 1911 essay comparing the life and ministry of Jesus to the Socialist movement. Two claims were made in that document that stand out or should stand out to the attentive reader. The first is Barth’s identification of Jesus as having embodied a ‘way of life,’ not a particular ethic or political program. The second is Barth’s significant criticism of the Socialist movement’s emphasis upon political programmes in the advancement of its ideals in response to identified injustices. In this 1911 essay, the former is subtly contrasted with the latter as Jesus’ means of promoting his ideals; in that it evokes a response from within that leads to a genuine moral response or transformation. Where the two approaches differ is in
the respect afforded to the freedom of the individual in bringing about the need of transformation.

Barth had been struggling to articulate a theologically responsible account of responsible discipleship in light of the end of Christendom and its social, philosophical and historical implications, without at the same time falling victim to the political errors identified, even within Religious Socialism, and their potential consequences. What was becoming ever more evident in the political life of his day was that attempts to bring order through the imposition of ethical/political programmes could only be perceived as oppressive and resulted in resistance with often violent outcomes. Due to the modern emphasis upon autonomy, only a personally initiated appropriation of order could be seen as truly respectful of the freedom of the individual. What Barth had experienced politically through Religious Socialism’s subversion of its ideals in an effort to improve justice, theologically in his Theological Mentors’ abandonment of their beliefs when endorsing the War effort, and once again politically in the violent Socialist uprisings of the post-war period were the costs being paid in order to restore or improve order through programmed ethical response and not the simple embodiment of ideals.

In his initial Romans, Barth sought to account for such social dynamics through an emphasis upon the immediacy of God as the one true source of the ongoing Kingdom transformation. It accounted for the historical implications of an emancipated humanity, in particular the social change, and if taken seriously could provide a check on the political concerns. However, his account led to a perceived over-identification of God with revolution in history and could be interpreted as in direct opposition to his intentions. He then emphasized divine transcendence as ‘Wholly Other’ and the necessity of personal
existential transformation. The approach accounted for the political implications of the Enlightenment’s stress on individual freedoms and, if faithfully applied, the convert’s requisite humility could check them. However, with its greater dependence upon a dialectical approach to surmounting the metaphysical challenges, Barth paid too high a theological price. The road to a third way was soon to be discovered in Reformed theology.

**A decisive turn to Reformed theology:**

With the later Romans completion in September 1921, Barth accepted an earlier call, departed from the Safenwil parish and assumed the chair of Reformed theology at Göttingen University. He entered the academy believing he was inadequately prepared for the task at hand and would immediately set to work on his own theological development. He began with some purely historical research and was soon ‘in earnest about discovering the character of Reformed theology’ and ‘understand[ing] the reformed heritage.’ He soon discovered his own theology had become more Reformed and Calvinistic, and ‘slowly but surely became intent on pure Reformed doctrine.’

Why Reformed theology? Although the obvious answer is that the position required it, the reason was much more personal and theological.

Something of a reason for Barth’s preference for Reformed theology in particular is already evident in his now-published lectures on John Calvin, delivered in the summer of 1922. In the introductory lectures, Barth offers a contrast and comparison of the Middle Ages and Reformation periods in which he traces the continuities and discontinuities along a vertical axis (our relationship to the divine) and a horizontal one (our relationships with one another or the world). The significant highlight amongst their discontinuities lay along the vertical axis. They are represented in the contrast between the ‘Theology of the cross’ that
characterized the Reformation era and the ‘theology of glory’ of the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages.

The earlier period had been intent on ‘knowledge of God in his glory, purity and majesty’ served by the use of reason unrestricted by Scriptural authority. The result was a Natural theology based upon ‘the basic concept it was natural that the relation of God, the world, and humanity should be seen at every point as a graded structure of possibilities that are clearly different yet no less clearly in continuity.’ Whereas, with its profound consciousness of human sinfulness, the Reformation theologian ‘sees in the cross and passion the visible side of God that is turned to us and does not look directly at the invisible things of God, his majesty, and glory, by way of profound spiritual vision.’ Therefore, observes Barth, ‘[t]rue theology and true knowledge of God lie … in the crucified Christ.’ Consequently, faith in God’s provision of grace became central and reason was increasingly regulated by Scripture.

In Barth’s further comparison concerning continuities along the horizontal axis, the import of the Renaissance is of particular note. Out of the ‘rebirth of the rationalism of antiquity’ that was the Renaissance, argues Barth, ‘the Modern spirit of an emphatic this-worldliness was born and took its first steps.’ Along with it there came ‘to life a strong interest in nature, in the social and political order, in history, in the nation as such, and last but by no means least in the individual personality.’ However, it was at first unaffected by the Lutheran Reformation and ‘spiritualistic enthusiasts combined the Reformation with Renaissance aspirations.’ In that way, he believes, the ‘Catholic Counter-Reformation was better able to adopt, use, and amalgamate the Renaissance with itself than the young Protestantism that opposed it.’ Although the Middle Ages died with Luther’s discovery,
Barth argues: ‘… their problem, the problem of the active life, of ethics in the broadest sense, did not die with them.’

He identifies ‘the positive significance’ of the Renaissance in its raising of the ‘fateful’ question: ‘What, in spite of everything, did the Lutheran vertical mean for the horizontal, the theology of the cross for unavoidable human striving?’ This question, Barth argued, was needed to bring the crises of the Middle Ages to a head and complete the necessary reformation:

With the posing of this fateful question the second turn in the Reformation came that eventually, by a higher curve in the path, would lead back to the beginning and tragically enough, though in a way that is historically understandable, would lead it back onto a newly repaired stretch of the old horizontal highway, to the Christian secularity from which it had once broken free. But those who put the question were not spectators like Erasmus, but Zwingli and Calvin, children of the Renaissance, who, whether dependently or independently, share the insight of Luther, the born scholastic and mystic.

Thus, the Renaissance’s social/political import both highlights where the historical periods overlap and offers insight into why Barth had a preference for Reformed theology.

For Barth, it is not the case that Luther did not recognize or even address this concern. It is, rather, a question of emphasis. Luther does not lose sight of the horizontal, but it is nearly ‘eclipsed’ by his emphasis upon the vertical. The lasting result would be the lack of responsible discipleship such as Barth was confronted with in his Safenwil parish. However, of the identified Reformed theologians, Barth writes, ‘they never lose sight of the vertical, and just because they keep it in view, their concern is with the whole of the Christian life.….’

Barth identifies Zwingli as the classical ‘Reformed’ theologian, but his early death does not allow this particular emphasis to come to full fruition as it does in Calvin. In Calvin, however, the emphasis upon the horizontal leads to the near ‘eclipse’ of the vertical,
which leads Barth to conclude: ‘If “the just lives by faith” was under threat in Luther, “the just lives by faith” was under threat in Calvin.’ The unfortunate result would be later Reformed thought’s oppressive ecclesial forms, of which Pietism and American Puritanism might be cited as representative examples.

The third alternative of ‘saying one word’ and bringing balance to these emphases is something Barth describes as perhaps an ‘impossible possibility that God has reserved strictly for Himself alone to proclaim.’ What was to be discovered within Reformed theology over time was the way to conceive of this one ‘Word of God’ as a gracious command eliciting a particular, responsible freedom of the individual, all the while maintaining the transcendence of the divine subject and avoiding ethical reductionism. The answer is provided for what had been Barth’s theological and ethical directive, a means with which to account for the modern emancipated subject in a theologically responsible way that when realized in the Church, I intend to show, promotes more amiable relations with the broader social order.

**THE REFORMED INFLUENCE: A Reformed dogmatic**

Barth would appropriate the Reformed elements with development over time, in a manner similar to another of the elements of the Reformed tradition for which he showed great appreciation, namely the ability to faithfully re-articulate new forms required by new contexts from out of the tradition. His appropriation of the tradition in terms appropriate to the identified concern is already evident in his somewhat dialectically conceived *Göttingen Dogmatics* from 1924/5.

McCormack also cites the decisive turn in Barth’s development after Romans II with the discovery of Reformed theology, in particular Heinrich Heppe’s *Reformed Dogmatics*.
and its significant ecclesial emphasis. McCormack identifies how Barth builds on the anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christological dogma whereby ‘the Logos (the second Person of the Holy Trinity) took to himself human flesh (i.e. a human “nature”, complete, whole and entire) and lived a human life in and through it.’ This conception is both evident in Barth’s conclusion regarding the Incarnation where he argues: ‘according to our proof … God’s revelation in any case means God’s revelation in his concealment’ and it does satisfy the Kantian epistemological requirement enabling Barth to identify the Incarnation, and not simply the resurrection as in his second Romans commentary, as revelation.

Therefore, following an appeal to the anhypostasis dogma, Barth warns that ‘In my view both dogmatics and the preaching which follows it must dare to be less christocentric.’ In a more Chalcedonian manner – through what, following Colin Gunton, might be identified as ‘the insertion of elements of the Cappadocian Fathers’ – Barth affirms the need ‘to be more objective and valiant by again giving God the significance that is his due precisely according to his revelation through the historical fact of Jesus of Nazareth, namely that he alone is the content of revelation.’ As a later Barth argues, ‘Revelation always means revealing; God’s presence is always God’s decision to be present. … God’s freedom remains an act of sovereign divine freedom.’ Thus revelation was not simply read off the face of Jesus. Rather, a divine enabling through the Spirit was required.

**Effects of an Avowed Christological Focus: election re-appropriated**

This belief is already evident when, turning to election, Barth argues against a pure objectivism observing that ‘no one has yet found a way, and no one will, so to serve [the Word of God] that it is always heard and retained by all.’ Evident in the fact that ‘One can understand the Bible historically and spiritually, or one can think one understands it
spiritually but in truth do so only carnally.’ The same is true of Scripture and ‘the revelation that stands in or behind or above it, of the Word of God in the primary sense.’ Thus, Barth argues, ‘already we have the positive side of our thesis for the section on predestination, namely, that belief in revelation, decision for the possibility of real knowledge of God, is exclusively the will and work of God.’

However, in Barth’s critical appropriation of the Reformed account of election, he rejects the approach identified with a fixed pre-temporal decision regarding the determination of those to be saved and those rejected in a *decretum absolutum*. His soteriology becomes a much more modern, spiritual-epistemological process that involves the freedom of the creature in a spiritual/moral awakening to its ‘true freedom’ or telos. It is not immediately present, but through later development will emerge in its final form. The critical element at this point in his development is his criticism of the earlier treatment’s fixed relationship of the divine to the Elect and Reprobate.

The concern is identified in Heidegger’s definition where it is stated ‘[God]… has resolved to leave fixed men, whom He does not elect, in the mass of corruption ….’ Barth attributes the notion to the Reformed doctrine generally, but regards it as ‘a secular error from which the whole doctrine, difficult enough in itself, suffers needlessly and irrelevantly.’ Surely, he argues, there are two specific forms, but ‘not some people as only elect and some as only rejected, but both as both.’ Therefore, he argues in a manner consistent with his actualism and which reveals his true moral concern, ‘God is free not only to elect and reject different people but also to elect or reject a particular individual at different times.’ Thus, for Barth:

election becomes exclusively a basic description of God’s dealings with us, of his free and actual use at every moment of the possibility of saying Yes or No to us, of electing
or rejecting us, of awakening us to faith or hardening us, of giving us a share in the hope of eternal salvation or leaving us in the general human situation whose end is perdition (cf. Phil. 3:19).  

Following this stated departure from the older Reformed tradition, Barth addresses the question of ‘What happens to people, then, when the hiddenness of God in his revelation causes them with hearing ears to hear only offense, or foolishness, or futility, and therefore not to know God?’ First, he argues, despite what the earlier Reformers called ‘preterition’ or omission, the divine will is not neglected. For,  

the irresistibility or infallible efficacy of grace is what God owes to no one, though this does not provide an excuse. … And this apparently twofold will of God is still only one will, the will of God, though this one will of God is an incomprehensible will in face of which one can neither excuse oneself nor dispute with God. … Full, sufficient, saving grace is present here as effective grace.  

Rather, amongst those who fail to see grace revealed is found ‘unbelief and disobedience’ and thus God allows them to ‘go their own way.’ Barth does not concede that this means the absence of ‘morality, a good conscience, [and] piety’, but ‘simply people who are really on their own with their own ideas and powers and perspectives. …[t]he reprobate can share the fullness of humanity, even of religious and Christian humanity.’ Yet, it is in their own will that they go on. Thus, he argues that: ‘Sin, which rules in the circumscribed area to which the reprobate are banned, is not God’s work, though it is certainly God’s work that the reprobate are banned there and left to their own devices.’  

Barth next addresses the question of the elect after first emphasizing that, in terms of predestination, the two sides of the apparently twofold will of God are not symmetrical. Rather: ‘Its point and goal are always election, not rejection, even in rejection.’ Then discounting the ‘will of man,’ or a ‘good use of grace,’ ‘foreseen faith,’ ‘foreknown merits,’
‘Christ Merits’ or ‘God glorying in his merits’ as ‘the determinative basis of election,’ he appeals to ‘God alone’ as the basis of election.\textsuperscript{467} He proceeds to argue, in a manner consistent with the realism of Tambach and the existential crisis theology of Romans II, that ‘something special’ must happen:

\textbf{[A]} recognition of the judgement of God on our situation, … an acknowledgement of the factual state of rebellion in which we find ourselves, an acknowledgement of the fact that in this situation there is a hidden will of God who has let us fall into it, an acknowledgement that he was right to do so because we deserve no better, an acknowledgement finally that we are in the wrong – this has everything to do with election.\textsuperscript{468}

For Barth, although enlightened regarding their condition, the elect do not come into possession of an improved state but remain \textit{simul iustus et peccatore}. The ‘special thing about the elect,’ what truly distinguishes them from the Reprobate ‘so long as time endures, is the special thing that happens to them through God’s Word, the forgiveness of sins that is promised to them and that binds them, not their special possessing and fulfilling.’\textsuperscript{469} An ability to recognize the judgement on their situation and take hold of that promise Barth attributes to the work of ‘The Holy Spirit through whose power our weak faith and obedience become the subjective possibility of revelation, ….’\textsuperscript{470}

\textbf{A Reformed ethic:}

Following this, Barth proceeds to address the questions raised concerning ethics, freedom and determination that arise when one begins to speak of predestination. First of the question of freedom, Barth concludes: ‘the divine freedom in which God turns to us is [only] a reminder of our own transcendental freedom … [c]ertainly, it is only a reminder. Freedom does not come, even in election.’ Thus, in light of the actualist definition of election, he continues with the assertion that ‘the problem of ethics, the problem of a pure will, is posed.
How could it be posed more radically than by the fact that with our whole existence, which we will day by day, we are placed under the either-or judgement in the grace of God?471

Therefore, recalling that for Calvin ‘the work of the Spirit is from the very first twofold; justification and sanctification,’ Barth argues that ‘divine Sonship and penitence, gospel and law, faith and obedience are all correlates that cannot be separated for a single moment.’472 The concerns regarding over-determination need not arise, but only after the removal of the ‘certain people’ clause from the traditional account. In its place, he contends: ‘We must put the pure, original, divine self-relating.’ Then, ‘everything is clear’:

For precisely in the terrible transition from judgement to grace, which is never a thing of the past, there arises that practical commitment to the Will of God, the question: What shall we do?, the recognition of the eternal demand, the need for work and conflict in the world of the relative, the possibility of taking up in bitter earnest concrete tasks in the shadow of the transitoriness of all things earthly, the Christian life which is lived with bowed head in meditation on the future life, which is unassuming but which is determined from within.

Thus, he writes, ‘Eschatology and ethics, predestination and ethics are totally inseparable from serious predestinarian thinking once we understand the first term in an actualist rather than a determinist way.’473

Out of this initial critical appropriation of certain elements of the tradition, Barth has found the means with which to reserve a place for the divine Subject in revelation while avoiding the pretentious objectivism of liberal historicism and conservative positivism, and to combine faith and obedience as necessary correlates in a life of free and responsible discipleship. This is already evident in his lecture ‘Church and Culture’ in which the Church is defined as ‘the community instituted by God himself, the community of faith and obedience living from the Word of God, the community of the faith and obedience of sinful men.’474
The Münster *Ethics*:

The general form such obedience is to take is fully articulated in Barth’s *Ethics* delivered at Münster to which he moved in October 1925. It begins with an elaborate rejection of all philosophically determined conceptions of ethics on the basis of our epistemological limitations concerning metaphysical realities. He then argues for a theological conception, itself the province of the Church, wholly determined by the Word of God. The trifold pattern of its history – Creation, Reconciliation and Redemption – interpreted as ‘only various angles from which to understand what is intrinsically one whole reality,’ with the following proviso applied – that ‘the Concept “Christian” can be no more than a pointer to the testimony: “I am the way, the truth and the life.”’ Thus, he argues:

Justice will be done to the special problem of Christian ethics which must occupy us here when we do not regard the Christian element as just a predicate but as the subject, as is appropriate in a discipline auxiliary to dogmatics; when we do not let human conduct as such be the center, the beginning, and the end of theological ethics, but allot the position instead to man’s claiming by the Word of God, to his sanctification, to God’s action in and on his own action.

Appropriate to Barth’s actualism, the claiming of ‘The Word of God only in act’ is described in a particularist fashion. ‘Only with reference to this reality which is not general but highly specific can theological ethics venture to answer the ethical question. Its theory is meant only as the theory of this practice.’ The general form this practice takes is defined as that of faith and obedience, whereby, ‘as this decision is taken man acts as a hearer and with responsibility, and to that extent he does good acts.’ The character of this responsibility is to do ‘The good … what is commanded me … as God’s creature, pardoned sinner, and heir of his kingdom.’ Barth elaborates along these three lines the tri-fold Command of God that exists concurrently. I offer some description with citations concerning the most abstract elements of the three.
There is the Command of God the Creator, or our being ‘created’ (meaning life), which is known vocationally, that requires order and is realized in faith. Of the nature of its claim, Barth writes: ‘What is commanded is obviously not the individuality of life in itself. … What is in fact commanded – and this is something very different – is the individuality of this creaturely life of ours, our will-to-be-ourselves becomes a relative thing compared to the only true will-to-be-himself of God.’\(^{481}\)

There is the Command of God the Reconciler, or our being ‘reconciled’ (meaning law), which is known in external authority, that requires humility and is realized in love. Its claim is present in our midst ‘to the extent that biblically speaking we encounter Moses, the divinely commissioned fellowman who is set before us in this sense, or, more generally, to the extent that human authority encounters us.’\(^{482}\) On the nature of said encounters, Barth elaborates that ‘Through the Word of God that he speaks to us with his claim, this near or distant person becomes the neighbor to whom we are under obligation.’\(^{483}\)

Finally there is the Command of God the Redeemer, or our being ‘redeemed’ (meaning promise), which is known in conscience, that requires gratitude and is realized in hope. For, … the fact that we are God’s children in this temporality, in the present, also involves a limit and distinction, and it is indeed only in the nearness of the children of God to their Father that we can see the other boundaries in and with their final sharpness and severity. In any case, then, we can do God’s will, we can be good, only *on earth*, only *on this side* of the coming perfection. Only with this proviso can I say, with the clarity that is reserved for God alone, that my conduct is at this moment good. Only with this proviso can I understand it as the conduct of the children of God that it is.\(^{484}\)

Thus, the theological direction taken had also profoundly impacted Barth’s ethics. It is also reflected politically in his summary theses on Church and State at the end of the work. There Bath provides descriptions of the two political bodies complementary in their divine
origin as divinely sanctioned ‘orders of grace relating to sin’ yet with very different purposes (517). Therefore, he concludes that:

Boniface VIII (*bull Unam Sanctum*, 1302) rightly presupposed, church and state, as two expressions of one and the same temporally though not eternally valid divine order, are the two swords of the one power of Jesus Christ. The dualism of this order is conditioned and demanded by the dualism of man reconciled to God as a sinner saved by grace. Christian humility will in the same way recognize the relativity of the distinction and the necessity of the relative distinction. It will not reckon, then, either with an absolutizing of the distinction (the metaphysical differentiation of a religious and a secular sphere of life) or a one-sided removal of it (caesaropapism or “theocracy”).

**SOCIAL POLITICAL THOUGHT: Barmen Declaration**

Barth would set out to write a new *Christliche Dogmatics* in 1927 only to abandon it after the first volume following a study in Anselm that convinced him of the need to go in a different direction. Of that direction Barth later reflected, ‘The positive factor in the new development was this: in these years I had to learn that Christian doctrine … [h]as to be exclusively and consistently the doctrine of Jesus Christ.’ Of its social/political effect, Markus Barth observes:

During these years the transition from K.B.’s Christian Dogmatics (1927) to his *Church Dogmatics* (1932-67) revealed a change of mind: What had looked like general reflections on the object and substance of faith was replaced by instruction on how the church was to give responsible testimony in the political realm. The church as the people of God and as a social institution could not help being a challenge to tyrannical human powers.

This becomes increasingly evident in Barth’s return to political involvement in the period leading up to and including the War writings. The best known is the Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Churches in Germany. His draft was accepted without revision.

The Declaration was prepared for a confessional synod in Bonn, May 29 to 31, 1934, of the German Evangelical Church, which consisted of Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches. According to Article 1 of their constitution of July 1933, the unity of these
Churches lay in the common confession that their ‘inviolable foundation is the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is attested for us in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation.’ Their concern was with how this common confession was ‘grievously imperiled … threatened by the teaching methods and actions of the ruling party of the German Christians.’ In the hands of its leaders and administration, they believed this common confession was ‘continually and systematically thwarted and rendered ineffective by alien principles.’ In this light, the confessing Churches spoke out with ‘one voice’ against the ruling party of the German Christians.

That the document is clearly influenced by Barth’s new-found theological foundation is evident in its theologically elaborated positive assertions. Among other things, it is declared that ‘we confess the following evangelical truths: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber … I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” (John 10:1, 9) Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.’

How these truths apply to the life and ministry of the Church in its fullness is the positive theological contribution of the document. It is this aspect of the work that is given most attention in subsequent studies in Barth’s development. However, it is in the critical theological intent of the document or the false teachings rejected that the real significance for the present work comes to light. First, in light of the positive theological affirmations and appealing to Eph. 4:15,16, it ‘reject[s] the false doctrine as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing
ideological and political convictions.\textsuperscript{492} In elaborating the theme of the work it then, appealing to Matt. 20:25-26, emphasizes the responsibility of the whole congregation for ‘the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the Church’ and rejects the establishment in the Church of ‘ruling powers’ or ‘authorities.’\textsuperscript{493}

With relation to the State, it appeals to 1 Peter 2:17, and the Churches’ acknowledgement of the divine appointment of the State with ‘the task of providing for justice and peace’ and the means used ‘of threat and exercise of force.’\textsuperscript{494} At the same time, it affirms that the Church, mindful of the ‘commandment and righteousness of God’, acknowledges the ‘responsibility of ruler and ruled.’\textsuperscript{495} In its exercise of that responsibility, it places its trust in the Word of God. Therefore, it rejects both ‘the false doctrine, as though the State … could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church’s vocation as well.’\textsuperscript{496} At the same time, it rejects ‘the false doctrine, as though the Church … should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State.’\textsuperscript{497} Finally, with appeal to Matt. 28:20 and 2 Tim. 2:9, it rejects as false doctrine that ‘the Church in human arrogance could place this Word and work of the Lord in service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.’\textsuperscript{498}

Thus, the new foundation for Barth’s theology is evidenced both in the document’s theological affirmations and in its decidedly political criticisms. In its emphasis upon the separation of Church and State as distinct bodies whose purposes were not to be confused, it very much reflects the earlier Münster \textit{Ethics}. Therefore, the Barmen Declaration is certainly a significant document both for what it reveals of Barth’s theological development, but just as much for what it unveils of his social/political development. However, a very
significant aspect of that development might go unrecognized, if the ecclesially-related false doctrines rejected were not attended to and the responsibility before God were not understood as a responsibility of the entire congregation.

That this is to be a responsibility borne by the whole Church is made clear in another of Barth’s lectures “Theological Existence Today” delivered in June of that same year. In the opening of that work, Barth acknowledges repeatedly avoiding requests for his opinion on matters affecting the Church at the time, matters for which he believes he can no longer with-hold comment. Yet, consistent with his new direction, he immediately places a limitation on what follows.

But I must at once make clear that the essence of what I attempt to contribute today bearing upon these anxieties and problems cannot be made the theme of a particular manifesto, for the simple reason that at Bonn here, …. I endeavour to carry on theology, and only theology, now as previously, and as if nothing had happened.

In the presupposition to that which follows is made clear, the point I am claiming should be recognized. In addressing the subject, Barth indicates his intentions as follows: ‘If dear friends at home and abroad, I have now been persuaded to speak “to the situation,” as it is expected of me, it can only be in the form of a question. The question is: “Would it not be better if one did not speak ‘to the situation,’ but, each one within the limits of his vocation, if he spoke ‘ad rem’?” In contrast with those who would encourage the leadership to step in and provide direction to the laity, Barth appears to argue what was needed was a laity that could discern how to act for themselves. Implicitly stated in how he elaborates, I suggest there is found the intent behind his social/political ethics thereafter. When he writes: ‘In other words, to consider and work out the presuppositions needed every day for speaking “ad rem” as it is needed today – not today for the first time – and yet it is needed today! A slight elucidation of this question can alone be my theme ….”
MATURE ACCOUNT OF ELECTION:

Thus, the Christological emphasis with a consequent moral obligation to live in its light clearly begins to dominate theologically and ethically toward the familiar understanding of Barth expressed by the time of his Gifford lectures delivered at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland in 1937:

Our life as such, our human life in its total extent, our ways of thought and of action, our outward and inward achievements, could not have a more intensive and complete claim made upon them than is made by our believing in Jesus Christ and by His being thus our life. How could all this be anything other than a circle which, whether it be narrow or wide, has this and this only as its centre. …Our true action is the action of Jesus Christ, but it is required of us as our action.503

Among the most significant developments in Barth’s thought in this period will be his revision of his thought on election, in which he ‘trac[es] back the concept of predestination to the biblical concept of the covenant or testament…’ which, following Zwingli, he understood universally.504 Barth attributes the use of the procedure to an insight gained from J. Cocceius’ systematics of 1662.505 However, a lecture delivered by Pierre Maury at a 1936 festival in Geneva may have influenced him here.506 It is by means of this procedure, I argue, that the two forms of human community are at once determined, yet its freedom preserved.

In effect, what Barth provides in the Church Dogmatics is a literary critical rendering along moral/theological lines of the narrative historical record of Scripture.507 Its signature event, the revelation of the covenant concluded in Christ, is its controlling theme. The one will of God is defined as a pre-temporal covenant of fellowship with free individuals elected by God the Father concluded in the life of Jesus Christ. It is concluded in him, because in the beginning with God, as electing God, the Son ‘in free obedience to His Father … elected to be man, and as man, to do the will of God.’508 Thus, he is both electing and elected. Therefore Barth, drawing on the other half of the Chalcedonian equation, writes:
In that He (as God) wills Himself (as man), He also wills them. And so they are elect ‘in Him,’ in and with His own election. And so, too, His election must be distinguished from theirs. It must not be distinguished from theirs merely as example and type, the revelation and reflection of their election. All this can, of course, be said quite truly of the election of Jesus Christ. But it must be said further that His election is the original and all inclusive election; the election which is absolutely unique, but which in this very uniqueness is universally meaningful and efficacious, because it is the election of Him who Himself elects. Of none other of the elect can it be said that his election carries in it and with it the election of the rest. But that is what we must say of Jesus Christ when we think of Him in relation to the rest. And for this reason, as elected man, He is the Lord and Head of all the elect, the revelation and reflection of their election, and the organ and instrument of all divine electing. For this reason His election is indeed the type of all election. For this reason we must now learn to recognise in Him not only the electing God but also elected man.509

Thus, Creation and divine judgement on its history are predicated upon grace for, Barth argues, ‘in relation to this other, the creation of God, God’s first thought and decree consists in the fact that in His Son He makes the being of this other His own being, that He allows the Son of Man Jesus to be called and actually to be His own Son.’510 Therefore, ‘Teleologically the election of the man Jesus carries within itself the election of a creation which is good according to the positive will of God and of man as fashioned after the divine image and foreordained to the divine likeness.’511

History concerns the unfolding of humanity in two forms, but again not in the over-determinate fashion of a decretum absolutum. Rather, Barth contends, ‘The fulfilment of [the creatures] calling to live to God’s glory is in any case a matter of his creaturely freedom and decision.’ However, in creaturely form, ‘he is quite different from God. He is at least challenged and not sovereign like God. And because of this, man stands on the frontier of that which is contradictory to the will of God.’ Thus, Barth argues, ‘when God of His own will raised up man to be a covenant-member with Himself, when from all eternity He elected to be one with man in Jesus Christ, He did it with a being which was not merely affected by evil but actually mastered by it.’512
The claim Barth is making is not infralapsarian, but supralapsarian. Humanity was not born in sin. Rather, the freedom that was granted permitted humanity’s fall. The logic behind the claim is the very logic of choice. For if God willed a certain end, argues Barth, ‘in the divine counsel the shadow itself is necessary as the object of rejection.’ Barth identifies Satan with the object of rejection. ‘Satan (and the whole kingdom of evil i.e., the demonic, which has its basis in him) is the shadow which accompanies the light of the election of Jesus Christ (and in Him of the good creation in which man is in the divine image).’ Yet, Barth writes: ‘when confronted by Satan and his kingdom, man in himself and as such has in his creaturely freedom no power to reject that which in His divine freedom God rejects. Face to face with temptation he cannot maintain the goodness of his creation in the divine image and foreordination to the divine likeness.’

On the assumption that it is ‘The kingdom of God [that is] set up as the consummation towards which all God’s ways and works are moving,’ the potential for both elect and non-elect forms exists throughout the one history that preceeds it, indeed within the course of each individual life. Therefore, history includes both humanity in its ‘passing form’ affected through the sin of humanity in its creaturely freedom, as well as that of humanity in its ‘coming’ elect form affected by a return to covenant fellowship in Christ, realized in a response of faith effected through the enlightening activity of the Holy Spirit. As Barth summarized earlier: ‘In its simplest and most comprehensive form the dogma of predestination consists, then, in the assertion that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus Christ.’

Thus, Christologically grounded, the actualist orientation of the earlier account is revised. What has changed, McCormack observes, is that ‘it is no longer the case that the
election or rejection of the individual is decided moment by moment in the revelation-event. The election of the individual has already been decided in Jesus Christ. What is decided in the revelation-event is not whether the individual is elect or not, but whether she will respond to her election. It is whether one will in honesty submit oneself to one’s needed grace. For as Barth writes, ‘The ones who “in [Jesus]” i.e., through Him, are elected and made partakers of His grace are those who could see in themselves only lost sinners “oppressed of the devil.”

The Word of God to the human community is grace, yet the one community is represented in two forms; that of Israel, which ‘has to serve the representation of the divine judgement,’ and that of the Church, which represents ‘the divine mercy.’ The former hears only and the latter also believes ‘the promise sent forth to man.’ The one human community represented in two forms embraces both its passing form in the one community and its coming form in the other. The two forms now describe socially what was stated individually in Barth’s argument concerning obedience in the second Romans, and the two forms of relationship to the divine in the Göttingen Dogmatics.

The shape given to the community in its coming form ‘acquires its true and essential form as the message of the Church, the form of the Gospel, of glad tidings for all who are defrauded and deprived of their rights, …. With such a message Jesus Himself stands in the midst of His own, and proclaimed by the service of His own wills to go out into the world.’ The shape of that life and service has been summarily defined as that of a life lived both ‘for God’ and ‘for the other.’ As McCormack observes, ‘The electing God, Barth argues, … is a God whose very being – already in eternity – is determined, defined, by what he reveals himself to be in Jesus Christ; viz. a God of love and mercy towards the whole
human race. That is what Barth means for us to understand when he says that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election. Moreover, ‘Jesus Christ is not only the electing God, he is also the elect human. The covenantal relation established by God’s eternal act of Self-determination is a relation with the man Jesus and with others only in “Him.”’

Thus, in Christ is found the way to the vertical relationship with the Father and the direction given for the horizontal relationship with others. ‘He is both at one and the same time. He is the promise and the command, the Gospel and the Law, the address of God to man and the claim of God upon man.’

Human election that corresponds to the divine is described as ‘a simple but comprehensive autonomy of the creature which is constituted originally by the act of eternal divine election and which has in this act its ultimate reality.’

Humanity is provided a teleological orientation, a definite freedom, without, arguably, its being overly determined. For Barth, rather, it is an act of self-determination that takes the form of ‘responsibility … decision … obedience … action.’ Therefore, Barth writes, ‘To the creature God determined … to give an individuality and autonomy, not that these gifts should be possessed outside Him, let alone against Him, but for Him and within His kingdom; not in rivalry with His sovereignty but for its confirming and glorifying.’ Accordingly, Barth argues that ‘The election of grace, as the election of Jesus Christ, is simultaneously the eternal election of the one Community of God by the existence of which Jesus Christ is to be attested to the whole world and the whole world summoned to faith in Jesus Christ.’

Identifying Jesus Christ as both the Subject and Object of election, Barth not only provides a way to bring together the earlier moves of reserving a place for the divine Subject and combining faith and obedience, but the claim on the creature is now predicated upon a
grace universal in scope. True human freedom is both found and its direction given in Christ. For Barth, as was evident already at Göttingen, its appropriation was an act of freedom in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit ‘unmasks and rejects man’s lack of freedom, but it also discloses and magnifies his freedom.’ Its realization is the distinguishing factor among the elect communities. However, its rejection did not mean God’s abandoning of the creature. Moreover, it was not a one-time decision, but a life in constant decision in which responsible freedom is now not wholly autonomous, but definite. Therefore, as Colin Gunton observes, Barth’s position is a ‘restatement of the Pauline-Augustinian tradition, though his use of “autonomy” betrays also an awareness of characteristically modern pre-occupations.’

**Conclusion:**

I believe that the most tumultuous period of Barth’s development concluded with the discovery of this particular Christological focus of Reformed theology, by means of which the freedom of the creature in both its forms is accounted for without the over-determination of the earlier Reformers or the presumptuousness of the later Enlightenment’s excesses. The universality of humanity’s election in Christ clearly underlies his account of the Christian and Civil communities in the later political writings. In these writings, the generalizing of the potential for anthropological error and the much more modest portrayal of an alienated social order initiated at Tambach are now extended in the production of a more amiable accounting of Church/State relations than much of the triumphalism that predominates.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND THE CIVIL COMMUNITY

Introduction: In this chapter, I begin with examination of a work of Barth’s that is exegetical and fairly exhaustive in detail. I argue that, reflecting both the implications and assumptions of Barth’s christologically grounded account of election and the relative independence of the secular community acknowledged as early as Tambach, it places the constitutive roles of Church and State in their proper perspective. Thus, it provides the proper context within which to examine his last major social/political work ‘The Christian Community and the Civil Community’, also his most positive account. In exposition of that work, I contend that Barth argues for a subordinate and evaluative political role for the Church that emphasizes its politically non-partisan character and the analogous nature of its theologically informed judgements.

Rechtfertigung und Recht: A vital connection tested

In a lecture delivered in Brugg and Liestal on June 20 and 27 respectively, 1937, Barth seeks to ‘give the Swiss people “clear information”, so that they would not weaken before Germany over the annexing of Austria.’ This earlier work’s concern is implied in the title accurately translated as ‘Justification and Justice’. What Barth seeks is ‘an inward and vital connection by means of which in any sense human justice (or law), as well as divine justification, becomes a concern of Christian faith and Christian responsibility and therefore also a matter which concerns the Christian Church.’ It is a connection with broad political relevance impacting other human conceptions concerning order, peace and freedom. In what sense, Barth asks, may we speak with Zwingli ‘in the same breath of “divine and human
Barth acknowledges that the identification of the two and the recognition that their representative parties (Church and State) need not be in conflict has been duly emphasized by the Reformers. However, he asserts: ‘Clearly we need to know not only that the two are not in conflict, but, first and foremost, to what extent they are connected?’

Of Calvin’s recognition of two distinct realms, but affirmation of the subjection of earthly rulers to Christ and ‘the divine ordination as the politia Christiana’, Barth asks, ‘What has Christ to do with this matter?’ He is equally disappointed by ‘Zwingli’s’ strong statement … that the secular power has “strength and assurance from the teaching and action of Christ.” That in itself, observes Barth, is ably confirmed with appeals to Matthew 22:21 and Jesus paying of the Didrachmon ‘tribute money’ (Matt. 17:24ff). However, Barth finds Zwingli’s remarks wanting, because stated ‘apart from the text of the Gospel, it is based not on the Gospel but on the Law.’ Thus, the lack of a solid positive relationship among the Reformers leads Barth to question whether they were legitimately rooting justice in justification or illegitimately ‘clamping it on.’

The latter possibility, he observes, might result in one of two outcomes. On the one hand, it could lead to an over-spiritualizing of the gospel and an ethical immobilization of the Church. On the other, it could lead to ‘a secularized gospel’ of human law and community committed to a false god and conception of justice that ‘is in no sense the Justice of God.’ Barth identifies the results as a ‘pietistic sterility’ on the one hand and ‘sterility of the Enlightenment’ on the other. Thus He argues that the dominant character of the representative parties in the Culture since the Reformation can be traced back to the Reformers’ failure to determine if there is ‘an actual, and therefore inward and vital, connection between the two realms.’
An alternative investigated:

Intent on addressing this question, Barth launches into an exegetical investigation of related New Testament texts. He begins by proposing a need to acknowledge the existence of a divinely sanctioned State authority, based upon Christ’s assertion before Pilate in John’s Gospel (Jn. 19), that Pilate would have no authority were it not given him by God. Upon considering Pilate’s exercise of his authority, in particular with respect to the divine purposes being realized despite the actions taken, Barth concludes: ‘we cannot say that the legal administration of the State “has nothing to do with the order of Redemption;” that here we have been moving in the realm of the first and not the second article of the Creed. No, Pontius Pilate now belongs not only to the Creed, but to its second article.’

He investigates the use of the New Testament terms ‘power’ (ἐξουσια) and ‘authority’ (ἄρχοντες) as applied to government, concluding it is a spiritual order which may be perverted at the hands of its temporal representative. That explains the respected State of Romans 13 becoming the ‘beast out of the abyss’ in Revelation 13 as, for example, under Pontius Pilate. Barth recalls Paul’s warnings in Colossians 2:18, exhortations in Eph. 4:12, comforting in Rom. 8:38f and promise of deliverance in 1 Cor. 15:24 suggesting ‘a direct bearing upon the “demons” and the “demonic” forces in the political sphere’ is implied.

With reference to the repeated teaching concerning such authorities under Christ, Barth concludes that their destiny is not their destruction, but subjection to His service; ‘And both the beginning and the middle also correspond to this destiny.’ He is unwilling to conclude they are representatives of ‘the world which lives on itself and by itself and as such is the antipodes and exact opposite of creation.’ Rather, citing Col. 1:15 and 2:10, he believes they are to be understood as created in Christ and that He is their Head. Therefore, he
argues, even their rebellion ‘can, in principle, only take place in accordance with their creation, and within Christ’s order.’\textsuperscript{543} In this light, he concludes ‘that the power, the State as such, belongs originally and ultimately to Jesus Christ; that in its comparatively independent substance, in its dignity, its function and its purpose, it should serve the Person and Work of Jesus Christ and therefore the justification of the sinner.’\textsuperscript{544}

However, through an attempted departure from its true purpose, as in self-aggrandizement or idolatry, Barth concedes the State may indeed become demonic, but it will not succeed. Nor is it inevitable that such should come about. It cannot become the Church, but in creating the conditions of justice and peace ‘it would be granting the gospel of justification a free and assured course.’\textsuperscript{545} In doing so, it may be neutral towards truth, or it may become unjust in its activities and persecute the Church. Yet Barth contends that it remains in subordination to its Head and may reflect it in becoming a just State. Therefore, in a remark that reflects his new historical perspective, he concludes: ‘There is clearly no cause for the Church to act as though it lived, in relation to the State, in a night in which all cats are grey. It is much more a question of continual decisions, and therefore of distinctions between one State and another, between the State of yesterday and the State of today.’\textsuperscript{546}

\textbf{A foundation asserted:}

That Barth characteristically defends a clear Christological sphere may be assumed when speaking of this State’s authority, and that the source from which its authority comes cannot be understood apart from the ‘person and work of Christ.’ Once recognized, argues Barth:

The establishment and the function of the State, and, above all, the Christian’s attitude towards it, will then lose a certain accidental character which was peculiar to the older form of exposition. … It is the fear of Christ – that is, the sense of indebtedness to Him as the Lord of all created lords (Col.4:1; Eph.6:9) which would be dishonoured by an
attitude of hostility, and it is the fear of Christ which clearly, according to 1 Peter 2:13, forms the foundation for the imperative: ‘Submit yourselves … to the King.’

Reflected in the relevant texts is the fact that such acknowledgement is not expected of all humankind. In a remark very much reflective of his *Ethics*’ identification of the form reconciliation takes and the required response of the Christian, Barth argues with appeal to relevant texts that ‘the Christian conscience (Συνείδησις) does demand that they should submit to authority (Rom. 13). Clearly this is because in this authority we are dealing indirectly, but in reality, with the authority of Jesus Christ.’

In terms of the significance of the State for the Church, Barth appeals to it as no more than a temporal analogue, a foretaste of the heavenly reality which the Church, whose true Citizenship lay there, awaits in hope. The heavenly reality, he contends, should be conceived in eschatological terms only, that is, in Christ, with its one analogical parallel to the State being its political nature. Thus, the temptation towards State deification or political anarchy is avoided.

**A conviction professed:**

While acknowledging the parallels to political structure in the ecclesia, Barth professes the conviction that it is ‘the preaching of justification of the Kingdom of God, which founds, here and now, the true system of law, the true State.’ It is implied that the creation/determination of that heavenly reality is a work of God alone, that it is a work which the Church only serves through its proclamation of justification. Barth contends that it is to overstep ‘its own bounds’ for the Church to set ‘itself up in concrete fashion, against the earthly State as the true State.’

What is commanded of the Church in terms of service before the State is no more than is demanded of it towards all men. Therefore, it is to pray for a peaceable existence, because
its own freedom to perform its one activity of proclamation is dependent upon such. That freedom, contends Barth, is the sole ‘limited guarantee’ it should seek from the State. It is also to render obedience to the State, because of its general mandate to reward good and punish evil. Here, Barth observes, the Church’s own order may be in conflict with the State, but it ought not to be antagonistic. For the Church’s order is a spiritual order that requires the testimony of the Holy Spirit, while the State’s is a general authority for which it is the keeper of the sword. Thus, argues Barth, the political character of the Church is mirrored by a certain ecclesiastical character in the State. In support, he identifies the use of ‘minister’ in Romans 13:4 and 13:6 to suggest the State’s officials are ‘ministri extraodinarii ecclesiae!’ (extraordinary ministers of the Church).551

**Its intentions elaborated:**

By means of the prayer Barth identifies as a service the Church owes to the State, he intends that it ‘offer itself to God for all men, and in particular for the bearers of State power.’552 In so doing, he contends, the church will fulfill the State’s worship of God in a way that others can and will not. This activity is required of the Church at all times, but for those periods in which the ‘State power [is] turned not to the protection but to the suppression of the preaching of the justification.’553 For nothing less than respect for the State authority is intended by the subjection that is required. At those times in which the State perverts its use of authority, in suppressing the preaching of justification, submission will not be withdrawn, however. Rather, it will now ‘consist in becoming [the State’s] victims … in order that the preaching of justification may be continued under all circumstances.’554 Barth does not interpret this form of resistance to the State authority as an act of defiance, but as support nonetheless. ‘If the State has perverted its God-given
authority, it cannot be honoured better than by this criticism which is due to it in all circumstances.’ In this way, Barth identifies the continued existence of the Church as its ‘first and fundamental service to the State. The Church need only be truly “Church” and it will inevitably render this service.’

With this, Barth considers the limits of oath taking, military service and patriotism, believing each is permitted providing they don’t interfere with the Church’s administration of its calling to proclaim justification or with its devotion to its one true Lord, at which point they should be withdrawn. Therefore, he argues: ‘I should say that we are justified, from the point of view of exegesis, in regarding the “democratic State” as a justifiable expansion of the thought of the New Testament’ and that the earthly State is not only to be endured, but willed. And that the sole claim the Church ought to make for itself is the freedom to be itself ‘in true scriptural preaching, and teaching, and in the true and scriptural administration of the sacraments.’ In conclusion, he offers a significant theological and political insight. With regard to Calvin’s use of suum cuique in summary of the functions of the Just State in the Institutes cited as ‘ut suum cuique salvum sit et incolume’ (to each his own, safe and unscathed), of which he contends:

This we must attempt to discover and to learn anew – it depends upon the justification of sinful man in Jesus Christ, and thus on the maintenance of this central message of the Christian Church, that all this should become true and valid in every sense, in the midst of this “world that passeth away,” in the midst of the great, but temporary contrast between Church and State, in the period which the Divine patience has granted us between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His return: Suum cuique.

There appears to be no clearer evidence that Barth believed the ‘just’ security of the State’s citizens was really only achievable when predicated upon this theological truth appropriated. The implications are very real and reflected in the earlier eschatological reference to ultimate and penultimate realms. They are again reflected in the last of his
political writings with his ascription of a provisional quality only to the Civil order and the true State identified with the Kingdom of God. The positive relationship Barth has just provided and the stated dependence of the broader institution’s ‘just’ life upon the message of justification are evident throughout the last essay to be considered. Both emphases are best accounted for within the context of Barth’s mature account of election and the teleological orientation of the creature it presupposed.

**Christengemeinde und Burgergemeinde: Positive intentions**

The impact of Barth’s Christological focus and linking of covenant and election is clearly evident in the last essay to be considered here in full: *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* (ET “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”).559 It was a lecture delivered in 1946, and described by Daniel Cornu as ‘the best known and the most rich …’ of the political writings.560 In the opening to the work, Barth refers to the title in stating his intention of highlighting the positive relation between the two. That which he suggests was likely the intention of Augustine with his use of *civitas coelestis* and *terrena* (heavenly city and earthly city), and Zwingi in his use of divine and human justice.

However, he claims a second purpose for its use. That is, it highlights that the two are more than ‘institutional offices.’ Each exists, argues Barth, as ‘human beings gathered together in corporate bodies in the service of common tasks.’561 This is captured in what Yoder observes would be a more accurate translation of the title as ‘Community of Christians and Community of Citizens’. Yoder observes that ‘What Barth is distinguishing is … two different kinds of political and social identification.’562 This social identification is determined, as I indicated earlier, either through the individual’s exercise of his/her true freedom obediently in response to the Spirit’s leading, or otherwise. Made clear throughout
the remainder of the essay is that the one definitive relation between the two is their common humanity.

**Disparate orientations:**

The initial community identifier indicates the common spiritual centre that, by the Holy Spirit, unites its members together in faith and ‘obedience to the Word of God in Jesus Christ’ with the common purpose of ‘[passing] on the word to others.’ This common confession and purpose ecumenically binds those gathered together with Christian communities in every other location. The predicate civil, on the other hand, indicates a unity under constitutional systems of government specific to physically defined boundaries for the common political purpose of defending ‘the external and relative and provisional freedom of its members, the external and relative peace of the community.’ Thus, they are united in ‘the safeguarding of the external, relative and *provisional* humanity of their life both as individuals and as a community’ through legislation, governance and the administration of justice.

Among the civil community, whose aim is to ‘embrace everyone living within its area’, requiring that it remain neutral, there is no commitment to a common confession. Rather, out of necessity, ‘the civil community as such, is spiritually blind and ignorant’ and tolerance in religious matters is considered a virtue. Barth contends it has but one means of persuasion; ‘physical force.’ For, wherein lay the State’s legitimacy and what more can it appeal to than its own boundaries or self-defined constitution? Therefore, he argues, the Civil Community is in constant ‘danger either of neglecting or absolutising itself and its particular system and thus in one way or the other destroying and annulling itself.’
Level playing field:

Consistent with his actualist account of election, Barth contends these spiritual shortcomings should not lead the Christian community to any expression of high-mindedness or sense of superiority. For it too ‘exists in “the still unredeemed world”’ and therefore is just as susceptible to the problems that confront the State. There is not much that separates the Christian from the non-Christian and mere acknowledgement of God is quite different from ‘being in God.’ Moreover, simple identification as ‘Church’ no more guarantees possession of the Word of God and the Spirit than does that as ‘State’. Therefore, it is very much susceptible to the possibility of a waning in its faith, love and hope, and in its expression of such in its word, worship and fellowship. There is ‘no cause for the Church to regard the civil community too superciliously’, Barth concludes.

Comparable structures:

If the two communities can be contrasted with regards to spiritual orientation, they can be positively compared, contends Barth, along the lines of political structure. In this regard, the Church is very much like the civil community; even the designation ecclesia ‘is borrowed from the political sphere.’ However, there is a further definite likeness in its subjection to rule of law, in polity and government. ‘[W]hat the legislature, the executive, and the administration are in the life of the State has its clear parallels in the life of the Church, however freely and flexibly it may be shaped and however “spiritually” it may be established and intended.’ Although the Church may not automatically ‘embrace’ everyone, its message of justification is intended for all. Its service is granted to all and its audience is the whole of the human community, for whom they are called to pray. Bearing this in mind, along with its eschatological hope in the coming Kingdom of God, itself a heavenly polis,
writes Barth, ‘we are entitled and compelled to regard the existence of the Christian community as of ultimate and supremely political significance.’

Consistent with his ethics, Barth argues that the Christian community is conscious of the human ‘need to be subject to an external, relative and provisional order of law, defended by superior authority and force.’ Therefore, the Christian community, knowing and preaching that such order and authority reside in the Kingdom of God, remains thankful to God for ‘an external, relative and provisional embodiment “in the world that is not yet redeemed,” in which it is valid and effective even when the temporal order is based on the most imperfect and clouded knowledge of Jesus Christ or on no such knowledge at all.’ In a remark that recalls his earliest student essay, Barth argues of human presumption and sinfulness, that if it were ‘not checked in time, chaos and nothingness would break in and bring human time to an end.’

The Christian Community recognizes the present time as one of grace in a twofold sense. That is as a period in which to ‘know and lay hold of God’s grace’ and as ‘graciously given’ for that purpose. The Christian community, which abides in this time, recognizes in the civil community ‘the visible means of this protection of human life from chaos’ and that its attempt ‘to achieve an external, relative, and provisional humanising of man’s life and the political order instituted for all … guarantees the worst is prevented from happening.’ Therefore, it welcomes the protection provided by the civil community. For, ‘it knows that without this political order there would be no Christian order. It knows and it thanks God that – as the inner circle within the wider circle … it is allowed to share the protection which the civil community affords.’

Despite the dubious moral character of the particular incarnation, the Christian
community views the civil community as one of divine ordinance and an ‘instrument of
divine grace.’ It is a sign that, despite humanity’s ongoing need for redemption, God does
not wane in His care for it. Rather, (again reflective of Barth’s account of election) through
the protection and order provided by the civil community, He ‘preserves and sustains’ an
otherwise undisciplined humanity and in patience provides ‘a time for the preaching of the
gospel; time for repentance; time for faith.’

Much more positively than the earlier Römerbrief, Barth argues that it too stands under
the Lordship of Jesus Christ as ‘one of the “powers” created through Him and in Him and
which subsist in Him (Colossians 1:16f.)’ in the divine plan of salvation. Its activity is
susceptible to perversion, yet even in perverted form, it ‘acts in the power which God has
given it.’ Although no particular political persuasion is required, Barth contends one thing
is ‘quite impossible’:

The Church can in no case be indifferent or neutral towards this manifestation of an
order so clearly related to its own mission. Such indifference would be equivalent to
the opposition of which it is said in Romans 13:2 that it is a rebellion against the
ordinance of God – and rebels secure their own condemnation.

Separation of tasks:

In his understanding of the Christian community’s contribution to the affairs of the
civil community, Barth is adamant that a separation of tasks is to be maintained; ‘The Church
must remain the Church.’ In a manner reflective of his earliest essay comparing Jesus Christ
and the movement for social justice, he argues that its task cannot be undertaken by the civil
community nor can the Church fulfil its task in ‘the forms peculiar to the civil
community.’ Once more, Barth emphasises that the Church’s most significant
contribution to the broader political order is its faithfulness in the pursuit of proclaiming ‘the
rule of Christ and the hope of the Kingdom of God.’ Failure to do so is to put at risk the
very welfare of the civil community, of which it is a part.

The civil community neither preaches, nor prays, nor makes appeals to divine authority in the execution of its task of providing for ‘the external and provisional delimitation and protection of human life.’ Rather, the civil community is dependent upon such appeals made in prayer coming from that place where insight into humanity’s spiritual nature, the threat that that entails and the ultimate answer to such threats is known. For, contends Barth, in its own evaluation regarding its progress, it is far too optimistic and of that regarding the contribution of its citizens far too pessimistic.

Therefore, the Christian community ‘shares in the task of the civil community precisely to the extent that it fulfils its own.’ Barth contends that ‘since they belong to the inner circle, the members of the Church are also automatically members of the wider circle.’ However, they show their support for the cause of the civil community in their belief in and preaching of Christ; their expressions of faith, hope and love, although they ‘will assume different forms on either side of the boundary’ that separate it from the broader community; their prayer for and action in the civil community in its responsibility before God; and finally, in their active subordination to the Civil Community’s cause in recognition that, from its own perspective, it is a divine ordinance. The latter, however, is not understood as that of the ‘blindest possible obedience.’ Nor is it motivated out of the pure exigency, but ‘for conscience sake.’ That is

[I]n the clear evangelical knowledge of the divine grace and patience, which is also manifested in the existence of the State and, therefore, in full responsibility towards the will of God which the Christian sees revealed in the civil community. The ‘subordination’ will be an expression of the obedience of a free heart which the Christian offers to God in the civil sphere as in the sphere of the church – although with a different purpose (he renders to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s – Matthew 22:21).
The Church’s responsibility in this work is non-ideological. It will not ‘Christen’ any one form of the State or defend as ‘Christian’ a theory of State-craft to be applied in every context. Nor is it to attempt to convert the State into the Church. For, although the civil community’s authority is of divine ordinance and although it is within the ‘kingdom of Christ’, ‘this does not mean that God is revealed, believed, and received in any political community as such.’\textsuperscript{586} Rather, ‘the effect of the divine ordinance is that men are entrusted (whether or not they believe it to be a divine revelation) to provide “according to the measure of human insight and human capacity” for temporal law and temporal peace, for an external, relative, and provisional humanisation of man’s existence.’\textsuperscript{587} In other words, in a manner consistent with the independence allotted those who fail to recognize their teleological orientation, they’re on their own.

**Joint responsibility:**

In what I believe is the most significant point of the essay, Barth defines the distinctive contribution of the Christian community as being ‘jointly responsible,’ in evaluative, not definitive terms. It is to participate ‘– on the basis of and by belief in the divine revelation – in the human search for the best form, for the most fitting system of political organization.’ It recognizes no particular political form can lay claim to the divine standard as ‘revealed’ and the approval of warranted belief ‘as the Christian concept above all others.’ Regardless of their participation, Barth concludes:

> Though the Christian will be both more lenient and more stern, more patient and more impatient towards them than the non-Christian, he will not regard any such achievement as perfect or mistake it for the Kingdom of God – for it can only have been brought about by human insight and human ability.\textsuperscript{588}

Consistent with Barth’s particularism, the stated aim is not to settle upon any one particular form as ‘Christian’, but to seek the best form in each instance. Moreover, the
intention is not to satisfy its own curiosity in such matters, but to ‘[remind] the world of
God’s kingdom, God’s commandment and righteousness and thereby of the responsibility of
governments and governed.’ This may set it against the civil community and jeopardize
its own security. Still, it is with just such intentions, so long as any action taken is
determined by the Word of God, that it exercises the responsibility it bears for the civil
community. In sum, reflecting his actualism and the particularism that entails, Barth writes:

The Christian community ‘subordinates’ itself to the civil community by making its
knowledge of the Lord who is Lord of all its criterion, and distinguishing between the
just and the unjust State, that is, between the better and the worse political form and
reality; between order and caprice; between government and tyranny; between freedom
and anarchy; between community and collectivism; between personal rights and
individualism; between the State as described in Romans 13 and the State as described
in Revelation 13. And it will judge all matters concerned with the establishment,
preservation, and enforcement of political order in accordance with these necessary
distinctions and according to the merits of the particular case and situation to which
they refer. On the basis of the judgement which it has formed it will choose and desire
whichever seems to be the better political system in any particular situation, and in
accordance with this choice and desire it will offer its support here and its resistance
there.

‘It is in the making of such distinctions, judgements, and choices,’ argues Barth, ‘from its
own centre, and in the practical decisions which necessarily flow from that centre, that the
Christian community expresses its “subordination” to the civil community and fulfils its
share of political responsibility.’

**Impartiality of the ecclesia:**

The Christian community, argues Barth, has no ‘idea, system, or programme’ to turn to
for guidance, but ‘a direction and a line that must be recognized and adhered to in all
circumstances.’ Its dependence upon this line once again distinguishes the Christian
community from the civil community, which, separated from its spiritual centre and thus in
spiritual ignorance, takes its direction from that which can be derived from ‘natural law.’
That which, in a manner again consistent with Barth’s definition of the Reprobate independence, is defined as ‘the embodiment of what man is alleged to regard as universally right and wrong, as necessary, permissible, and forbidden “by nature” that is, on any conceivable premise.’ Notably, Barth argues that this restriction on the civil community’s right execution of its divinely ordained task need not entail that the civil community will always fail in its execution. Yet, out of the civil community’s groping in the dark, any success in making good political judgements is not to be credited to any brilliance in the application of the natural law. Rather, it is attributable to the fact ‘the ignorant, neutral, pagan civil community is still in the kingdom of Christ, and that all political questions and political efforts as such are founded on the gracious ordinance of God by which man is preserved and his sin and crime confined.’

However, for the Christian community to follow in the use of the natural law, argues Barth, would be for it to deprive the civil community of ‘... a firmer and clearer motivation for political decisions than the so-called natural law can provide.’ Regardless of the fact that the ‘tasks and problems’ it is called to share in are “natural”, secular and profane tasks and problems’, the norm by which the Christian community is guided ‘is derived from the clear law of its own faith, not from the obscure workings of a system outside itself: it is from knowledge of this norm that it will make its decisions in the political sphere.’

**Amiable relations:**

In a more concrete consideration of the manner in which the Christian community is to participate in the civil community’s matters, Barth defines two ways in which its spiritual norm will shape the Christian community’s participation in civil affairs, echoing an earlier work. It is faithfulness to this spiritual norm, he contends, that enables the Christian
community ‘to support the cause of the civil community honestly and calmly.’ Here is heard an echo of what he first concluded is the effect of a proper subjection of the good citizen to the ‘powers that be’ in his second Romans commentary.

Calm reflection has thus been substituted for the convulsions of revolution – calm, because final assertions and final complaints have been ruled out, because a prudent reckoning with reality has outrun the insolence of warfare between good and evil, and because an honest humanitarianism and a clear knowledge of the world recognize that the strange chess-board upon which men dare to experiment with men and against them in State and Church and in Society cannot be the scene of the conflict between the Kingdom of God and Anti-Christ.

The necessary social/historical conditions implied here were provided for in Barth’s appropriation of election and covenant, with which he accounts for a divinely sanctioned independence from humanity’s common spiritual centre and thus its teleological orientation, without demonizing one human community, while enlightening without privileging, but commanding responsibility of another. Recalling their very different orientations, Barth next contrasts the eschatological nature of the awaited polis the Church proclaims with the providential nature of the State as justification for a separation of tasks.

**Eschatological proviso:**

‘The divine purpose of the civil community consists in creating opportunities for the preaching and hearing of the Word and to that extent the existence of the Church.’ Justified, Barth argues, is the contempt shown the Church ‘when fighting for its own interests with political weapons.’ Reliance upon its spiritual norm should in fact free the Christian community from such action. In awareness of the civil community’s limits, the Church should be enabled to offer its support in calm and patient expectation of that which it proclaims. ‘The Church cannot, however, simply take the Kingdom of God itself into the political arena.’ For, although the Church proclaims the Kingdom of God, it recognizes
that it ‘is the rule of God in the _redeemed_ world,’ which is an eschatological reality in Barth’s mature thought.

By contrast, and in a manner consistent with the Münster _Ethics_’ identification of order with reconciliation, the very ordinance of the State is ‘for the “world not yet redeemed.”’ So, for the State to seek to become the Kingdom of God is not only outside ‘its own purpose’, it exceeds its own limitations. At the same time, for the Church to try and make it into the Kingdom of God is equally ‘rashly presumptuous.’ Not only would it have to ‘disavow’ its own purpose, it would also be required to think that it could develop into the Kingdom of God. However, argues Barth, ‘A free Church will not allow itself to be caught on this path.’

Barth limits ‘the direction of Christian judgements, purposes, and ideals in political affairs.’ They are limited, he contends, to ‘the analogical capacities and needs of political organisation.’ The reasons for this are inferred from that which has been said thus far. As a community with a purpose, the State is independent of the Church. However, in their common humanity ‘bearing the stamp of this fleeting world’, neither can be equated with the Kingdom of God. Therefore, ‘an equating of State and Church on the one hand and State and Kingdom of God on the other is ... out of the question.’ In light of their common political character, ‘a simple and absolute heterogeneity between State and Church on the one hand and State and Kingdom of God on the other is ... just as much out of the question.’ Therefore, Barth contends:

The one possibility that remains – and it suggests itself compellingly – is to regard the existence of the State as an allegory \[gleichnis\], as a correspondence and an analogue to the Kingdom of God which the Church preaches and believes in. Since the State forms the outer circle, within which the Church, with the mystery of its faith and gospel, is the inner circle, since it shares a common centre with the Church, it is inevitable that, although its presuppositions and its tasks are its own and different, it is
nevertheless capable of reflecting indirectly the truth and reality which constitute the Christian community.605

It is important to note that in his emphasis upon its eschatological character, Barth has excluded the hoped-for Kingdom of God as being constitutive of the Church. What does constitute the Church is its shared responsibility to its common Lord and for others in its life together in anticipation of the Kingdom of God. However, as those who share in unredeemed humanity, the Church is not necessarily any more faithful or accurate than the State in reflecting that eschatological reality. Thus, despite the Church’s participation, as John Webster observes:

Whilst state order is analogous to the kingdom of God, the analogy relativizes as much as it legitimates state order, for the eschatological disjunction between the heavenly city and its earthly analogue is such that the heavenly city is ‘not an ideal but … a real State – yes … the only real State; not … an imaginary one but … the only one that truly exists.’606

The State’s limitations form the basis for ‘the peculiarity and difference of [its] presuppositions and tasks and its existence as an outer circle…,’ which, contends Barth, determine that ‘its justice and even its very existence as a reflected image of the Christian truth and reality’ are fleeting. Therefore, it is in constant need of what, in its avowed spiritual ignorance, it cannot provide itself; ‘a historical setting whose goal and content are the moulding of the State into an allegory of the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of its righteousness.’607 What it lacks is provided (divinely) through the evaluative role of the Church faithful to its gospel truth. The ‘political responsibility’ of the Church itself is not defined in terms of moulding, but through spiritually informed judgements providing the necessary context, or in the language of the Church Dogmatics, bearing witness. ‘The distinctions, judgements and choices which [the Church] makes in the political sphere,’ argues Barth, ‘are always intended to foster the illumination of the State’s connexion with
the order of the divine salvation and grace and to discourage all the attempts to hide this connexion.\textsuperscript{608} It needs to be acknowledged that whether the proffered enlightenment should take root is outside the Church’s responsibility.

**Applied with purpose:**

With this, Barth turns to illustrate with particular applications of what is the clearest theory of Christian political responsibility he provides. Barth refers to them as ‘a few examples of Christian choices, decisions, and activities,’ which are not to be confused with the ‘paragraphs of a political constitution.’ It should be clear that Barth does not intend to provide in it the one political approach to civil affairs most congruent with the gospel. Rather, their intended purpose is ‘to illustrate how the Church can make decisions on a Christian basis in the political sphere.’\textsuperscript{609}

In other words, it is not the conclusions reached, but the means by which they were arrived at that Barth intends to illustrate. The approach taken is very much in accord with the approach of his Münster *Ethics*’ emphasis upon the Word of God. The hermeneutical key applied is best described in what John Webster argues is for Barth ‘possible – indeed urgently necessary for human beings to come to apprehend a transcendent order of value if they are to conduct themselves properly in the world’, that is ‘scrupulous and ever newly focused attention to Jesus Christ in the perfection of his achievement and in his presence and activity in the power of the Holy Spirit.’\textsuperscript{610}

Before turning from the general shape of the Christian community’s exercise of its political responsibility to Barth’s concrete expressions of it, I return to an analogy in summing up what Barth has argued as the nature of the political participation of the Christian community. In reflecting on what Barth has proffered, the reader does well to consider what
he describes as analogous to an aesthetic activity. The analogy is suggested in Barth’s remarks concerning what the Church desires in such matters: ‘It desires that the active grace of God, as revealed from heaven, should be reflected in the earthly material of the external, relative, and provisional actions and modes of action of the political community.’

The discontinuity between the provisional human community, of which the Church is a part, and the eschatological redeemed community that is to come inhibits straight application in the human community and suggests the analogy. However, insofar as the civil community in which it may be received is spiritually blind and ignorant, Barth argues, ‘the translation of the Kingdom of God into political terms demands Christian, spiritual, and prophetic knowledge on every side.’ What Barth describes is an activity nearer to that of informed, imaginative judgement.

Among the political possibilities open at any particular moment [the Christian community] will choose those which most suggest a correspondence to, an analogy and a reflection of, the content of its own faith and gospel. … In the decisions of the State, the Church will always support the side which clarifies rather than obscures the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the whole, which includes this political sphere outside the Church.

Therefore, as Hans Frei argued of Barth’s narrative interpretation, the hermeneutical key for such judgement is once again the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

When Barth opens the series of illustrations with the proscription against ideological or partisan politics, it is grounded in the fact that, in Jesus, God acted on behalf of humanity and not a cause. Therefore, ‘man has not to serve causes; causes have to serve man.’ When he argues for the defense of social justice, it is grounded in the fact that Jesus came to seek and save the lost; a ‘common law,’ in God’s justification of humanity in Jesus; ‘responsible freedom,’ in the free call of the word of grace; ‘equality’ of freedom and responsibility, in their members’ ‘baptism in one Spirit’; a ‘division of powers’ in matters of governance, upon
‘the variety of the gifts and task’ of that same Spirit; ‘honesty and openness’ in political affairs, upon the fact that ‘the Church lives from the disclosure of the true God and his revelation’; ‘freedom of speech’ and participation in debate, upon the Church’s trust in the free ‘Word of God’; ‘empowerment for service,’ upon the nature of their own Christian discipleship as service; ‘non-parochial politics,’ upon the fact that ‘the church is ecumenical by virtue of its very origin’; for the ‘use of force’ as a last resort, upon ‘God’s anger and judgement, ... that lasts but for a moment, whereas His mercy is for eternity’.616

Non-partisan examples:

As I’ve stated, Barth offers these as but ‘examples of Christian choices, decisions, and activities in the political sphere,’ which could have been multiplied. They were intended to illuminate, says Barth, ‘the analogical but extremely concrete relationship between the Christian gospel and certain political decisions and modes of behaviour.’617 Not all such decisions, he admits, will permit such an approach, ‘but the clarity of the message of the Bible will guarantee that all the explications and applications of the Christian approach will move in one unswerving direction and one continuous line.’618

Yet Barth rejects the option of a Christian party for a number of reasons, not least of which is that the demands of the political form, regardless of its material difference, would in fact subvert the very aims it is called to serve. He writes, ‘when it is represented by a Christian party, the Christian community cannot be the political salt which it is its duty to be in the civil community.’ The opportunity that best affords it the faithful exercise of its political duty, he claims, is ‘the preaching of the whole gospel of God’s grace.’619 It is Barth’s conviction that ‘explications and applications of its political content in an unmistakable direction will inevitably take place ... where the Christian community is
gathered together in the service of this gospel.’ However, he argues, the Church must take care in its choice of situations in which to speak. It must act prudently and definitely in order to be heard. It should not simply wait for ‘questions of a religious and ethical nature in the narrower sense,’ on which to take a stand.620

Barth suggests perhaps the most important contribution the Church can make, ‘is to bear in mind in the shaping of its own life that, gathered as it is directly and consciously around the common centre, it has to represent the inner within the outer circle. The real Church must be the model and proto-type of the real State. ... The Church must not forget that what it is rather than what it says will be best understood not least in the State.’621 A Church faithful in this task usurps the need for a Christian party, for it is certainly visible and identifiable for what it is.622 Moreover, it will have its own share of members who will ‘enter the political arena anonymously, that is in the only way they can appear on the political scene, and who will act in accordance with the Christian approach and will thereby prove themselves unassuming witnesses of the Gospel of Christ, which can alone bring salvation in the political sphere no less than elsewhere.’623 If they are faithful to their calling, he argues, in a manner that emphasizes the character of his ecclesiology:

In every party they will be against narrow party policies and stand up for the interests of the whole community. By that token they will be political men and women in the primary meaning of the word. Scattered in different places, and known or unknown to one another, in touch with one another or out of touch, they will all be together – as citizens – and will make the same distinctions and judgments, choose and desire one cause, work for one cause. ... For in their existence the Church will be fulfilling its share of political responsibility in the most direct form.624

Conclusion:

I argue that Barth’s last essay should be read in light of the earlier (Church and State) work’s accounting for a positive relationship between divine and human justice, a work in
which the provisional yet divinely sanctioned quality of both Civil and Christian communities is made clear. The effects on the later work are found in Barth’s defense of an evaluative political role for the Church subordinate to the tasks of the State. Barth promotes the application of Christologically informed analogical judgements in the particular, but rejects partisan identification with or establishment by the Church of a political ideology or party.
CHAPTER EIGHT
BARTH’S LATER POLITICAL THOUGHT: THE MATURE ETHICS APPLIED

In this chapter, drawing upon the work of John Howard Yoder, I affirm the post-Christendom yet non-secular nature of Bart’s last major political writing. I contend that its illustrations are intended as methodological and not political, and are correctly interpreted as examples of provisional and relative analogical judgements made individually in a prayerful spirit. I conclude that they are properly interpreted from the perspective of Barth’s later ethics as examples of the exercise of a responsible freedom determined by God’s action in Jesus Christ; an exercise that, in application, resembles more that of an art than a science.

Introduction:

That Barth evidenced favourable views of socially democratic society is undeniable and need not come as a surprise given the context in which he was raised. The aims of Social Democracy were shown to be biblically supportable by the man himself as early as 1911. That work is most often placed alongside the application of the work just examined to support the claim. However, it must be asked if the works are truly comparable.

No doubt Barth draws upon the life and ministry of Jesus in both the earlier work and, in its own way, in the later work as well. Yet, the methods are not at all comparable. In the earlier work, he draws a direct, but critical, correlation between historical elements in the life and ministry of Jesus and those of Socialism to suggest the two share the same goals. In the later work, he is ‘illustrating’ how ‘analogous’ links might be made between two distinct political entities. The one, an eschatological reality, is the focus of the hope of the Christian community. The other, a temporal reality, serves a divine purpose, but is comparable to the
former in its political nature only.

Although comparisons might be made, it is here argued that the methodological difference between the two works indicates the real significance of the later work. That difference reflects Barth having theologically accounted for a phenomenon recognized, but not adequately accounted for in the interim essay provided at Tambach. Implicit in that methodological difference is a significant departure, due to a profound moral, theological transformation in his thought, from the political thought of the last two millennia or, more precisely, of post-Constantian Protestantism.

Yoder’s Analysis of Barth’s account:

The difference of the later work can easily be missed, argues Yoder, because of one or other of the common approaches to interpretation in social ethics. One might either read the distinction between the Christian community and the civil community as ‘between the individual and the social’, or as a way of distinguishing between the ‘spiritual or religious or sacral and the … material or worldly or everyday.’\textsuperscript{626} However, neither of these approaches embodies Barth’s intention. The distinction, rather, is more nearly ethnographic and in that way its comprehensiveness is comparable to Aristides second-century description of Christians as ‘the ones, beyond all the \textit{nations} of earth, who have found the truth.’\textsuperscript{627}

Barth is distinguishing between two different social/political identities that are comparable in all ways but one, observes Yoder, that being ‘that in one of them … they all confess Jesus as Christ and as Lord, and the members of the other group do not.’\textsuperscript{628} And therein lay the distinctiveness in Barth’s definition of the political players. As Yoder observes, ‘In his definition of what he calls the citizen community, Barth is affirming for the first time in mainstream Protestant theology since Constantine the theological legitimacy of
admitting, about a set of social structures, that those who participate in them cannot be presumed to be addressable from the perspective of Christian confession. 629

As was earlier suggested, Barth had already recognized as much in the Tambach lecture and criticized the two common methods of addressing the phenomenon. The difference in the later work is that what was once a sociological observation has become a theological affirmation, accounted for through his mature account of election. As Yoder observes, ‘in making this the difference that matters now in the late 1940’s, [Barth] has begun so simply, programmatically, to derive the sociology of the community around the Word from the central place of confession.’ 630

Yoder, who builds on Barth’s definition of the political players in ‘the Christian community and the civil community’, acknowledges it as the only valid critique of Christendom. He refers to the ‘duality of Church and world’ identified in Barth’s essay as neither a ‘slice separating the religious from the profane, nor the ecclesiastical from the civil, nor the spiritual from the material.’ 631 Rather, recognizing that Barth believed the two forms of elect status ran through the heart of every individual, the sole distinguishing factor is the relationship of faith to its Object:

It is the divide this side of which there are those who confess Jesus as Lord, who in so doing are both secular and profane, both spiritual and physical, both ecclesiastical and civil, both individual and organized in their relationships to one another and to others. The difference as to whether Christ is confessed as Lord is a difference on the level of real history and personal choices; not a difference of realm or levels or even dimensions. 632

Once he identified this as the ‘difference that matters’, Yoder then puts the fault with Christendom in proper perspective. What truly mattered was not the adoption of a position of power that led to violence and the crusades, the identification of eschatological workings of God with those of present powers that be, the adoption of pagan religious practices, the
ecclesial appropriation of the forms of Roman administration or other often-regretted changes in the nature of the Church’s beliefs, practices or structure. All might be legitimately identified as mistakes. However, the one that truly mattered, argues Yoder, ‘is [the Church’s] illegitimate takeover of the world: its ascription of a Christian loyalty or duty to those who have made no confession and, thereby, its denying to the non-confessing creation the freedom of unbelief that the nonresistance of God in creation gave to a rebellious humanity.’

Yoder’s appreciation of Barth:

Building on Barth’s work, Yoder argues it is only in maintaining the sociological distinction in the confessional way Barth does that a ‘gospel social ethics’ is possible. The possibility of a gospel social ethics requires telling the story of Jesus, because ‘The principle of coherence of the church’s self-understanding is narrative rather than deductive.’ He argues it is this which Barth intends when he later ascribes to the life of the Church the meaning ‘liturgical.’ As Yoder observes:

Because the meaning of Jesus was known within the categories of ordinary historical reality, he must be re-known, represented, on through time in a celebratory recounting that ties the particularity of his history to the particularity of ours, without trusting to the “bridge” of some mediating generalizations about the nature of things.

For Yoder, crucial to a Christian social ethics is the maintenance of its particularity, and therein lay the promise in Barth’s account. ‘[F]rom the very beginning,’ argues Yoder, ‘the faith has been subject to the challenge of those who seek to incorporate it within the somehow more trustworthy or less precarious framework of some wider wisdom.’ This is often identified by theologians and ethicists as ‘natural theology’ or a ‘theology of being,’ both of which were handily rejected by Barth:
Already in the apostolic age of Christendom there was the Gnostic temptation … submerging the specificity of Jesus in the obviously more valid humanism of the broader Hellenistic culture and its profounder Gnostic religiosity. … The fourth century incorporated other nations and cultures as well as religions into the majestic unity of the imperial civilization. The medieval church felt it equally fitting to borrow and baptize the classical wisdom of antiquity … incorporating Christianity with the … underlying, structure of natural reason. In early modern times the challenge was posed again by the classical question of Lessing and equally classically answered by the majestic synthesis of Hegel.  

Each time, argues Yoder, there resulted the ‘domestication of the biblical witness … [which] meant relegating to unimportance the specificity of the Jewishness and the ethic of Jesus.’

Yoder’s concern is with what Barth has often referred to as the secularizing of the gospel or a secularized Christ. It is valid and is certainly in some degree true of Barth, who didn’t shun alternative thought forms outright, but in his post-liberal theology argued they be subordinated to the logic of Scripture. At the same time I believe that Yoder’s concern is a somewhat one-sided reading of Barth’s intent when arguing for a strict distinction between the two communities and their attendant purposes.

**Beyond Yoder: equanimity in metaphysical humility:**

I argue that the distinction between the Christian and civil communities Barth wished to maintain was also directed toward the protection against clericalism, or for the preservation of *the freedom of unbelief.* This freedom was identified as early as the Tambach lecture and implicit in the earlier 1911 work’s comparison of Jesus to the social justice movement. Support for this claim is reflected in the very same material of the later *Church Dogmatics* from which Yoder draws for support. There, in his treatment of Church law as ‘exemplary law’, Barth writes:

In relation to those who are without [the church] cannot, therefore, be indifferent or silent or preoccupied with itself. It can be genuinely preoccupied with itself only when it is also concerned with them and is aware of its responsibility towards them. It has to converse with them, and one way in which it has to do so is by showing them the law
valid within it. To what end? Certainly not in order to claim that the law valid in the Church must also be the law of the state and other human societies. Certainly not to demand or invite these to appropriate the provisions of ecclesiastical law and therefore to replace their own law by cannon law. Certainly not to ecclesiasticise the world and especially the state as the all embracing form of human society. There will, of course, be only one law in the redemption which comes with the future manifestation of Jesus Christ, in the heavenly Jerusalem, in the glory of eternal life. But this will be the law of Jesus Christ over every sphere of life. It will be the law of the kingdom of God. It will not be a human law at all, and therefore it will not be Church law. What law of what Church at what stage of its transition from yesterday to tomorrow, from the worse to the better, can ever be held up to the world as a norm, or commended as an example to follow?640

For Barth, freedom in Christ represented a ‘way of life’ to be realized personally and was not to be made a social programme applied irrespective of conviction.

Barth’s position is theologically motivated and for avowedly political reasons, evidence of which is found in the Church Dogmatics III/3 in his discussion of the providential Lordship of God in history. It is there he argues for the work of God in ordering history with a ‘unified plan which is in the process of execution, and there is no creature which this plan does not embrace, and which does not in its own place and its own way help forward this plan. But in its own place and its own way. This plan has nothing whatever to do with a levelling down and flattening out of individuals and individual groupings.’641

Barth not only affirms the diversity of creaturely existence in this way, but argues that it must be respected. He contends that ‘[w]e must not obscure the positive sense of the relativity of all creaturely occurrence by ignoring the fact that God alone is the One in relation to whom the relativity exists.’ Barth argues that to view the relativity as horizontally (humanly) determined is dangerous because of where it might lead – that is to substituting ‘the divine work of co-ordination [for] the very human idea of a cosmic relationship which curves in on itself.’642

If the vertical relationship is occluded, argues Barth, what will be required is an
alternative if for no other reason than explanatory purposes. In the process, the vertical relationship is likely to merge with the horizontal substitute. ‘[The creature’s] subordination to God could be forgotten in favour of its coordination with the creature.’

In the process, the creature in all its particularity may be lost, becoming nothing more than a part of a larger whole. This form of argument is most often touted, because of its perceived ability to promote a more socially tolerant atmosphere. However, Barth contends this form is ‘most dangerous in its amiable brutality … most dangerous because its brutality is far more noticeable than its amiability.’

It is in his description of how that brutality manifests itself that Barth provides the moral justification for the need to embrace the diversity in the broader polis, as divinely sanctioned. For in the course of its substitution, he argues there ‘is quite independently interposed between the free governing divine will of God subordinating and coordinating and individual creatures and their existence an all-embracing third factor, the house or state, the *totum opus*, the *universum*, the *communitas*, in the interests of which and in relation to which the individual is reduced to a mere means, …’ Once adopted, this phenomenon can lead to the ‘unequivocal abasement of the individual creature or at any rate the majority of individual creatures.’

Identification through the exercise of a responsible freedom:

This, he believes, is what was observed in the diverse ‘political and economic totalitarianisms’ of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European history. The avoidance of a similar threat, I argue, lay behind Barth’s remarks on blind subjection to Church authorities and received traditions already at Barmen and throughout the *Church Dogmatics*. Consider the following from *The Christian Life*:
The cause of the church and its task in the world can be served as little by blind adherents, supporters, and followers of the confession “I believe the Church,” by Christians who go along with the swing of the pendulum between excess and defect in the church’s life and do not even notice the offense involved, as it can by what is said and done by disengaged outsiders who peevishly repudiate that confession.648

Excluded from such political phenomena as those identified and absent from such blind faith is that which Barth often praised in Kant’s contribution to philosophy; the idea of thinking for oneself: that is, no more than the exercise of the freedom necessary for being personally and thereby morally responsible to God.649 Summarily stated, for Barth the Church exists in, or is defined by, its active members and not its members by the Church:650

The church lives in its involved and, to that extent, its faithful members. But these will continually have to be faithful in the form of faithful suspicions, questions, and warnings, and often enough in the form of faithful protests against the state and course of things in the church, against the traditions it inherits and the novelties it ventures. The Church, like the world, needs salt, not pepper. As a member of the church, the Christian owes it the debt of being salt in his own place and portion [cf Mt. 5:13], of disturbing the equilibrium, of working against the ignorance of God within it, of serving the knowledge of God, and of thus being to it an element of unrest and hope.651

In “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, Barth refers to the two communities or ‘ordinances’ (authoritative directions) in terms of an inner circle representing the Christian community, not the Kingdom of God in its fullness, and an outer, wider circle representing the civil community, both under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The image employed is that of ‘concentric circles’ with Christ at the centre. However, I contend that the significance is in Barth’s definition of the players as distinct communities of individuals within a shared social space, each bearing a responsibility for the broader whole. Barth does not intend to identify them by their relation to social bodies at the institutional level, but by the nature of the relationship to their common centre.

This is evident in a later questioning concerning the image. Barth states his preference for it lies in ‘its ability to show that the centre of the two communities or ordinances is
identical, that centre being Jesus Christ." Yet, he concedes in response to further questioning: ‘What we miss in the figure of the concentric circles is the dynamic relation between the inner and outer circles. The inner circle should have many arrows pointing outward — showing that it is distinguished but not separated (like the chalcedonian formula!).’ With Barth’s actualism applied to his universal account of election, the hard and fast lines of demarcation the image suggests are not really existent.

**Freedom exercised in a confused situation:**

What truly distinguishes the two communities, he argues, is the nature of the obedience their ‘authoritative direction’ can command of its members. Barth continues:

The communities are within certain orders. Those who make up the communities (and for Christian community I prefer the word ‘Gemeinde’ to ‘Kirche’, because Gemeinde means togetherness) are called to obey. The Lordship of Christ works in the Christian community as free obedience. In the State obedience is also asked, but the State can ask for obedience with no question of freedom. But even in the State, if obedience is only legal and outward, this is not good. The State also needs action as free responsibility, but the State cannot ask for citizens to be free. The State lives out of what the Church can say.

Here the image is likened to the description of what Barth later identifies in *The Christian Life* as the confused situation, created through humanity’s elected freedoms realized and unrealized, the Church inhabits in the ‘time between the times’ of Christ’s coming and expected return. The wider community represents those living independently of their elected freedom or in ignorance of God, chosen or otherwise. The inner community represents those who, enlightened by the Spirit, exist within the context of the broader community, but seek to live in accordance with their true elected freedom.

As Barth elsewhere described the Christian:

To summarize provisionally, we may say that in virtue of what he (and only he) can see, the Christian is the one who has a true knowledge in this matter of the providence and universal lordship of God. This providence and lordship affect him as they do all
other creatures, but he participates in them differently from all other creatures. He participates in them from within. Of all creatures he is the one who while he simply experiences the providence and lordship of God also consents to it, having a kind of “understanding” – if we may put it this way – with the overruling God and creator.655

Barth did not believe, however, that spiritual enlightenment entitled the Christian to participate within the broader body politic with an air of superiority, as has been shown within his last political work and supported from later material. Barth elsewhere argues that although incorporated into the body of Christ, ‘The head does not become the body and the body does not become the head.’656 For Barth, the object of one’s faith is a living Lord very much active in restoring a non-believing world to covenant relations with Himself and, as Kathryn Tanner has observed,

[w]hat God’s being for us in Christ means for the covenant is clear, as is its import for human beings. … Far more difficult is determining in any definite way the meaning of what happens in Christ for the world beyond the human and outside the human history that can be directly tied to Christ – Israel and the Church.657

Thus for the later Barth, while the Church had been enlightened with regards to what had been undertaken in Jesus Christ on humanity’s behalf and of its future promises, it was not given an ethical roadmap with which to navigate future developments in the relations amongst those who live independently of the Lord of the covenant. Therefore, it is not to perceive itself as the answer to the world’s political problems.

**In a prayerful spirit:**

Therefore, for an appropriate reading of the illustrations Barth provides in “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, I suggest they be considered in light of Barth’s later ethical reflections in *The Christian Life;* namely those detailed under the subsection on the petition ‘Hallowed be thy name’ and the subsequent subsection on ‘The precedence of the Word of God.’ In which Barth addresses action amid ‘the division or the
ambivalence in which the same one, true, and living God is both known and unknown to the world, to the church, and to us Christians ….”658 It is there he describes how determination is to be made, in light of the Word of God, when considering alternative courses of action in the confused situation between the times.

At the opening of this material, Barth defines the ‘wakeful’ Church as those who cannot remain apathetic in the divided situation and identifies ‘God himself, “in the totality and the singularity of His being” … [with] the act of his self-presentation and self-attestation in the world.’659 He contends that ‘the question of an unknown or hidden God may arise de facto, but there can be no question of such a God de jure except per nefas, that is, to the extent that his name has not yet been proclaimed among us or to the extent that we will not yet recognize and confess it, ….’660 The latter case generally defines the situation in the broader social community within which the Church exists between the times.

The command to pray itself indicates an assumption that the disciples were among those who had been enlightened: ‘Jesus takes them seriously by empowering, leading and summoning them to pray this prayer. … to see themselves not only in the darkness but also in the light.’ And with the command comes the gospel: ‘even though to his hurt [the one addressed] still exists in the counterpoise of light and darkness, there is addressed and accredited to him the freedom to break out of it, to decide gratefully for the light and against the darkness.’ Moreover, the petition ‘Hallowed be thy name’ in itself ‘casts a light on those who do not as yet pray with [those who do]; for there, with promise for [those who don’t] too, a step is made toward the name of God that corresponds to its own coming, dwelling and abiding.’661
Thus, argues Barth, implicit within the petition is ‘a pledge that the painful vacillation between the knowledge and the ignorance of God in the world, the church and ourselves is not at any rate a law of brass that cannot be broken.’ It is important that the nature of the petition be rightly understood, however. Barth here intends to correct the reformation exegesis that emphasized its members’ fulfilling of the petition in their words and actions. The request being made, he contends, is ‘a petition to God that he himself should sanctify his name and thus do in the matter what he alone can do.’

Barth eventually concedes, after this subtle but theologically and politically significant distancing of himself from the tradition, that to act in accordance with the petition is not wrong. Nor is it the intent of the petition, which seeks the ultimate glorification of the name of God. Divine action is made necessary because of the ongoing ignorance of God among humanity, the elimination of which, in its epistemological darkness, humanity alone is not truly capable. Moreover, the petition cannot be fulfilled by a mere marginal change to the extent of the sanctity accorded God’s name, but only in the complete elimination of any competing truth.

In faith and hope:

Yet the Church’s knowledge of God is not obtained through a Christian philosophy, achievements in Church history, or personal experience, but only ‘in faith.’ The Church prays the prayer of sanctification in the knowledge of God as He who ‘has acted and spoken in the history of Jesus Christ.’ That is, ‘as they look beyond themselves and all their achievements to him who is the basis of their being and their Head and Lord, being begotten of his living Word and finding their only nourishment in this living Word.’ Therefore, argues Barth, ‘It is praying for the taking place of the unique and definitive divine act which
it knows to have taken place already in Jesus Christ.664

It needs to be understood, then, that all that is possible through human action in the present confused situation is a profound sighing. Because, contends Barth, ‘the total and final sanctifying of the name of God and the removal of the juxtaposition has already been revealed to us by the Word … as something that has taken place already in the work of Jesus Christ.’665 This truth, however, is always before the Church, preventing ambivalence when confronted with the confused times. This truth ‘is full of critical dynamic preventing any easy pacification among those who perceive it.’666 Therefore, this truth not only prevents any complacent acceptance of the situation, but also orients the Church towards the ‘once for all manifested glory of God as also the future of this present …and therefore the goal of our existence.’667

To make the petition itself is already an act of obedience, argues Barth. It ‘obviously would not be an act of obedience …. [i]f they did not turn toward the day for whose coming they pray with some movement of their own, ….’668 Demanded of those who make the petition authentically is a corresponding ‘zeal for the honour of God. … a movement analogous to that which we ask and expect from God.’669 However, there are limits. Barth argues:

The Christological and eschatological context in which we must now speak directly about the ethical relevance of the first petition does, of course make some delimitation and clarification necessary. Our part … can indeed only be ours. … it can be done only in our human place and our human manner, only within the limits of our human capabilities and possibilities. It can be done in obedience to God’s command only when it stays within these limits, so that, taking place in due modesty and honesty it is a zeal that is pleasing to God, that is, that corresponds and is analogous to his divine act.670

**In the divine Subject:**

It is proceeding in this way, placing the Christian action within its creaturely limits,
that Barth theologically corrects the Reformers, whose emphasis he believes not necessarily wrong but only truncated. He is arguing against the mis-identification of the Church as the divine agent in the world and for the Church understood as a divine servant that is politically significant. The Reformers’ failing to first emphasize that that for which they pray was an action only God could perform and had fulfilled already in Jesus Christ left the impression that their human actions could achieve too much.

This, Barth asserts, has too often been the mistaken emphasis in the Church and raises the question that if human acts could achieve what was pleaded for in the petition, of what necessity is then left to God? As a result of such thinking, the emphasis has too often been placed upon the wrong subject and ‘the glorifying of God’s name becomes in fact the glorifying of their own human nature’ implicitly expressing an avowed atheism. The same concern arises out of the eschatological emphasis when mis-applied as in ‘the commonly heard expression that we are to hasten the dawning of the great day by what we can and should do as we move toward it.’ Therefore, Barth contends that we should also do our best to avoid the eschatological emphasis.

Barth argues that great strides forward are not what is expected of the Church’s obedience, but only ‘limited action both qualitatively and quantitatively. It is simply our existence in movement, as we pray the first petition, in the everyday affairs of our personal lives and the life of the church and the world. … It is a matter of the steps that we have to take hour by hour … as we pray for the hallowing of God’s name, in the manner that corresponds to this petition and the sure and certain answer to it.’ There may be times when more significant actions are called for, but these are likely to be rare. Moreover, argues Barth, ‘measured against by whether it is analogous or not to the hallowing of God’s
name for which we pray, a supposedly great step might be a fairly small one. … a
supposedly little step might really be a very big one.'675 Therefore, the significance of one’s
action is not so easily determined.

In their limited human freedom, all that is to be expected is ‘that [they] not evade the
living Word of Jesus Christ, the awakening, enlightening, comforting and impelling of the
Holy Spirit, but give these free course and let them do their work in [their] lives.’676 For in
this way, they bear witness to God’s action in Christ and it is this ministry of witness, argues
Barth, to which they are called. In order to properly understand Barth, at this point I digress
with some consideration of his later ethics by which I intend that which informed his Church
Dogmatics, but was also expressed in other works.

The later ethics:

As early as the dialectical theology of his Göttingen Dogmatics, Barth rejected the
over-identification of revelation with the Scriptural text. He believed it ‘does not just put
scripture in the pope’s place but makes it a pope, a paper pope, from which we are to get
shoes as from a shoemaker.’677 Interpreted in this way, in the course of the previous two
centuries, the approach to scripture as an ethical rulebook was promoted. For the mature
Barth, however, ‘Holy Scripture defies being forced into a set of rules; it is a mistake to use it
as such.’678 He approached the record of divine commands as particular instances of God in
history commanding particular actions and only indirectly applicable.679 Barth’s approach
was due, in part, to a suspicion of the facile ethical system represented, for example in the
abuses of casuistry; a suspicion that arose in the dialectical period out of what Biggar
identifies as ‘the eschatological relativization of all human goodness and ethical
understanding.’680
In the *Church Dogmatics*, the correlation of faith and obedience or dogmatics and ethics manifested in the Münster *Ethics* is maintained formally with some modification materially. The *Dogmatics* itself was to be treated in five parts; a theological prolegomena followed by sections concerning God, Creation, Reconciliation and Redemption, with a subsequent ethical section in each part.\(^{681}\) In the ethics of the early *Church Dogmatics* in particular, responsibility to God is described in a less Kantian more Kierkegaardian manner. Personal and ethical decision-making was always to be undertaken by listening for the command of God in the moment, while taking into consideration the particularities of the given situation. In this way, it manifests another element already evident in the earlier dialectical theology, that is ‘an earnest acknowledgement of humankind’s radical dependence upon God in all his sovereignty, freedom, and mystery.’\(^{682}\)

**The command ethic?**

Biggar contends that it is these emphases, brought forward from the earlier dialectical period, that cast certain of Barth’s later ethics (*CD* II/2 in particular) in the form of a divine command ethic. It was thereby subject to criticisms of voluntarism (determined by the will of God alone and not any ‘external’ canons of reason) and irrationalism (requiring no human reflection) normally ascribed to a divine command ethic.\(^{683}\) However, in the doctrine of creation’s ethical material, Barth expressly denies that his intent is that we ‘be governed from moment to moment and situation to situation by a kind of direct and particular inspiration and guidance.’\(^{684}\)

To accurately interpret Barth’s ethics, I believe it is necessary to read him in light of the later ethics of Reconciliation. There it is evident that, as John Webster has observed: ‘Barth believes that good human action is generated, shaped, and judged by “that which is”,'
and “that which is” is a Christological, not a pre-Christological, category. Yet something of the direction taken there is already evident in “The Gift of Freedom: Foundation of Evangelical Ethics” delivered to Gesellschaft für Evangelische Theologie (Society for Theological Ethics) at Bielefeld on September 21, 1953.

There Barth defines ethics in something more of a moral theological manner, as a ‘theory of human behaviour’ intended neither to provide one with a program to follow nor a set of principles to be interpreted and applied. Rather, its concern is with what is to be done with the freedom humanity has been given. The ethical task, it might be said, is to make clear the individual’s responsibility before God ‘who is the light illuminating all his actions.’ In this way, it serves as a teacher and guide, but ‘leaves the pronouncement of unconditional imperatives to God.’

An emancipated form:

In continuity with the direction set in the Münster Ethics, the later ethics are informed by way of theological insights gained from sustained reflection on Holy Scripture. Its findings are ‘admonished, nourished and enriched’ through reflection on the Christian community’s ‘past and present history.’ As such, argues Barth, it is not without signposts ‘in its attempt to point to God’s authoritative word of judgment.’ However, it remains open and preliminary:

The ethical quest remains a quest and yet is not totally devoid of fulfillment. Indirect as it may be, the quest is a witness to God’s concrete word. Ethical reflection may and must be genuine search and genuine doctrine, genuine because true ethics does not deprive God, its object, of His due power and glory. It leaves the uttering of the essential and final word to God Himself. But it does not shrink away from the preliminary words which are necessary to focus man’s wandering thoughts on the one center where he himself free, shall hear the word of the free God, the commandment addressed to him, the judgment falling upon him and the promise waiting for him.

Barth proceeds to assert that freedom is a gift of God, who, in His freedom, elected to
be ‘man’s partisan.’ God’s freedom is not essentially freedom from, but *to* and *for* man. God is ‘the locus of man’s existence’ and as humanity’s Creator He intended for it to be good. Yet God remains at humanity’s side throughout and beyond its undoing in human sin.

Despite man’s sin God is with him, the One who was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world, drawing man unto Himself in merciful judgement. Man’s evil past is not merely crossed out because of its irrelevancy. Rather it is in the good care of God. Despite man’s life in the flesh, corrupt and ephemeral, God is with him. The victor in Christ is here and now present through His Spirit, man’s strength, companion, and comfort. Despite man’s death God is with him, meeting him as redeemer and perfecter at the threshold of the future to *show* him the totality of existence in the true light in which the eyes of God beheld it from the beginning and will behold it evermore. In what He is for man and does for man, God ushers in the history leading to the ultimate salvation of man.  

What is known from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is that ‘He willed to love man.’ This is the content of the gospel and in ‘receiving this good news from those who witness to it, the Christian community in the world is called to acknowledge it in faith, to respond to it in love, to set on it its hope and trust, and to proclaim it to the world which belongs to this free God.’ Such is the Christian community’s ‘privilege and mission’, and in ‘its acknowledging and confessing Jesus Christ as the revelation of God’s freedom [it] is incorporated into the body of Christ and becomes the earthly and historical form of His existence’ The existence of the Christian community, Barth argues, ‘is already an expression of man’s God-given freedom.’

Once he’s accounted for the gift of human freedom as an expression of God’s grace, Barth next distinguishes between humanity’s natural (created) freedom and Christian (reconciled) freedom. He argues that the former, along with ‘promised freedom’ (of redemption), needs to be understood on the basis of the latter ‘because freedom is made known to us by God as “the freedom of the Christian man.”’ Generally, the gift is rooted in the outpouring of God’s grace and in character ‘the event wherein the free God gives and
man receives this gift. When viewed in this light, both the idea of an un-free humanity and the notion of freedom as one’s ‘rightful claim’ are ‘equally contradictory’ and impossible. Rightly conceived, man’s power lies in ‘appropriating the gift.’

The event of man’s freedom is the event of his thankfulness for the gift, of his sense of responsibility as a receiver, of his loving care for what is given him. It is his reverence before the free God who accepts him as His partner without relinquishing His sovereignty. This event alone is the event of freedom.

Thus, observes Biggar, where the later ethic differs is in ‘its concentration upon God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ’. The effect on Barth’s later ethic was twofold:

First it established that the purpose of the command of God is gracious; it intends the salvation of the one it bears down upon. In the light of Christ it becomes clear that the ultimate point of the Law is Gospel. At this point the Kantian character of Barth’s ethic recedes even further, and reveals something basically eudaimonist: We should obey God’s command, *not out of spineless deference to the capricious wishes of an almighty despot, but out of regard for our own best good*, which this gracious God alone truly understands and which he intends with all his heart.

However, the Christological focus not only revealed a benevolent form to God’s command, it also shaped its content. Theologically defined in Trinitarian terms, ‘Ethics proper’, Barth argues, ‘begins with the recognition that God is the free man’s Lord, Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer and that free man is God’s creature, partner and child.’ These dimensions, identified with the earlier Command of God the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, ‘are not ontologically discrete; they interact and qualify each other’ yet need to be considered in turn. I do so momentarily, drawing upon Biggar’s insights, in returning to the material of *The Christian Life* from which I left off on page 171 above.

**Amidst a non-believing world:**

Already in 1953, Barth notes the Gift of freedom is ‘total, unequivocal and irrevocable,’ but it can be ‘mis-understood or mis-used.’ With this, Barth challenges the modern account of autonomous human freedom or unlimited choice illustrated by Hercules
at the crossroads. Barth retains the volitional elements, but within a limited scope. ‘It is true that man’s God-given freedom is choice, decision and act. But it is genuine choice; it is genuine decision and act in the right direction. … Man becomes free and is free by choosing, and determining himself in accordance with the freedom of God. The source of man’s freedom is also its yardstick.’

In *The Christian Life*, Barth contends that in the exercise of their obedience ‘Christians have to consider, to put into effect and to confirm the precedence to the Word of God in what they will and choose to do.’ Barth specifically defines the Word of God as ‘the Word of the living Jesus Christ, in which God in the power of his Holy Spirit has made himself known, and continually makes himself known, to the world, the church, and Christians as members of the church.’ Precedence is to be given to this Word of God over all other creaturely factors that bear upon their lives, whether they are personal, social or particular; as in responsibilities to Church or State. The reason for the order, Barth asserts, is that these other factors are unequivocal, ambivalent and dialectical in character, whereas the Word of God is the ‘firmly established and intrinsically clear promise of the morning without evening, the truth without contradiction, righteousness without resistance, peace without end.’

Barth is arguing for what Biggar identifies as ‘Epistemological precedence’ for the Command of God the Reconciler. For it is there that true humanity is revealed.

However, Barth argues, those other creaturely factors of our existence are not to be eclipsed by the Word of God, but ‘the Word of God is to be heard first, and only after it has been heard is the voice of the other factors to be heard too.’ For Barth, human being is initially creaturely; having a given nature. Barth already gave an account of this structure in his 1953 essay as consisting of responsibility to God; responsibility for fellow humanity;
responsibility for life; and a responsibility within the temporal limits of one’s life. This structure itself sets his ethics apart from other forms of divine command theory. In Barth’s ethic, human freedom is not absolute, but finite, subject to certain conditions that specify God’s command and for which divine command theory would not normally have a place.

When epistemologically considered, the command of God the Creator is informed by the logically subsequent dimensions (Command of God the Reconciler and Redeemer). Therefore, the factors of one’s creaturely being within the confused situation between the times should not control the Christian existence. A difference in their situation can be made, albeit limited, when precedence is given to the ‘unequivocal Word of God.’ Therefore, those other factors are to be given consideration, but only in guiding and not controlling Christian actions.

By the precedence given to the Word, what Barth does not intend is a naïve obedience or what Bonhoeffer mistakenly identified in Barth as a revelational positivism. Rather, Barth intends a genuine freedom within, but not constrained by, the limits that have been set. The individual’s ‘thoughts, words and works’ cannot remain content with the status quo, but such might result if they allow these other, often competing, factors to control the situation. Whereas, Barth contends, the Christian’s ‘wrestling’ with these other factors, while giving precedence to the Word of God, may give rise to ‘acts that repudiate the status quo.’

In application:

In Barth’s description of how, in this wrestling, such possibly repudiating acts are determined is revealed an approach to ethical decision-making much more focused on the art or, as Biggar contends, casuistry more accurately defined. Here I cite Barth’s description in full:
The result of this wrestling will be that [the Christian] will pay heed to their [competing factors] claims but accept them as only partially determinative along the lines indicated by the primacy of the Word of God. This will mean, however, that in handling them under the control of God’s Word there will arise within the world of ambivalence certain emphases on the knowledge of God over against the ignorance of God, and these will necessarily take the concrete form of preferences for one of the other factors over one of all of the rest. In testimony to the untenability of the balance, or, positively, to the superiority of the knowledge over the ignorance of God, of the light over the darkness, and therefore as an act of repudiation of the regime of vacillation, greater weight will be given to one of the factors over one or all of the others (ambivalent as they all are in themselves). The claim of this one factor will be respected and the claims of all of the others at least temporarily set aside in its favor. The possibilities it offers will be chosen, willed, and actualized, while the other possibilities will not be chosen, willed and actualized for the time being. In this hour and this situation this action must be seen as important and performed; others at the moment must be set aside as less important or not important at all, and they must at least wait, even if they are not discarded altogether.  

What is described here is not the typical de-ontological application of definitive principles to identified situations. Rather, it is the consideration of the particular situation with all its determining factors in light of the ‘Word of God’ as Barth has defined it. In that way, what Barth describes is not unlike the reference made by an artist or apprentice to the master’s expressed forms for direction in the production of his/her own work. It is not the master’s work that is to be reproduced, but the master’s form of expression that guides in the work under production.

What is not intended, however, is a pure aestheticism in terms of decisions made with precedence being given to one’s own particular tastes or value preferences, but in light of and with precedence given to the liberating freedom of the Word of God (Command of God the Reconciler). Barth continues:

This must not be done, of course, according to my own whim or ever so deep intuition (“I feel it” [the characteristic phrase of Zinzendorf]). Nor must it be done according to some intrinsic value or importance of this or that possibility. Nor must it be done according to its a priori precedence over others. It must be done as and because it
acquires this precedence under the guidance and control of the Word of God, which is above all human possibilities; as and because the Christian, as he prefers it to all others and seizes it, has to resist in practice the regime of vacillation and bear witness to the superiority of light over darkness, here in the present in which this may not be seen and indicated but has to be believed and then attested by the one who knows it in faith. The steps that the Christian takes in obedience are movements testifying to the victory of God, which has already taken place but has yet to be manifested.\footnote{712}

To be undertaken, Barth believes a particular action would need to be required of all in the present circumstances. However, the method of determination, or better discernment, Barth describes is not comparable with those systems that believe for an action to be deemed justifiable it must be applicable in every like situation. In accordance with the dynamic character of divine/human relations in history, due to Barth’s emphasis upon divine actualism and the attendant particularism, not to mention the effect of ongoing sanctification, decisions made will always be in need of revisiting and perhaps even reforming. Thus, with regards to judgements made, Barth contends they cannot be ascribed definitive status and assumed as applicable in all like situations, but are only ever provisional and relative to the particular:

These are all interim steps. They can have no more than provisional and relative significance and range. We recall that if all is not to be lost, the Christian himself must not in any circumstances ascribe definitive and absolute significance and range to them. He cannot be, and should not try to be a Christian Hercules. He can neither repeat nor anticipate God’s victory. He can serve only as its mirror. His decision to give God’s Word priority over all the other factors that partly determine his life, his good resolve to hear and respect these others only along the lines indicated by the first factor, \textit{will never be securely and once for all behind him} no matter how great may be his willingness and readiness. Nor especially will be the certainty of his confirming it on the path that he has entered and in the obedient preferring now of this possibility and now of that. \textit{His decision and resolve and confirmation can only be a matter of ever new hours and situations.}\footnote{713}

Biggar recognizes ‘in addition to his explicit, radical voluntarist account, [Barth] pursued lines of ethical thinking that are far less radical and considerably more rational (though not rationalized), although largely unannounced.’\footnote{714} For example, although evincing
a somewhat pacifist orientation, when once queried concerning his political thought and
whether one can go against a command such as ‘thou shalt not kill,’ Barth, acknowledging
murder as the right translation, first replies ‘we must distinguish between murder and
killing.’ Then, he argues: ‘The State presupposes coercion. Think of yourself as a
policeman or a soldier in the army. We must choose the best possibility and not hesitate, but
act with good conscience.’

A perspective explained and defended:

This method of discernment applied, it is here argued, is what Barth intended to
demonstrate by the illustrations given at the end of the ‘Christian Community and the Civil
Community.’ Barth had just argued for a divided social context, not unlike the confused
situation he’s speaking of in The Christian Life. The illustrations Barth provides in the
‘Christian Community and the Civil Community’ should not be identified as items of a
particular political platform applied, but analogical judgements independently determined
with reference to a specific social/political context. For, as he once communicated in a
letter to Brunner, ‘the church never thinks, speaks or acts “on principle.” Rather, it judges in
the Spirit with respect to individual cases.’ Again, when questioned with respect to
political judgements, he asserted:

The communist acts either by following a system of ideas (Marxism) where he finds
out the right thing to do and feels protected by the system or by finding out the right
moment in history (the Kairos). But the Christian has no system. A Christian lives
before God – not before a God who has no face, but the triune God revealed in Jesus
Christ. So he is not dependent on a system. We can only be obedient in relation to
God. We obey God, not a system. The end does not justify the means. If it is God
who is asking me to act in a certain situation, then God justifies the means. Sure the
two may look the same, but we must risk this. We cannot help it because we are
men.

Therefore, the reader has been encouraged to consider what Barth argued in the last
work in a manner more conducive to that of an art than a science. Otherwise, the reader misunderstands Barth’s intentions in providing the ‘examples of analogies and corollaries of that Kingdom of God in which the Church believes and which it preaches, in the sphere of the external, relative, and provisional problems of the civil community.’ One might otherwise read the analogous judgements provided as illustrations by Barth as an approach to rationalizing or sanctioning a particular political program. Although he does argue with reference to democracy that the ‘Christian view shows a stronger trend in this direction than in any other,’ I do not believe Barth intends for these illustrations, when combined, to sanction a political program.

Yet Herberg, for example, might be read as having misunderstood Barth’s intentions at just this point when he raises the question ‘Is it not evident on the face of it that very different conclusions could just as easily have been drawn from the same premises by the same method?’ Barth admits as much in his very own remarks about the combined picture provided. ‘Here again, we shall be careful not to deny an obvious fact, though “democracy” in any technical meaning of the word (Swiss, American, French etc.), is certainly not necessarily the form of State closest to the Christian view. Such a State may equally well assume the form of a monarchy or an aristocracy, and occasionally even that of a dictatorship.’ He may have provided other examples, to be sure.

Another way to interpret this criticism – rather than as a mere admission that alternatives are possible – is to believe Herberg considered Barth at fault for not providing a method that allowed only “one” application. That I believe would be to seriously misconstrue Barth’s intent, which was not to put forth a traditional political ethic, but to present an account of Christian responsibility in the life of the polis. To show the Christian
how ‘from among the political possibilities open at any particular moment [to] choose that which most suggests a correspondence to, an analogy and a reflection of, the content of its own faith and gospel.’ The standard by which judgements were to be made was the narrative of God’s activity in history in Jesus Christ. And this approach is in clear agreement with Barth’s ethical reflections already outlined as early as “The Gift of Freedom”. There he argued that: ‘Freedom is the joy whereby man acknowledges and confesses this divine election by willing, deciding and determining himself to be the mirror of the divine act.’

Hans Frei identified Barth’s hermeneutical approach in the Church Dogmatics, one already evident in the second Romans Commentary, as congruent with a “realistic narrative” approach. According to this approach, the task, as described by Grant Osborne, is to “identify” with the intended “reader” of the text and allow the story to guide [the] response. When appropriately understood, I believe that procedure best describes how Barth intends for spiritually enlightened individuals to make responsible political judgements in the historical media that is their socio-political context.

The keyword in this description is guide, for the narrative is not intended to determine but to give direction for the response. Moreover, the hermeneutical key in the narrative that guides is the narrative that transcends the text or that concerning God’s relations with His human subjects interpreted Christologically. Thus, it is not the positivism that some have charged Barth with, nor is it deontological, but more nearly ‘aesthetic.’ One’s judgement is first formed through appreciation of the form of the divine relations with humanity revealed in Christ. It is then analogously applied within the medium that is one’s historical context making the most responsible choices from amongst the available alternatives.

The Hunsinger objection:
The reader may still object that Barth’s method of analogy in the political writing might fail to avoid what Hunsinger contends needs to be ‘strenuously avoided’, if the theologian makes the Word of God his or her ‘controlling passion.’ That is that ‘the gospel …become an echo of what was present in the heart before we came to it, a reworking of what we already thought.’ However, Barth believed that to circumvent that objection was to require a measure of certainty reserved for God alone. To think one could achieve pure objectivity particularly in matters metaphysical was merely presumption. He not only recognized that ‘our supposed listening is in fact a strange mixture of hearing and our own speaking, and in accordance with the usual role, it is most likely that our own speaking will be the really decisive event.’ He went further in believing that ‘whether the thought and language in a theology are based on faith or on unbelief is not a scientific, still less a human decision.’ Rather, he argued, ‘it belongs to the hidden judgement of God that sooner or later it unmasks a dead orthodoxy for what it is.’

Therefore, Barth fully embraced the principle *semper reformanda*, to be ‘always reforming,’ in light, it might be said, of this principled hermeneutical insight, expressed in volume 1/2 of the *Church Dogmatics*, that in reading Scripture the reader is inevitably biased and, in so far as their interpretations are of theological significance, also engaged in the theological act. However, given human fallibility, he argued, the only genuine safeguard against such biased interpretation was for each to bring their own perspective to bear upon the text and share their findings in the context of a community of disciplined readers, ready to revise their findings in the light of (divine) judgements passed on previous work and the insights of others present. That places great stress upon the responsibility of each member of the tradition to participate in order to serve the critical appropriation of these testimonial
narratives in the contemporary setting. As such, it highlights the critical significance and responsibility of the whole Church as a hermeneutic community.

This need is reflected in another of Barth’s political writings concerning “Political Decisions in the Unity of Faith,” where he writes: ‘No one can believe in another’s place or allow anyone else to do his believing for him. Therefore no choice and decision made in obedience can be taken over unexamined by anyone else and turned into his own choice and decision.’\(^{732}\) Thus, as Robert T. Osborn has observed, there is a ‘personalist’ tenor implicit in his political thought according to which each covenant member is personally responsible to the Lord of the Covenant. What is clear, Barth argues in ‘The Gift of Freedom’, is that God willed to be and remains man’s Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, and that the individual be His creature, partner and child. However, ‘what this means for each of us here and there, today and tomorrow,’ he contends, ‘is decided by the free word of the free Lord in ever-renewed encounter between God and an individual.’\(^{733}\)

It is only when measured against the command of God, so conceived, that one’s actions are found either good or evil. ‘These terms affirm the content and consequence of the imperative and the criterion, and concurrently exclude any arbitrary and accidental characteristics.’\(^{734}\) As was noted earlier, Barth asserts that ‘The question of good and evil is never answered by man’s pointing to the authoritative Word of God in terms of a set of rules. It is never discovered by man or imposed on the self and others in a code of good and evil actions, a sort of yardstick of what is good and evil.’\(^{735}\) When confronted by the Word of God, argues Barth, the individual is left alone; not with God, but with ‘his own conscience … the kairos or … his own judgement. … To offer ethical norms to man in this predicament is to hold out a stone instead of bread.’\(^{736}\)
I argue, therefore, that Barth’s mature social/political ethic is only properly understood when carefully considered in the light of his mature theological and ethical writings. Those writings identify the need for a responsible freedom before God, what John Webster describes as a life lived in ‘Correspondence’ to the divine life. I elaborate in describing it as a life that is lived in freedom determined by the Word of God (Christologically defined) through the enlightening activity of the Holy Spirit applied in the particular. When so interpreted, it presents a theologically responsible account of free, personal, political responsibility to be applied in the regnant post-Christendom social/political context.
CONCLUSION

When considered in relation to Barth’s later thought, there is a very real comparison that can be made between the last and the earliest political writings. However, that comparison ought not to be identified with the apparent defence of Socialism in each work. It is to be found, rather, in the particular way in which what Barth undertakes in the earlier work is comparable to that approach he argues for in the later work. The clear difference is that in the first he draws a critical correlation between Jesus and Socialism, leaving the impression it is necessary. Whereas in the latter, he is only illustrating the method of discernment he’s arguing for and, if attention is paid to the argument, it is clear that he intended that its method be applied in other ways, as Herberg’s criticism illustrates.

I have argued the development that explains this methodological difference is Barth’s desire to come to terms in a theologically responsible manner with the effects of the Modern Enlightenment and the freedoms realized in its wake. This better explains the development in his social/political thought than the Socialist influence of his Safenwil parish. I believe it more accurate to suggest that implicit in his social/political development was the search for a theologically responsible account of a responsible freedom, in light of the reigning modern anthropology and its social/political implications, the dissolution of Christendom in particular. The challenge was how to account for the freedom that had been wrought in Christ in a way that carried the responsibility to act that had been lacking in Luther and without the determinism that had occurred in the later Reformers.

A developmental perspective on the political writings:

It is already apparent in his earliest University days that Barth recognized both the political challenge Enlightenment freedoms raised, along with the need for a Moral-
theological solution to that challenge. While a student at Berne, Barth had already discredited the modern political solution to the problem of order amidst unsatisfied, often competing, freedoms provided by contemporary Social Democracy. This is not to say he didn’t support a Socialist polity, only that he recognized it couldn’t be achieved through the imposition of an alternative political program in reaction to the challenge. He truly appreciated, if only implicitly understood, the depth of the challenge such freedoms imposed.

His instruction under Herrmann and the neo-Kantians deepened his understanding of the epistemological challenge and the moral implications the Enlightenment paradigm posed to maintaining a public order, faith-based or otherwise. That he recognized these challenges is implicitly evident in his post-graduate reflections on Modern Theology, in which he argues the weakness of those committed to promoting the Kingdom of God lay in the perceived obligation to do so ‘clearly and positively with common human cultural awareness according to its scientific side.’ That is, with the perceived obligation that they were required to remove all doubt or speak with certainty.

That Barth continued to find satisfaction in the Biblical witness to the Kingdom is equally apparent in how he continued to draw upon it and allow it to speak with authority. This much is clearly evident in the 1911 essay comparing Jesus with Socialism in which, still borrowing in methodology from Herrmann, Barth granted the tradition authority. He critically applied its witness in the comparison he made between Jesus’ life and aims with those of the contemporary Religious Socialists he had begun to identify with.

While in the Safenwil pastorate, Barth became particularly conscious of the need to address the challenge that the Enlightenment and its emancipation posed. What became especially evident were the costs to be paid by ignoring the social/political consequences
implicit in the metaphysical challenge. The theological tradition was abused when his liberal mentors would lay claim to it while underwriting the Chancellor’s nationalist war effort. To the same end, ideals of justice were abused at the hands of the Religious Socialists. Both were the consequence of an overly optimistic anthropology. A realization that he may have started down a similar path in his early support of the Religious Socialist cause might help explain Barth’s sure and certain departure from his early liberalism. The irony is that he would choose to identify with the movement in hope that his criticisms of it might be received.

Barth’s Safenwil experience clearly encouraged the need of addressing the emancipated subject in a manner that eluded the social/political consequences, which were evident all around him. As John Webster observes, ‘what was jettisoned (and never recovered, not even in the ethics of reconciliation) were notions of moral subjectivity which lack deep roots in the freedom and transcendence of God.’ I believe that it has been shown that what was sought was a theologically responsible means with which to humble the emancipated subject without sacrificing it altogether.

That he sought to do so from within the particularity of the faith, but without its imposition upon the broader social order, is clearly evident at Tambach. He had just employed a process eschatology emphasizing that the advancement of social order was in the hands of God, but to be followed with a welcoming embrace. A more consistent eschatology emphasizing divine Transcendence and a needed existential transformation was next appropriated, supporting something of the critical realism Barth himself came to exemplify. Yet, both attempts would be found inadequate insofar as he subordinated theological claims to externally derived philosophical forms and, as a consequence, paid significantly in
theological content.

It was with his submission of form to substantive theological claims that Barth would find a way forward. That came about with his recovery of Reformed thought and the employment of an anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology with which he found a way – by re-appropriating election in an actualist fashion – to theologically ground human freedom in a manner that was not overly determinative. With the later identification of a pre-temporal covenant and election with the person and work of Jesus Christ, he not only rooted, but gave direction, for a definite freedom, the teleological orientation of the human creature. For in Christ, conceived in Chalcedonian fashion, both divine and human persons are represented, and so the true human orientation (responsible to God and for the other) is also revealed.

As a result, Barth found a means with which to embrace within humanity’s elected freedom the twin Commandments of loving God and neighbour, which he had put forward as the answer to the problem of order in the context of competing freedoms in his earliest essay at Berne. At the same time, in making it the teleological orientation of the creature, he accounted for the diversity of freedoms culturally represented in a way that was morally charged yet not overly determined. For Barth, it was the freedom to which they were called and neither imposed nor immediately embraced.

The creature was elected to share in fellowship with its divine master. For Barth, however, this meant a fellowship of ‘loving freedom.’ As a consequence, the creature needed to freely embrace its definite freedom. The way had been prepared pre-temporally. The challenge was in the needed humility to realize one’s true freedom in the limits that had been set to it. That required one to freely subordinate one’s will to that of service of the divine master, which Barth believed required the Spirit’s assistance and amounted to ‘the
granting of a very definite freedom.’ However, as Colin Gunton observes, ‘the pure waters of human freedom are muddied for Barth by the slavery that is the lot of those who would unaccountably (or, as he would say, ‘impossibly’) try to live outside the covenant.’

The personal covenant responsibility of the Christian before God was to manifest – or bear witness to, as Barth preferred to say – that covenant freedom in every aspect of life, including his or her social ethical and political decisions. Ecclesial responsibility in the promotion of political order was defined as that of witness to the Word of God (Christologically defined) in the whole of life, so that others, either ignorant of or choosing to ignore the divine claim on their lives, might be led into a covenant relationship with their Lord and along the path to realizing their true freedom. To impose anything more in normal circumstances would be irresponsible to the freedom they were called to make manifest. However, it has been shown that allowance was made for resistance to State authorities where political demands conflicted with the Christian’s personal responsibility before God.

I am proposing, therefore, that Barth’s mature social/political thought be interpreted as a re-conception of the social/political relations between the disparate communities that are individually not institutionally represented. Barth provides something of a moral ontology of said communities in which, in its social relations, the Christian community, in return for the civil community’s protection of the freedom to pursue its mission, provides in its life together witness to the civil community’s members of an alternative responsible freedom that has as its aim not another’s programme to be applied (as has been common in much of the Church), but a way of life to be embodied, along with a vehicle for its discovery and the provision of opportunities for its exercise.

This, rather than the imposition of a prescribed order (whether Socialism or any
other), ought to be seen as the political service Barth was arguing for of the Christian community in the civil community. What drove it, I contend, was the need to wrestle with the emancipation that came with the Enlightenment and not an ideological preference for Socialism *per se*, such as is the impression given by the secondary literature. I also propose that the suggested aesthetic character of his ethic is the explanation for the criticism that has been a question in Barth studies and his politics in particular, at least since his conversations with Bonhoeffer in 1931. That is, it explains the supposed ‘failure of Barth to explain how he could and did move from theological and ethical principles to concrete decisions.’

Politically, the results of this work do support the radical politics Marquardt and others have identified. However, I believe it has less to do with a Socialist bias and more to do with the fact that Barth was, to borrow from Timothy Gorringe, against – even Christian – hegemony. For Barth, any influence on or by the Christian community in the context of the broader polis was not to be through active imposition of a predetermined order. Rather, it was more nearly that of passive witness to the freedom given by the divine Master bodied forth in context, through active responsible engagement. In that regard, his later writings in particular were both profoundly theological and essentially moral.

**PROMISE, PROBLEM AND PROSPECTS:**

The promise in Barth’s mature thought lies, I believe, in how it supports a somewhat chastened view of Christian political activity, one in which the Church acknowledges the sovereignty of the image it seeks to represent, but at the same time recognizes its own limits and the limits of the medium within which it is called to seek to do so. That medium is the confused situation created by a humanity whose true freedom is found in Jesus Christ, but who in the case of the un-evangelized remains ignorant of it, with the atheist chooses not to
acknowledge it, or even in the case of the still un-redeemed Christian misrepresents it. For, by nature, that context makes it near impossible to preconceive of a set of principles to be applied in anticipation of all the challenges that might arise. That Barth understood this is evident, I believe, in how he describes the activity of ethical determination or better discernment.

As Hunsinger observes, this creates the problem in Barth’s social/political ethics for most of Barth’s interpreters. Their problem I argue is rooted in a desire for certainty and a controlled outcome and so to operate within a system that conforms more to that of a science. That desire is exacerbated by a perceived inadequacy in the individual’s ability to make decisions in accordance with the source of the freedom they’ve been given. I believe Barth sought to encourage the determination to take one’s direction from Christ with the intention of acting upon it, no doubt himself recognizing that one might do so in full confidence that forgiveness was available when errors in judgement were made.744

For Barth, I believe that, and not the irresponsible freedom of Lutheranism or the Pietism that stifled freedom, was the true liberation the Gospel provided. Barth knew that freedom was not the license to set one’s own course. However, I believe he correctly recognized it needed to include the measure of independence, or liberty, required to steer one’s own ship. Barth recognized as much in Jesus’ use of the call to ‘follow me’ in his making of disciples. Instruction was given by Jesus, but its application not harshly imposed, even upon those who answered the call. It is in this way that Barth considered Jesus to be, and was himself, more Socialist than the Socialists.

In light of the required freedom, one approach to ecclesiology that might prove more conducive to promoting the free responsibility Barth sought is that proposed by Phillip
Clayton in collaboration with Tripp Fuller in *Transforming Christian Theology: for Church and Society*, in which it is proposed Churches move towards a more facilitative and less oratorical approach to pulpit ministry. In a fashion much nearer to that of the ancient Eucharist, it is an approach by which, through reading of scripture and a word of instruction, the parishioner is given opportunity to discover how to conceive of his/her world theologically through the appropriation of the divine logic of Scripture. For the purposes of this work, I add that again, as in the ancient liturgy, they be encouraged to analogically apply the divine logic personally in the particulars of their everyday lives and not instructed in how specifically to do so, a skill that when exercised would serve them in the decisions of the everyday as well as the political. If applied, with respect for a measure of independence thereby allotted to the parishioner and those outside its walls, this approach would no doubt also begin to transform the perception of Churches in the wider polis. In so far as the perception that they were being instructed in precisely what to think or how specifically to apply it (its forms) in their daily lives and not decide for themselves, would no longer be as great.

When discussing the matter of “Political Decisions in the Unity of the Faith” Barth himself gave some indication as to what the aims of such facilitation would need to be, ‘if political decisions made in the unity of the faith are to be genuine and fruitful.’ With respect to their relations along the horizontal axis, he contends first:

They will demand from those who make them and commend them to others, an extreme degree of *political sobriety* and *theological insight*: sobriety in considering the material factors to be taken into account – and insight in judging them and viewing them as a whole; and also a *spiritual instinct* for the relative values of each side of the case, an acute sense of the sense or non-sense, the good or harm, … behind the different evaluations of the conflicting factors in the situation. The fact that its advocates might lack one or more of these qualities requires at the same time
‘an extreme degree of open-mindedness from their fellow Christians.’

With respect to their relations along the vertical axis, he argues their epistemological limitations and the theological realities that guide them in their judgements require ‘an extreme degree of courage and humility’ of all, even of those who wish to remain neutral. ‘As a testimony by Christians to Christians (and non-Christians!),’ Barth argues, ‘political decisions can speak an intelligible language only in so far as they make this dialectic clear.’

One place to begin in the facilitation of such theological formation would be to encourage the appropriation as one’s personal theological/moral assumption the general truth implicit in the reason given in Jesus’ call upon the Father that his crucifiers be forgiven – ‘For they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34 emphasis added), a generalization accounted for by the perfect tense of the verb εἰδ (oïðασιν, to know) employed. According to The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology that tense is used where knowledge already appropriated ‘may serve as a basis for further thought and action. [It] contains the implication of certainty based on experience.’ That is the epistemological place from which no one sets out, in particular with reference to matters theological or moral. And so in epistemological limitations, each one might be compared with Christ’s crucifiers. This emphasis is then to be complemented with an emphasis on the promise that the Son is the answer to his plea. Therefore, while the asserted epistemological deficit could be used to give listeners cause for humility in asserting themselves, the assured promise that the Son is the answer to his call might be used to provide impetus for the courage to act in faith where certainty is lacking.

With respect to the appropriation of the logic of Scripture in the making of one’s
judgements, Barth advocates a spiritual balance between ‘an extreme degree of New Testament joyfulness and Old Testament severity.’ They should exhibit joyfulness ‘radiating from within’ because their judgements ‘can be full of light … only if they are grounded in the gospel.’ However, this should be tempered with severity ‘toward themselves and others because such judgements are a practical confirmation of God’s Covenant with His people and flow from knowledge and practice of His commandment.’ Barth observes that to err on the side of severity or to lack joy is to fall victim to ideology. However, of the one who errs on the side of joy or lacks severity, he asks, from ‘whence can they derive the determination and constraining power with which, if a Yes or No are to be heard, Yes or No must be said?’

Politically, is it not just such a balance that enables the Church to think in terms of restorative rather than retributive justice or vengeance? In the past, direction was sought in the Old Testament law in matters moral and so, for example, the death penalty was required of the one who committed adultery (Lev. 20:10). When addressed by Christ, the practice is indeed discouraged, but the harsh penalty abandoned (Luke, 8:11). In this one example, is it not shown how Christ approves of limits while allowing for a measure of latitude that is often lacking in conservative post-Christendom social/political thought? The Church over time has applied similar logic in its adapting to new cultural contexts as, for example, in the move away from the ostracizing of the divorced. Similar analogical judgements can be applied even with regards to lessening the penalty applied for the taking of a life, with the hope that a life might be redeemed. What Barth clearly recognized is that so appropriated, Scripture’s direction in its entirety makes for a social engagement that is much more amenable to the conditions of the pluralist State that much of the Western World finds itself in.
Thus, Barth advocates for the nurturance of the qualities of sobriety, insight, open-mindedness, metaphysical humility, moral courage and balance. That is a high calling for the Churches indeed. Yet so exercised, Christian political involvement is more likely to exhibit more patience, be less antagonistic and less confrontational, though no less disciplined in its approach to the broader political community. This is something I believe would serve its intentions far more positively than is often the case with contemporary, particularly conservative, Christian approaches to the broader polis, which often fail to acknowledge the full implications of what cannot be denied biblically, namely that God chose to endow his creatures with a measure of freedom.\textsuperscript{755}

Barth improves upon past traditions in his emphasis on the fact that the line that separates the Church from its civil counterparts is a line that runs through the heart of each one. Thus with Tertullian, he could surely confess that the Church is ‘a corporation with a common knowledge of religion, a common rule of life, and an union of hope.’\textsuperscript{756} That its ‘citizenship … magistracies and the very name of its curia is the Church of Christ.’\textsuperscript{757} Yet, he would not be so fast to confess with Tertullian that ‘nothing is more alien to us than politics’ or that ‘nothing … is more foreign to us than the state.’\textsuperscript{758} In fact for Barth, the only thing that truly does distinguish the Christian from others in the broader polis is that which determines their orientation in it, which is a professed belief that one was ‘a citizen of the city of Jerusalem that is above.’\textsuperscript{759} He also recognized that while that orientation needs to be faithfully applied at all times, in the modern democracies it is not. At the other end of the spectrum, along with Eusebius, Barth could likely affirm that God appointed both the Roman Empire and Christian piety for the benefit of humanity. However, he would have seen it as anything but ‘a new and fresh era of existence’ that had ‘begun to appear’ when the two were
brought together under Constantine. For Barth, the new and fresh era had begun with Christendom’s dissolution in the Enlightenment.

What the Enlightenment had emancipated its followers from was blind deference to authority. Barth recognized that re-asserting traditional authorities was not the means with which to control the outcome, even if this was the direction political classes were moving. And, as the last century in theology had proven, neither was the way forward to risk abandoning those authorities through mis-alignment with the new controls of science. For Barth, the solution was to acknowledge the emancipated subject and responsibly re-conceive the tradition from within for a new, post-Christendom era which, in its growing social diversity, probably bears far more resemblance to the large urban centres at the birth of the Christian era than is acknowledged. In this way, Barth provides already what David S. Yeago, almost half a century later, asserted was necessary to meet the challenge of the ‘eclipse of the public character of the church which is the deepest root of the religious privatism and individualism of which devout moralists today so often complain.’ Religious privatism and individualism, he writes, ‘must be addressed by a renewal of critical ecclesiological teaching and practice, a renewed vision and an exemplary praxis of what it means to be the church.’

In conclusion, I contend that a more productive line of interpreting Barth’s social/political thought’s development is as a life-long search for a theologically and morally responsible means with which the Church might address the social problem modern freedoms posed to a well-ordered society. His mature thought is a theologically responsible, yet realistic, answer to the root of the ‘social question’ already identified in the essay delivered to the Zofingia student association at Berne in 1906. In which he argued the question of order –
in a context where ‘freedom’ was prevalent – was a moral not a political problem and what was needed was a moral response and not simply a political one.

The value in interpreting Barth’s thought in this way lies in the fact that it provides a means with which to unite the man’s social/political thought from its earliest through to its most mature form in a manner that explains the development that occurs. Moreover, it does not attribute the holding of ideological commitments like Socialism or Anarchism to Barth in a manner he expressly dis-avowed in his theology. All the while it allows for, even explains, those Socialist elements that appear.
Endnotes


2 Jehle, 23.

3 Jehle, 22.

4 Of particular note, observes Jehle, is the fact that Barth applies “the tradition of the Swiss Reformation [appealing] to Zwingli, Oecolampadius (the Basil reformer), and Calvin in his reflections on the matter.” Jehle, 24.

5 The works are: “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice”, “The Christian’s Place in Society” and “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”. The selection of texts has been decided on the following grounds: their relevance to the defined topic, the overall comprehensiveness of their treatment of the subject, and their relationship to the identified period of Barth’s theological development.

6 While Barth came to reject the view of freedom advocated in the post-Enlightenment era, I believe he also acknowledged the fact that one could not simply put the proverbial genie back in the bottle or ignore it.

7 J.W. Marquardt initiated the thesis that Barth’s theology was most influenced by the socialism of his early pastoral experience. I believe undue attention to his work has resulted in a misrepresentation of Barth’s social/political writings. (See the next chapter for more on this development.)


9 Jehle is the only one to have given similar attention to the political writings to date, but each in isolation from the rest and showing no continuity.

10 Used in this work religious or Christian socialism refers to those movements in early twentieth century Western Europe that attempted to provide religious sanction to the political socialism that was growing in influence.


12 By this I do not only mean the intellectual freedoms usually associated with the Enlightenment, but include the political freedoms won in the French Revolution and the religious freedoms won in the Reformation, each occurring in relative historical proximity to the Enlightenment.


15 What is not intended here is a particular order, as in socialism, but an order arrived at, in relative independence from the transcendent author of order itself, by a body that exists by divine appointment nonetheless.

16 In the work Barth illustrates the approach he is advocating and a socialist direction is present in the illustration, but it is intended as an illustration only and Barth states as much.

17 Jehle, 47. Among the “sensitive” members of the description Jehle includes the Confessing church, for whom Barth drafted the Barmen declaration, but who eventually “thought him too difficult and not diplomatic enough”, as well as those among his contemporaries in Switzerland and his own Swiss government, which placed a ban on his political speech in 1941. Jehle, 54 and 70.

18 Will Herberg, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*. (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), 13. Among other things it was the response of these early interpreters that Herberg believes “compelled [Barth] to propound views on society and the state that make him into one of the most influential social thinkers of our time.”


20 The explanation for such a conclusion is surely rooted in what John Webster describes as the assumption of many “that, in breaking with the kind of liberalism expressed in Troeltsch’s lack of interest in re-opening the bureau of eschatology, Barth abandoned any sense that the human subject is an ethical agent: turning from a tradition in which human moral action was the locus of the relation of God to humanity, he appeared to have lost the moral self altogether.” John Webster, “Life From the Third Dimension: Human Action in Barth’s Early Ethics” in *Barth’s Moral Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 11. More on the impact of this evaluation of Barth’s early ethics on his later works and a more nuanced reading of the same can be found in this work.

21 Joseph Bettis, “Political Theology and Social Ethics: The Socialist Humanism of Karl Barth” in *Scottish Journal of Theology* (vol. 27, 1974), 291. Bettis’ remarks are directed primarily at the poor reception Barth has received among Anglo-American readers.


9. This is the Marquardt thesis as defined by Hunsinger.


25 H. Martin Rumscheidt, *Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloquium of 1972*. (The Corporation for the Publication of Academic Studies in Religion in Canada, 1974), 90. This result led Helmut Gollwitzer to leave the faculty and move to the Frei Universitat, where the thesis was eventually accepted and Marquardt received appointment at professorial rank.

26 John Howard Yoder, “Review: Karl Barth and Radical Politics,” *Journal of Church and State* (Vol. 20, 1978), 339. Among other things Barth has been identified as a “critic of bourgeois culture,” a “proponent of democratic socialism,” and by John Howard Yoder as “a free churchman”.

27 George Hunsinger, *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, 10. Marcus Barth gives an account of the conference at which the identified divisions were clearly defined. See: “Current Discussion on the Political Character of Karl Barth’s Theology” in *Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloquium of 1972*, 90-92.


29 Most significantly, Barth was among the primary contributors to the Barmen declaration.


32 George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth and Radical Politics: Some Further Considerations” in *Studies in Religion* 7/2, (Spring 1978) 167. The present work aims to shed some light on just how Barth intended this question to be answered.

33 Hunsinger, “Some Further Considerations”, 174. This is the clearest identification of a lack in Barth’s political thought, particularly that of “The Christian Community and the Civil Community.”

34 David Clough, *Ethics in Crises: Interpreting Barth’s Ethics*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005). Clough argues that the dialectic that is present in the ethics of Barth’s second Romans commentary is also present in the ethical sections of his *Church Dogmatics* and that the ambiguity it elicits was intended.

35 Rober T. Osborn. “A ‘personalistic’ appraisal of Barth’s political ethics” in *Studies in Religion* (12/3 1983). However, Osborn’s emphasis is upon how Barth’s thought anticipates positions
derived from other, later sources; namely Michael Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge* and Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Moreover, the argument he provides for the emphasis upon ecclesial mediation in the political sphere may actually fall victim to the very political faults Barth identified as underlying the sinister politics that infected much of the twentieth century. Thus, it does little in showing how Barth’s social/political thought might be particularly insightful.


39 Busch, 217.


41 While the present work cannot enter into this debate to settle it, a brief account of its history is warranted. I take as my point of departure, because of its comprehensive treatment of the matter, Bruce McCormack’s, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1995).


43 Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 4. McCormack observes that Von Balthasar earlier defines “the periodization which emerges from the first model [as]: ‘dialectical theology’ (1918-31) and ‘analogue theology’ (1931 and following). On the second model, the periodization is a bit more nuanced: ‘dialectical theology’ (1918-1927), the ‘turn to analogy’ (1927-1931) and ‘analogy in its fully developed form’ (1938 and following).”


46 McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 6 citing Karl Barth. *Der Romerbrief*. 1922 (Zurich: TVZ, 1940), xiii. McCormack observes that when Barth uses Sache (thing; matter; case; question) he intends by it something objectively real, but not an empirical
object.

47 Jüngel, ‘Von Dialektik zur Analogie’, 143.

48 Karl Barth, ‘Kirche und Theologie’, in Die Theologie und die Kirche. (Munich; Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1928), 319. ET ‘Church and Theology’, in Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928. (London SCM Press, 1962), 299. With this being the substance of Barth’s reaction to Peterson’s work, one begins to wonder whether Jüngel’s earlier interpretation of the ‘inner dialectic of the Sache’ is not a mis-interpretation. It just might be that the Sache to which Barth refers is the meaning/idea communicated by the text and not the reality that stands behind it. On this matter see Barth’s hermeneutical reflections from this period on pages 96-97 below.

49 McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 7.


51 McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 8.

52 Ibid., 9.

53 Ibid. This was itself manifested in four phases: the break with liberalism being the first; the period 1920 - 1924 the second; that following 1924 to the Anselm book the third; and finally the Church Dogmatics.

54 Michael Beintker, Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1987).

55 However, McCormack identifies Beintker’s real contribution with ‘his searching analysis of the meaning of “dialectic” in Barth’s so-called “dialectical theology.”’ McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 10. The details of that analysis shall not be provided here.

56 Ibid, 11.

57 As a conceptual tool Barth’s concept of the analogia fidei is comparable to Catholic theology’s concept of the analogia entis, but was preferred because he believed it avoided the implications of a natural theology he believed was inherent in the latter.

58 McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 14.

59 Ibid., 19.

60 The particular merit in this work is the extent to which it examines and documents a general continuity in Barth’s theology following his early break with the liberalism of his youth, noting periodic revisions that are theologically determined.
McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Cristically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 129. This perspective, McCormack argues, is found nicely summarized in Barth’s formulaic expression of the period ‘World remains world, But God is God.’ Karl Barth ‘*Kriegszeit und Gottesreich*’, a lecture given in Basle, Switzerland, 15 Nov. 1915; cited by Anzinger as, “*Glaube und kommunikative Praxis*”, 120-2.


McCormack concludes: ‘To that extent, Barth’s brand of realism depended for its existence on the success of the critical element in idealism. Indeed, without idealism, it would have been unthinkable. The “real” for Barth was not the world known empirically. The truly “real” is the wholly otherness of the Self-revealing God in comparison with whom the empirical world is mere shadow and appearance. Moreover, there is no epistemological way which leads from the empirical world to its divine source. The metaphysical way taken by classical realism would remain for ever closed to Barth. To that extent, Barth’s brand of realism depended for its existence on the success of the critical element in idealism.’ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Cristically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 130.


Gunton, “Karl Barth and the Western Intellectual Tradition”, 291.

Ibid. (emphasis added).

How much Kierkegaard influenced Barth’s own thinking here is debated to this day. What is clear is that Barth believed him to be a stop that each theologian might want to make in their journey of development, but not remain.


Ibid., 298. Whether Anselm’s methodology provided Barth an altogether new start or simply with a justification for what he had been attempting already, Gunton’s argument provides a better explanation for the importance Barth attributes to the Anselm work than that which McCormack provides. McCormack’s explanation for the significance Barth ascribes to the Anselm work is tied up with his explanation for the revision of the *Christliche Dogmatik* as the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. McCormack attributes this revision to Barth’s desire to distance himself from the other dialectical theologians that he had come to be associated with. If Barth’s earlier work had dialectic in the title and clear dialectical intentions this might be defended, but it doesn’t.

John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
The use of the descriptor post-modern is not intended to define a philosophical attitude or school of thought, but purely in a temporal historical sense. That is, to describe the period in human history following the advent of Modernity.

Karl Barth. *Church and State*, 29.

John Webster. *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000) 152, citing Karl Barth *Church and State*, 29f and 38. Webster continues: ‘Indeed the Christian may resist existing political arrangements, provided such resistance is not anarchic, but an affirmation of the true order established by the Word of God.’ (Ibid.) This is a point which will be made clear below.

Busch, 292. The remark was made by Barth to students in Leiden, 27th February 1939.

Ibid., 2.

Ibid., 13-14. The order of the earlier remark has been changed for clarity. *Die Hilfe* (help) was a newspaper published by the Christian Socialist Friedrich Naumann.

Ibid., 27.

Ibid.

The description Busch gives of the man’s legacy might just as easily be used to describe Karl Barth: ‘he argued resolutely that the scholarly task of theology should be taken seriously, sometimes scandalizing the group with his views. … he sought to act as a mediator between supporters and critics of tradition. … Thus he manifestly sought some kind of middle way which went beyond the confrontation of “conservative” and “liberal.”’ Busch, 10.

Shelly Baranowski, “The Primacy of Theology: Karl Barth and Socialism” in *Studies in Religion* 10/4 (1981), 456. However, it must be admitted that initially Barth would be less conscious of the implications of such norms as they were appropriated and articulated by himself.


The compromise concerned the nature of the school in which the studies were to be pursued. His father had wished for a more conservative context at Tubingen, whereas Karl wanted to go on to further study at Marburg

Busch, 40.

Ibid., emphasis added.

86 Ibid., 24f

87 Ibid., 25.

88 Ibid.

89 Barth would remain close to Schleiermacher for the rest of his days, as is evident in his continued reference to God’s action in the particular. Arguably what would change would be his agreement with him at precisely this point.

90 Schleiermacher, 26.

91 Busch, 41.

92 On these matters see Busch, 41. It was during this term at Berne that he would present the previously cited essay to the Zofingia no doubt drawing upon his study of Christianity and the Social Question under Walter Simons at Berlin.

93 Jehle, p. 20. For more on the movement and its history see Jehle, 18-20.


96 The stated purpose of the union is cited later in the work as: ‘The Zofinger union exists for the purpose of developing in its membership a truthful patriotic cast of mind founded on the idea of a Swiss folklore. Free and independent from every political party position it seeks to train its members to heartily advance on all areas of the political and social life, to aspire to citizen on the basis of the democratic principles.’ Karl Barth, “Zofingia und Sociale Frage, 1906”, 77 note.

97 Ibid., 72.

98 Ibid., emphasis added.

99 Ibid., 72-73.

100 Ibid., 74.
Ibid., emphasis added.

Barth, Karl: “Zofingia und Sociale Frage, 1906”, 73.

Ibid., 74. The error in most references to this work, McCormack’s among them, is to jump to Barth’s prescribed action on the part of the union’s members as illustrative of what was his primary concern.

Ibid., 75.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. Citing Matt. 9:16f. and parallels.


Ibid., 76.

Ibid.


McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 83.

In this way the impetus behind Barth’s entire theological career is implicitly present from its very beginning.

It seems clear that he recognized the social significance of the emancipation from authoritative structures. However, he did not realize, at first, how profoundly one’s judgement might be affected by the discovery of this freedom.

Busch, 43.

Busch, 44.

McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 50, 51.

This resolution of the problem had distanced Herrmann from Ritschl.

It should be noted that it was the younger Schleiermacher that exerted the greatest influence
McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 54. McCormack’s remarks fail to take note of the fact that Herrmann had already had a significant influence upon Ritschl’s own thought by this time. So the question becomes “what is he defining as ‘Ritschlian’”?

Karl Barth. “The principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Herrmann”, in *Theology and Church*, 267-268 (emphasis added). These reflections were shared at the Minister’s Study Group in Hanover at the Conference of Free Protestantism for Anhalt, Baunschweig, and the Province of Saxony at Halberstadt, 13th and 17th May 1925. Therefore, they follow Barth’s departure from much of the theology of his youth.

Karl Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925*, Trans. James D. Smart (London: The Epworth Press, 1964) 36, emphasis added. Eduard Thurneysen and Barth had known one another from their university days, becoming very close pastoral colleagues during Barth’s Safenwil pastorate, and remained friends for life.


Ibid., 57.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid., 36

Ibid., 37. In light of what was shown in Barth’s Zofingia essay, this ethically determined response is another aspect of Herrmann’s thought that is likely to have significant appeal for Barth.

McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 58. It is here that McCormack identifies the most significant fault in Herrmann’s thought. For, “at the crucial point in his debate with Hermann Cohen, [Herrmann] reverted to an idealistic attempt to justify belief in God. He posited God as the answer to the existential and ethical problem of how one can be truthful while believing in the existence of one’s self.” McCormack, 66.

“The principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Herrmann”, 245.

This was a move that would clearly have an impact on Barth’s own development.

Herrmann, 18.
Ibid., 19.

Hermann, 19.

Karl Barth. “Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit”, Gesamtausgabe/Karl Barth 3 Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1905-1909, Digital Karl Barth Library edition (All references to this work are from this edition and the translation throughout are my own). The theological significance of Barth’s early framework has been accurately defined in contrast to that which came later as “a theological framework which gave priority to the role and response of man to God, rather than to the action of God towards man, and which also assumed a given relationality between the human and the divine.” Robert E. Willis The Ethics of Karl Barth. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 7.

Karl Barth “Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit”, 317.

Ibid.

Ibid., 321.

Ibid., (emphasis added).

Willis, Robert E. The Ethics of Karl Barth, 9.


Jüngel has argued convincingly, from an unpublished lecture of Barth’s, “Religion and Socialism”, given in Baden on Dec. 7 1915, that this involvement was rooted in Barth’s joy at being a pastor. Jüngel writes, ‘… he became a socialist and a Social Democrat precisely because he is glad to be a pastor, not because he is more or less bored with his calling. The “great cause” for which he lives, and for which he works as a pastor is also that which allowed him to become a socialist.’ Jüngel, Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy, 89f.

This may have been exacerbated by the death of his father in 1912 from whom among the last words to be spoken were: ‘The main thing is not scholarship, nor learning, nor criticism, but to love the Lord Jesus. We need a living relationship with God, and we must ask the Lord for that.’ (Busch, 68) That Barth had been deeply moved by his father’s passing is apparent in a sermon delivered the week after. It was soon afterward that his appreciation for his father’s views, about which Barth had reservations as a student, becomes evident.

147 Busch, 69.

148 Ibid.


150 Ibid., 20.

151 Ibid., 21.

152 Ibid., 21, 22.

153 Ibid., 23. The best way to characterize that bridge is as a shared commitment to social justice.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid., 24.

157 He makes specific reference to a number of passages in Matthew’s Gospel in which Jesus discourages anxiety over and scorns an overemphasis upon material things. (Matt: 4:4; 6:31-33; 16:26).

158 “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice”, 26, 27.

159 Ibid., 27.

160 Ibid., emphasis in original.

161 Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 57. Webster is citing Church Dogmatics II/2, 641.

162 Karl Barth, “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice”, 27, 28 (emphasis in original).

163 Ibid., 26.

164 Ibid., 28-29.

165 Ibid., 30.

166 Ibid., 29.

167 Ibid., 30.
168 Ibid., 31

169 Ibid., 31f.

170 Ibid., 32.


172 Ibid., 33 emphasis added.

173 Ibid., 34. Here Barth clearly attacks that individualist view of religion, which is fundamentally basic to the theology of his German teachers and early evidence is given of a marked divergence from their views. In particular Harnack, observes McCormack, whose ‘conception of the gospel of the kingdom of God allowed for no externalization, other than individual works of charity.’ McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 90.

174 Karl Barth, “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice”, 34.

175 Ibid., 36.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

178 Ibid., 28 (emphasis added).

179 Ibid., 36-37 (emphasis in original).

180 Ibid., 37 (emphasis added).

181 Ibid., (emphasis added). Notably the acknowledged necessity of this dialectic of humility and courage will reappear in Barth’s later work “Political Decisions in the Unity of Faith”, to which I will return in the conclusion of this work.

182 Baranowski, 456.

183 Busch, 70.

184 Jüngel, Barth a Theological Legacy, 90.

185 In this sense Barth might be considered amenable to Marx’ emphasis on the social, but I do believe he came to this conviction independently, as has already been supported in the description of the context of his upbringing, and not through appropriation of his ideas as Marquardt suggested.

186 This observation follows that of Simon Fisher who suggests that the Barth of the Marburg era
is perhaps best associated theologically with that of the young Tillich. *Revelatory Positivism?: Barth’s earliest theology and the Marburg school.*

187 By Contemporary Socialism is intended the burgeoning political movements among Western European nations that sought unified humanitarian ends, through the application of state controlled political means and for which support, in the Church, was divided. That division becomes clearest in the split amongst the Churches in the 1930’s debates concerning support for the German SPD. I shall return to this debate, and the significant part in it Barth plays with the composition of the *Barmen Declaration,* later.

188 What informed Barth was his reading, as has been noted by Marquardt and McCormack, of a work of Sombart which is unclearly identified in a later essay on the Gospel and Socialism. At the same time McCormack is right in maintaining that Marquardt is probably mistaken in suggesting that Barth had been familiar with the work prior to his arrival in Safenwil. Although he had purchased the book while in Marburg in 1908 he would later recall turning to it only after coming to Safenwil. Cf. Barth, ‘Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher’ in *The Theology of Schleiermacher,* 263.

189 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1,* eds. G.W. Bomiley and T.F. Torrance, (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1958), 74.

190 Karl Barth. “Predigten, 25 January 1914” *Gesamtausgabe 1/5,* (All references to this material are of my own translation).

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.

194 Ibid.

195 Ibid.

196 Ibid.

197 A reference to the earlier confession ‘We did will these thoughts, we will socialism’ of the previous citation.

198 Karl Barth, “Predigten 25 January 1914” *Gesamtausgabe 1/5.*

199 At this point in his development he still understands revelation occurring immediately through the conscience.


Ibid, 730.

Ibid.

Karl Barth, “Evangelium und Sozialismus” in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909-1914* Gesamtausgabe III.22 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich 1993) 729. The translation of this work throughout is my own, the emphasis here is added. Literally, it reads: ‘… must have pleasure in Socialism ….’

Ibid, 729. Literally, it reads ‘… must have pleasure in the Gospel, there must be found guidelines and sought strength.’

Karl Barth, “Evangelium und Sozialismus”, 730f.

The work identifies it as such by completing the S, as ‘S[afenwil]’.

Karl Barth, “Evangelium und Sozialismus”, 732.

Ibid.

Ibid., 731.

Sermon on Matthew 4:18-20 in Predigten 1913, Gesamtausgabe 1.8 (Translation own).

Gorringe, *Against Hegemony*, 10.

Jüngel, *Karl Barth, a Theological Legacy*, 88.

Busch, 81.


Ibid.

Busch, 82. Citing the autobiographical text ‘Ruckblick’, in *Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn, Festschrift für Albert Schadelin*. 1950, 1ff.


Ibid.
220 Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 11.


223 Ibid. That Barth believed himself in a better position to do so at this time is also reflected in his continuation of these remarks to Thurneysen: ‘And I myself hope now to avoid becoming unfaithful to our “essential” orientation as might very well have happened to me had I taken this step two years ago ….’ Although it is not explicitly identified here, it will become clear that that “essential orientation” is that of Jesus and the Gospel.

224 This work, along with another unpublished lecture on “Religion and Socialism,” are cited by Eberhard Jüngel as among the archived material of Barth, but could not be located among the published works of Barth in German or English available to me, including the whole of Gesamt Ausgabe as available through the Digital Karl Barth Library. Therefore, for what follows on these works I am entirely beholden to Jüngel’s *Karl Barth: a Theological Legacy*.


226 Jüngel, 89.

227 Ibid.

228 Ibid., (emphasis added).


230 Karl Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 30-31. Barth’s overview of the assessment and his response are found in a letter to Thurneysen. The overview of Baden’s assessment is the material from which the following comparison is made.

231 Ibid. 31.

232 Ibid.

233 Ibid.


235 Cited in Busch, 84.
As cited in McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 124. In contrast to Ragaz, who, insisting upon immediate action, was something of a social activist, Kutter adopted a wait-and-see attitude with respect to social revolution.


Ibid, 133 n. 78.

Karl Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 37f.

What is intended here is that, for Barth, the critique of pure reason was not independent of, but completed in the second critique of practical reason such that what was truly known manifested itself in action and thereby faith and praxis were intimately related. That and why he was so profoundly appreciative of Kant is later made known in his essay on Kant in *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19 Jahrhundert. Ihre Geschichte und Vorgeschichte* (Evangelischer Verlag 1947). E.T. Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century, (SCM Press and Judson Press, Valley Forge 1972). Portions of this work are also published in *From Rousseau to Ritschl: being the translation of eleven chapters of Die Protestantische theologie IM19. Jahrhundert*. (London: SCM Press, 1959).

Markus Barth, “Current Discussion on the Political Character of Karl Barth’s Theology”, 84, 85.

Willis, Robert E. *The Ethics of Karl Barth*, 7f.


Willis, 12.


Busch, 96f citing Karl Barth, *Auto Biographical Texts I*.

Marquardt, *Theologie und Socialismus*, 111.

Torrence, p. 6

Ibid.


“The Christian’s Place in Society” is commonly known as the Tambach lecture because it was conceived for the conference held in Tambach, September 1919.
252 Torrence, 6.


254 Gorringe, 37.


256 *Romerbrief*, 225.

257 Gorringe, 39.

258 Gorringe, 40. Among the concerns Barth was addressing in this way was that of the constructivist epistemology that ruled historical study at the time. See: McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* 147.

259 Gorringe, 39 citing *Romerbrief* 161, 313.

260 *Romerbrief*, 462.

261 Ibid., 500.

262 Ibid., 501.

263 Ibid.

264 Ibid.

265 Ibid., 502.

266 Ibid.

267 Ibid., 503.

268 Ibid.

269 Ibid.

270 Ibid., 503-504.

271 Ibid., 504.
The eschatological dimension also underlies the Tambach lecture. See below.

Hunsinger, “Toward a Radical Barth” in Karl Barth and Radical Politics. 207, citing Der Romerbrief, 328.

John Webster, “Life From the Third dimension”, 19.

I believe Barth’s use of the phrase ‘im verborgen der menschen’ (in the hiddenness of man) may reveal his intentions when speaking of heavenly or eschatological realities breaking into the present. Such events/actions are the presence/realization of an alternate dimension, already (ontologically) real yet hidden within the present reality. This hiddenness might be likened to what, in his later ethics, he will refer to as three dimensions of moral reality, what are the created, reconciled and redeemed dimensions. (It is believed a similar idea is already at work here, although it has not been fully worked out as of yet.) They do not represent three subsequent realities, but the one reality in its three forms. Where the different forms are actualized their presence is made known; unveiled. Thus, of the un-reconciled sinner the created dimension is all that is known and all that is rightly to be expected of them. For the enlightened/reconciled individual much more is expected and should be made known/attested to in the life lived here and now. However, that life is still simul justus et peccator (at once sinful and justified), an un-redeemed work in process of sanctification and will yet fail in its obedience, so the actualism in Barth’s work. Where a moral transformation has taken place, through the Spirit’s presence, and action taken accordingly, an alternate dimension to the present reality may be revealed, but not necessarily recognized for what it is. What Barth is moving away from, in the way he has dealt with the matter, is the coming into being of another reality, in a manner that pays no respect to human freedom. This is but to expand upon what Webster has already suggested above. Where this might raise concern for some is in the implication that the realization of a divine reality is subject to human action. This is a question I believe can be
addressed from within the context of Barth’s later theology.


286 Ibid.


289 Ibid., 508.

290 Busch, p. 100 n185 the citation is Busch’s from the Romerbrief.

291 Karl Barth, Romerbrief, 508 emphasis added.

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid.


295 Karl Barth, *Romerbrief*, 508, 509.

296 Ibid., 509 (Translation own).

297 Ibid.

298 Ibid., emphasis added.

299 Ibid.

300 Ibid., 510-511 (Translation own).


302 Webster, “Life From the Third dimension”, 20.

303 Ibid. This description is a reworking of that which Webster identifies as occurring in the work.

304 Ibid. Such mis-interpretation is what elicited the early interpretation of Barth’s theology as politically irrelevant and became commonplace. This is particularly true as it became customary to read the work in the light of Barth’s second commentary on Romans in which he somewhat overreacts to criticisms of the earlier work.
Ibid., 20-21.

306 McCormack, Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 201.


308 Ibid., 273.

309 Ibid.

310 Willis, 15.


312 Ibid.


314 The use of post-modern is again intended as a purely historical designation only.


316 Ibid., 276.

317 Ibid., 277.

318 Ibid., 278.

319 Ibid., 280.

320 Ibid., 280-281.

321 Ibid., 281.

322 Ibid., 281-282.

323 Ibid., 282.

324 Ibid., 282-283. In lieu of what follows, I suggest that Barth’s intentions might be understood in terms of Narrative. The “instant,” in this case is that of a particular scene in a grand drama - “the movement.”

325 Ibid., 283.

326 Ibid., 284, 285.
Ibid., 286.

Ibid., 286-287.

Ibid., 287.

Ibid., 288.

Ibid.

Ibid., 289-290.

Ibid., 290.

Ibid., 291.


Ibid., 293 (emphasis original).

Ibid., 293, 294. There is something of a parallel here with how Duncan B. Forrester describes the hermeneutics of suspicion operative in Liberation Theology. He writes: ‘We are forced to pose new questions, or old questions in a different way, by our experience of commitment in the world. We question ourselves, our behaviour, the way we understand and affect our world and the people around us, and the way we construe the tradition. And we ask a new type of question about social forces and social conflicts, enquiring about the social balance of power and who benefits and who loses, and what can be done to change things. The role of ideology also has to be examined to see how far it is used as a cloak to disguise what is really happening, how far it is an instrument of social control, helping to keep people “in their place” and content with oppressive conditions, and how far it illuminates reality and shows us what is going on.’ Theology and Politics (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) p 81f.


Ibid., 296-297.

Ibid., 297.

Ibid., 299. Here, in something of a reversal of Hegel’s philosophy of history, the Kingdom of God is defined not as the summit of human achievement, but as the telos of all God’s activity in history, the synthesis referring to its divine origin, the thesis the created order or society and the antithesis, reconciliation, returning it to its origin in God or synthesis (redemption).

Ibid., 300. As John Webster and others have noted, such language concerning orders of creation would one day make Barth “blanch”, but he will not abandon completely the notion of
the analogical potential of the natural world, which he develops in what follows. Webster, “‘Life From the Third dimension’”, 26.

343 Ibid., 300.

344 Ibid., 302, 303.

345 Ibid., 305.

346 Ibid., 306.

347 Much has been made of this use of the analogical potential, but it should not be interpreted out of the context of Barth’s larger theological perspective. The regnum naturae is still very much subject to the fall and thus its analogical potential is just as much a limiting quality. Moreover the actualism of the Römerbrief is still very much at work at this stage of Barth’s development.


349 Ibid., 308 emphasis original.

350 Ibid., 309.

351 Ibid., 310.

352 Ibid., 310-311.

353 Ibid., 311.

354 Ibid.

355 Ibid., 312.

356 Ibid.

357 Ibid., 313.

358 Ibid.

359 Ibid., 314.

360 Ibid., 316-317 emphasis added.

361 Ibid., 317.

362 Ibid.
Barth himself suggests this artistic metaphor in the following: ‘The Sovereignty which Alcibiades admires in Socrates in the Symposium arises from the very dualism of the Socratic perception of life; it arises from the critical power accompanying the idea – and the strength of Michelangelo, Bach, Schiller, and others like them is obviously traceable to the same source. This the Athenian blueblood did not see. But we should see it and not lose touch with facts.’ The Word of God and the Word of Man, 312-313.

Given that the Christian is immersed in the medium, a comparison with the dramatic arts is perhaps most applicable.


Ibid., 321. It’s at this point that those who, like Richard Niebuhr, wish to interpret Barth as arguing for a transformational politics are proven mistaken. No matter how promising the analogical potential of the regnum naturae may appear in Barth, it is still only analogical.

Ibid., 321-322.

Ibid., 322.

Ibid., 323.

Ibid., 323-324.

Ibid., 324.

Ibid., 325.

Ibid., 325-326.

Ibid., 327.

Even Religion has come under criticism at this point in his career, clearly setting him in opposition to his earlier theological mentors.

Hunsinger, “Toward a Radical Barth”, 211.

Ibid., 208.
It is in how Barth attempted to address that concern in his second Romans commentary, particularly the account of revelation given there, that accounted for the “almost catastrophic opposition of God and the world, God and humanity, God and the Church” for which he later criticized it. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 44.

Gorringe, 40.

John Howard Yoder, “Karl Barth Post-Christendom Theologian” unpublished (1995). I don’t mean to suggest that Barth ever held such a view, only that the approach taken in the initial Romans commentary would challenge those who resisted change on such grounds.

Karl Barth, *Römerbrief*, 90.

Ibid., 21.

Clough, 3.

This is not necessarily a development in the man’s thought, but might simply reflect the distinctly political character of the work itself.

Gorringe, 51. There is certain continuity here with the Barth of *The Christian Life* that came some 40 years later. Time and space does not permit a full analysis, but I cite two passages that should illustrate that claim. In the Christian life the coming of the Kingdom of God is not a one-time affair, but a repeated event in history. In God’s coming Barth writes: ‘He does not come to reveal and impart to them this or that morality. He does not come with a purpose whose execution depends, if not totally, then at least partially on the action, or at any rate the cooperation of Christians. He comes in the deed in which he acts and deals on and for and with them as their Lord and King, in which he acts directly as such and proves himself to be such. In coming he illumines, establishes, asserts, and protects his questioned, obscured, and threatened right to man and therefore man’s own right, his right to life, which is negated apart from God’s own right as Lord and King. …. He comes and sets aside not only unrighteousness but also the lordship of the lordless powers, scattering them to the winds like the mists of the hypostatized fictions that they are, restoring to man the freedom over his abilities of which they had robbed him, reinstituting him as the lord of the earth which he may and should be as the servant of God.’ (*The Christian life*, 236-7)

Busch, 111, citing Mattmüller *Ragaz II*.

Busch observes that Barth was ‘faced once more with the wisdom of Plato’ and credits his brother with showing him ‘the possibility of a new understanding of Kant in the light of Plato’.
Busch, 116.


396 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 9.

397 Ibid., 8 (emphasis added).

398 Ibid. A useful hermeneutical comparison might possibly be made here between what Barth argues of a transcendent meaning to be found through engagement with the text, and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s description of the words on the page as but a “ladder” to their meaning.


400 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 45.

401 Bultmann believed Barth’s view could be likened to those of Schleiermacher (to whom Barth’s opposition was growing), Otto and Troeltsch, but how Bultmann described Barth led him to question ‘whether they really had the same views.’ Busch, 136. If there is something of a comparison with Schleiermacher to be made, where Barth differs is that while Schleiermacher describes faith as something of an innate sense of dependence upon God, for Barth, it is not innate, but a willed acceptance of life’s contingency born in crisis.

402 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 208.

403 Ibid., 209.

404 Ibid.

405 Ibid.

406 Ibid., 210.

407 Ibid., 213.

408 Ibid., 425.

409 Evident in these remarks is the problem fleshed out more fully in his essay “The problem of ethics Today,” the later Munster Ethics and the ethical material of the *Church Dogmatics* II/2.

410 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 425.

411 Ibid., 426.
412 Ibid., 438.

413 Clough, 8.

414 Ibid. citing Romans II, 12. (English translation).

415 Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 475.

416 Ibid., 479.

417 Ibid., 480.

418 Ibid., 481 emphasis added.

419 Ibid.

420 Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 481.

421 Ibid., 519 (emphasis added).

422 Clough, 14. With reference to John Webster, “‘Life from the third dimension’: Human Action in Barth’s Early Ethics.”

423 Webster, “‘Life from the third dimension’: Human Action in Barth’s Early Ethics.”, 27.

424 It is Barth who identifies this as the concern raised by Ragaz. Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, (USA: C.C. Deans, 1960), 45.

425 Webster, “‘Life from the third dimension’: Human Action in Barth’s Early Ethics.”, 27-8.

426 Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, 42. As David Clough notes even ‘the ethics of Romans II is dialectical, not in a Hegelian sense where thesis and antithesis lead inevitably to synthesis, but where thesis and antithesis remain in unresolved mutual tension. The brokenness of the relationship between God and humankind and our predicament resulting from it can only be expressed in the brokenness of the language of dialectical theology.’ Clough, Ethics in Crisis, 14-15.

427 The Epistle to the Romans, 422.

428 Busch, p. 129. Barth’s exegetical development never included a wholehearted rejection of historical research, only its demotion to that of service to the more significant task of theological interpretation. Where historical, critical work could help in providing clarification of nomenclature, the history of the times under consideration, etc. its results were certainly appreciated and open to consultation, albeit not uncritically.
This effort helps explain what McCormack has identified as the critical realism that pervaded Barth at this time. For at the same time he was becoming more ‘theologically realist’ in that his ‘work gave evidence of a “turn to theological objectivism,”’ he was also becoming more classically Kantian in the true sense and thus more critical epistemologically and ethically. Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology, 130.

It is the belief of this writer that the religiously charged political environment throughout much of the Western world is but a later realization of the same forces due to the dissolution of Christendom; a cultural hangover being played out only a century later. These might also come into play once again in what Philip Jenkins identifies as the “next crusade” of the century ahead. CF The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity. (New York: Oxford UP, 2002) chap. 8.

Busch, 128.

Busch, 129.


Ibid., 31.

Ibid., 44.

Ibid., 66.

Ibid.

Ibid., 66f.

Ibid., 49.

Ibid., 67.

Ibid. Barth highlights this second development and completion of the reformation as the main theme of his lectures; ‘quiet, but yet explicit’.

Ibid., 77.

Ibid., 79. (I’ve reversed the order, the emphasis is original). When it comes right down to it, by means of strict comparison of the lives of the men themselves, Barth concludes, of Calvin, ‘even as a minister of the divine Word he never hesitated to act personally as a statesman.’ 86. However, he identifies that there exists in Luther ‘a broad gap between the parsonage and the
council chamber’ and thus he is found wanting. This is not intended as a reproach of Luther. Rather, writes Barth, ‘I am simply saying that when Luther had to make the step from faith to ethics concretely and not just theoretically he hesitated, whereas in the mind of Calvin, no matter what we think of it, faith and ethics were in practice coincident.’ 87.

445 Ibid., 81f.


447 Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion* vol. 1, Hannelotte Reifeen ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley trans. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1991). That the influence of dialectic pervades throughout the development of Barth’s thought has been argued by McCormack and is central to the thesis of David Clough’s work. While there is worth in continuing to debate the matter, I believe it fair to conclude that Barth does maintain a certain dialectical approach in his method, even if motivated by no other reason than his profound recognition that the object under investigation was a transcendental being, even when represented in human form and our ability to grasp that nature is limited by our location in space and time.


449 Ibid., 327.

450 Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 144.

451 Ibid., 91.

452 Colin Gunton, “Barth, the Trinity and Human Freedom” in *Theology Today* vol. 43 no.3, 1986, 317. The Cappadocian fathers distinguished the members of the trinity as one does a particular from the universal. In their defence against the charge of tri-theism emphasis was placed on the unity of the three persons in the act of revelation. It ‘originated in the father proceeds through the Son, and is completed in the Spirit.’ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 336. Thus, Jesus might be perceived as God in revelation yet revelation “complete” not identified with Jesus. Therein lay the transcendence implicitly hidden within Jesus’ humanity.
To offer a full accounting of how Barth was influenced by Reformed theology is certainly a worthy task. However, it would require a full investigation of the *Church Dogmatics* and more. Thus it exceeds the confines of the present work and will not be attempted here. Rather, I shall restrict myself to a brief exposition of those elements that clearly have a bearing upon his solution to the question identified.

The question remains as to how Barth intends to maintain the independence of the creature, very much presupposed in his account of the Reprobate and implicitly here, while arguing for the activity of the Holy Spirit as essential to an acknowledgement of one’s elect status. The clearest I have been able to conceive of a work that involves both persons in the act, without attributing a special action to the human individual is that of the removal of epistemological blinders by the Holy Spirit that permits the human individual to then recognize what they were blind to and act accordingly. In *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 § 66 Barth will once again treat the first work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit as the removal of that which inhibits...
one’s answer to the call to discipleship or conversion.

471 Ibid., 472.

472 Ibid.

473 Ibid., 473 emphasis added.


475 Karl Barth, *Ethics*, Dietrich Braun ed. Geoffrey Bromiley Trans. (New York: Seabury Press, 1981). A great deal more might be derived from this work. I only offer these few remarks as indication of the impact of what has been offered above on its composition.

476 Ibid., 54. This correlation of ethics with the theological elements of the Christian narrative will remain with Barth throughout the conception of his dogmatics.

477 Karl Barth, *Ethics*, 34.

478 Ibid., 49.

479 Ibid., 50.

480 Ibid., 55.

481 Ibid., 133.

482 Ibid., 57.

483 Ibid., 351.

484 Ibid., 513 emphasis in original.

485 Ibid., 520. The summary is in fact four pages in length. I have only condensed here what is expressed more elaborately, to support the claim I’m making.


487 Markus Barth, “Current Discussion on the Political Character of Karl Barth’s Theology”, 79 emphasis added.

488 References to this work are from James Y. Holloway ed., *Barth Barmen and the Confessing Church Today: Katallagete*. (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 5.
Of the former position, it is my belief that all such an approach tends to do is eventually incapacitate the laity, such that they refuse to act, unless otherwise directed by the leadership. It is concerning the latter position, I believe, that the differences between the positions of Barth and Bonhoeffer came to light, when they met in 1931.

Karl Barth, *The knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the teaching of the Reformation, recalling the Scottish Confession of 1560; the Gifford lectures delivered in the university of Aberdeen in 1937 and 1938*. (Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), 143,144. This work is often overlooked in discussions of Barth’s politics. Yet as Busch rightly observes: ‘Here Barth spoke not only of the ‘church service’ but of the ‘political service of Christians’, because Jesus Christ is also the Lord of the world’ (280). In fact, there is much here that is later more fully stated in his most mature works “Church and State” and “The Christian Community and the Civil Community.”

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 102 and 114. Barth conceives of election in the context of a Triune existence in relationship with creation. ‘In the beginning before time and space as we know them, before creation, before there was any reality distinct from God which could be
the object of the love of God or the setting for His acts of freedom, God anticipated and
determined within Himself (in the power of His love and freedom, of His knowing and willing)
that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the
fact that in His Son He would be gracious towards man, uniting Himself with him. In the
beginning it was the choice of the Father Himself to establish this covenant with man by giving
up His Son for him, that He Himself might become man in the fulfilment of His grace. In the
beginning it was the choice of the Son to be obedient to grace, and therefore to offer up Himself
and to become man in order that this covenant might be made a reality. In the beginning it was
the resolve of the Holy Spirit that the unity of God, of Father and Son should not be disturbed or
rent by this covenant with man, but that it should be made the more glorious, the deity of God,
the divinity of His love and freedom, being confirmed and demonstrated by this offering of the
Father and this self-offering of the Son. This choice was in the beginning. As the subject and
object of this choice, Jesus Christ was at the beginning. He was not at the beginning of God, for
God has indeed no beginning. But he was at the beginning of all things, at the beginning of
God’s dealings with the reality which is distinct from himself. He was the election of God’s
grace as directed towards man. He was the election of God’s covenant with man.’ Karl Barth.
Church Dogmatics II/2, 101-102. In Church Dogmatics IV/1 Barth elaborates on the possibility
of a kenosis and wishes to speak of the humanity of the Word as a possibility attributable to his
divinity, prior to its actuality. ‘It was not to Him an inalienable necessity to exist only in that
form of God, only to be God, and therefore only to be different from the creature, from man, as
the reality which is distinct from God, only to be the eternal Word and not flesh. He was not
committed to any such only. In addition to His form in the likeness of God He could also – and
this involves at once a making poor, a humiliation, a condescension, and to that extent a kenosis
-- take the form of a servant.’ (180)

Thus, McCormack observes that Barth moves beyond the reformed notion that ‘the
Logos appeared in the eternal plan of God as incarnandus only insofar as he was the object of
election’ or subsequent to a prior decision of God. This leads him to conclude that ‘If now Barth
wishes to speak of Jesus Christ (and not an abstractly conceived Logos asarkos) as the Subject of
election, he must deny to the Logos a mode or state of being above and prior to the decision to be
incarnate in time.’ “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s gracious election in Karl Barth’s
theological ontology” in The Cambridge Companion To Karl Barth, ed. John Webster

505 The insight gained was that of reading the whole of the historical narrative in covenantal
terms. In his reading of it as a unified history of a single covenant, Barth differs from the
Federal Theologians, who read the historical narrative as a series of covenants.

506 Busch, 278. Barth was already familiar with Cocceius at Münster where Barth lectured after
leaving Göttingen in 1925.

507 By literary critical I intend that form of reading by which the whole is interpreted through the
lens of one of its parts. This leads one to question just how significantly Barth may have been
influenced by his study of Dostoevsky and his detailed narrative accounts.

508 Karl Barth. Church Dogmatics, II/2, 105.
That the two forms exist throughout history, and thus, the use of Israel is symbolic of the broader unbelieving community, is later reflected in Barth’s description of the Church in *Church Dogmatics IV*. There it is defined by faith; a faith represented in the Israeli remnant dating all the way back to Abraham and like-minded individuals throughout its history.

The text speaks of a passing from the one community to the other or out of the one into the other, not unlike the description concerning obedience in the Romans. ‘From the relation of my body to me as I am, must emerge its relation to me as I am not.’ Karl Barth. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 9.

McCormack continues, ‘Implied in this claim is the further thought that “true humanity” is the humanity realized in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. …. And what is the nature of the human relation to God as it is disclosed in Jesus of Nazareth? “Not my will, but Thine, be done.”’ McCormack, “Grace and Being”, 97f.
Ibid., 195.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 374. Barth speaks of a lack of freedom here, because he believed that the autonomy of which modernity spoke, by which one determined their own ends, was not liberating at all.

I choose the term definite, rather than limited, because I believe what Barth intends is more of a formal than a material limitation. That limitation actually exists, particularly in social environments and Barth elsewhere draws the reader’s attention to it when he writes: 'all creaturely reality aims at a certain effect. This aiming at an effect is as such a matter of the free striving and willing of the creature, …. It is in this striving and willing that the creature is active. But its activity as such is not effecting, and its striving and willing is not attaining and achieving. The end attained and the goal achieved and the bringing about of the effect desired --- all these lie quite beyond the striving and willing and working of the creature.' (III/3, 166) Thus, the limit placed upon the creature is not so much upon what they will be, but whether they will seek to be so independent of their true telos, earlier defined by Barth as in relationship with God.: ‘He himself is the only goal which He has appointed for the creature and towards which He directs it. Proceeding from God and accompanied by God, the creature must also return to God. It must for this is its greatness and dignity and hope. The movement towards God is the meaning of its history. (*Church Dogmatics* III/3, 158)

Gunton, “Barth The Trinity and Human Freedom”, *Theology Today*, vol. 43. no. 3 1986, 321.

Busch, 287. The intention is stated by Karl Barth in a letter to W. G. Meyer 13th April 1938.

The work’s English translation was given the title “Church and State.” However, it was conceived and published in German as “Rechtfertigung und Recht”, *Theologische Studien*, no. 1 (Evangelischer Verlag, Zollikon-Zurich, 1937). Citations given in the present text are from the Macmillan Canada edition of “Church and State” (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd, 1946).

Karl Barth, “Church and State”, 1.

Ibid., 2.

Ibid., 3.


Ibid., 5-6.

Ibid., 8.

Ibid., 9.

Ibid., 22. The cited opinion from which Barth is here dissenting is that of Gunther Dehn. “Engel und Obrigkeit,” *Theologische Aufsätze*, (1936), 97 and 106.
541 Ibid., 25.

542 Ibid., 27. With reference to: 1Cor. 15:25; Phil. 2:9f; Eph. 1:20,21; 1Peter 3:22; Col. 2:15.

543 Ibid., 28f.

544 Ibid., 29.

545 Ibid., 31.

546 Ibid., 32.

547 Ibid., 34-35.

548 Ibid., 36. Barth makes particular reference to Schlatter’s translation of \( \Sigma \text{unei} \delta \text{ησις} \ θεον \) from 1Peter 2:19 as ‘certainty of God’.

549 This remark raises significant questions regarding those who attempt to argue for the appropriation of Barth’s thought on the assumption that he argues the Church, through faithful embodiment of its life together, might influence the State towards a more accurate analogy of that Kingdom reality.

550 Karl Barth, “Church and State”, 44.

551 Ibid., 61.

552 Ibid., 62.

553 Ibid., 67.

554 Ibid., 68.

555 Ibid., 69, 72.

556 ‘This was a point reached, for Barth, in August 1934, when he stated his own refusal to declare an oath to Hitler without the added stipulation ‘only within my responsibilities as an Evangelical Christian.’’ Busch, 255.

557 Karl Barth, “Church and State”, 80, 82.


559 The work was first published in English translation in Against the Stream, (New York: SCM Press, 1954). References in the current work will draw from a later publication Community,
Daniel Cornu. *Karl Barth et la Politique.* (Paris: Editions Labor et Fides: Genève, 1968), 118 (my translation). Cornu observed that ‘Barth anticipates taking up again all the problems of rights and of the State in his ethics of reconciliation. But it is unlikely that this important part of the Dogmatics shall ever see the day’ (118, footnote). As will be shown below he was not wholly accurate in that claim. However, I believe it is accurate to say “The Christian Community and the Civil Community” does remain the standard text of Barth’s mature thought regarding Politics.

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 149.

John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics versus the Wider Wisdom” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, Michael G. Cartwright ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 107, 108. The noun form in the first identifier is plural. Thus, Yoder contends ‘it defines the confessional status of the people who make up the community.’ The other use of ‘citizen’ is ‘again a definitional qualification’. (107) Gemeinde is clearly a political term but was applied to the parish form of church and not its institutional form.

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 150.

Ibid., 150-151 emphasis added. Humanity’s ‘provisional’ quality, as is soon reflected, is best explained by its common reconciliation, but awaited redemption as per Barth’s mature account of election. Thus, it defines the positive relation unaccounted for in past accounts of Church/State relations. Yet, although Barth will insist upon the Church’s participation in the civil community, there is to be no confusion of their purposes. As he argues elsewhere: ‘On a third level of thought and reality [the Scottish Confession] knows also a service of God rendered by the State. We shall be able to see this third level, once we reflect that the Christian life and the life of the church are enacted within the confines of a world which does not yet listen to the Word of God, which is still a stranger to the Lordship and judgement of Jesus Christ and which therefore cannot yet be claimed to be under the obedience of faith. Note that the Christians too, belong to this world, even when church members and conscious and active members, in so far as it is true to say of them, too, that they are not yet under the obedience of faith, but are constantly engaged in the conflict of the flesh with the spirit, a conflict in which the church herself is engaged in and with her members.’ Karl Barth. *The knowledge of God and the Service of God*, 218-219.

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 151.

That claim might once have appeared to be unjustified. What about reason one might ask? However, in the post-modern atmosphere, confidence in its capacities is increasingly on the wane.

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 151-152.
Ibid., 152 citing the Barmen declaration.

Ibid., 153.

Ibid.

Ibid., 154.

Ibid.

Ibid., 155.

Ibid.

Ibid. Here Barth appeals to Oscar Cullmann’s *Königsherrschaft Christi und Kirche im Neuen Testament* of 1941 (Christ’s royal rule and the Church in the New Testament) indicating once more the distinguishing feature of the two Communities is their spiritual orientation only, or their difference in receptiveness to humanity’s teleological orientation, its elected or ‘true freedom’.

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 156.

Ibid.

Ibid., 157. As in the earlier work Barth once more cites John 19 as evidence of the claim.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 158.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 159 emphasis added.

Ibid., 160.

Ibid.

Ibid., 161.

Ibid.
Ibid., 162 citing Barmen Declaration Thesis no. 5.

Ibid., 162-163.

Ibid., 163.

Ibid., 163 emphasis added.

Ibid., 164.

Ibid., 163.

Ibid., 165.

Ibid., 165.

Ibid.

Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 489 (emphasis added).

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 166.

Ibid., 165.

Ibid., 167 emphasis added.

Ibid., 168.

Ibid.

Ibid., 169.

The translation here is disputed. *Gleichnis*, may be translated “parable” rather than allegory (the term used in the English translation cited here), Barth’s clear theological intentions and his use of parable at Tambach may be cited in defense. However, apart from a theological sanctioning it is unclear what, if anything, is to be gained in so doing. The fact remains that nothing more than an imperfect ‘likeness’ is ever attainable.


Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 118-119, citing Barth “Church and State”, 38.


Ibid., 170 emphasis added.

Ibid., 179 emphasis added.
The aesthetic concept employed here is similar to that of aesthetic formalism, here defined according to the description provided by Wolterstorff as: “the view that in our interaction with works of art, form should be given primacy.” For “those who use the concept of form mainly wish to contrast the artifact itself with its relations to entities outside itself” including “its standing in various relations of influence and similarity to preceding, succeeding, and contemporary works”. Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Aesthetic Formalism”, in The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Robert Audi, General Editor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, repr.1997), 9. For Barth such works would be the political alternatives available and to be contrasted with the form of the kingdom of God as embodied in Christ.

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 171 emphasis added.

Ibid., 179.

Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 170 emphasis added.

Ibid., 172.

Ibid., 174-178. I’ve condensed the series to what Barth deemed justifiable, through analogous judgement, with God’s action in Christ and the events precipitated thereby.

Ibid., 179. As Webster notes ‘Sometimes the analogies which Barth spells out work well (the correspondence between the mission of the church and the search for social justice, for example); at other points (opposition to political secrecy on the basis that Jesus is the light of the world) the theological material seems to be conscripted.’ Barth, 153.

Ibid., 180.

Ibid., 184.

Ibid., 185.

Ibid., 186, 187.

Barth would later place greater emphasis on the significance of this aspect of the Church’s life, writing: ‘There can be no doubt … that the decisive contribution which the Christian Community can make to the upbuilding and work and maintenance of the civil consists in the witness that it has to give to it and to all human societies in the form of the order of its own upbuilding and constitution. It cannot give in the world a direct portrayal of Jesus Christ, who is also the world’s Lord and Saviour, or of the peace and freedom and joy of the kingdom of God. For it is by itself only a human society moving like all others to His manifestation. But in the form in which it exists among them it can and must be to the world of men around it a reminder of the law of the kingdom of God already set up on earth in Jesus Christ, and a promise of its
future manifestation. *De facto*, whether they realize it or not, it can and should show them that there is already on earth an order which is based on that great alteration of the human situation and directed towards its manifestation. *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 721 (emphasis added).


624 Ibid., 188.

625 Environmental factors have long been supposed to influence one’s development and thus beliefs. Recent studies in cognitive science demonstrate that environment influences cognitive development such that it has an effect on one’s higher abstract reasoning, and thus how one sees the world. See: Lakoff and Johnson *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, (New York: Basic Books, 1999). For thought along these lines from a theological/hermeneutical perspective see Kevin Vanhoozer, *First theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002). Vanhoozer argues that the conception of God which is shaped by familial and societal influences, prior to any serious personal reflection, is likely to have an effect on one’s theology, as it affects one’s reading of Scripture.


629 Yoder identifies the approach as sectarian, not in the sense of the ‘narrowness of the “sect’s” truth claims, but with the quality of the group’s recognition that it is not in control of the wider society.’ “Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics”, 108. That is to say that of the ‘four typical constellations of state, society, and individuals’ that Ingolf Dalferth identifies as ‘religious, tolerant, secular and post-secular’, the only one to which Barth’s later writings could not be applied is the religious. Ingolf Dalferth “Post-secular Society: Christianity and the Dialectics of the Secular” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol 78 no.2 (Atlanta: Oxford UP, 2010), 332.


631 Ibid., 108.

632 Ibid., 108-109 emphasis added.

633 Ibid., 109, emphasis added.

634 Ibid., 110

635 See: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 695ff.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 111.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2*, 720 emphasis added.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/3*, 168.

Ibid., 171.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/3*, 171.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/3*, 173.

Ibid., with modifications to the word order.

Ibid.

To the Churches in North America, the inhumanities performed in the name of ‘civilizing’ aboriginal peoples in the new states being colonized, serves as the most relevant example to the kind of brutality of which Barth is speaking.


This was not because the metaphysical truth was of one’s own making, but because it could not be fully grasped by any one individual. For in the words of Paul, ‘now we see only a reflection as in a mirror’ (1 Cor. 13:12 TNIV).

That is to say, that the nature of the community’s relationship to its Lord is determined in the life of its active members and not in their identification with institutional structures, policies and procedures. In this regard there is certainly a Free Church quality to Barth’s ecclesiology.


*Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, John Godsey, rec. and ed. (Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 78.

Ibid., emphasis added.

Ibid.
Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/3, 242.

Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 75.


Ibid., 155.

Ibid.

Ibid., 156.

Ibid.


Ibid., 163.

Ibid., 164f.

Ibid., 165.

Ibid., 166.

Ibid., 168.

Ibid., 169.

Ibid., 170.

The difference is politically significant. The level of responsibility perceived by the Church as divine agent promotes an element of necessity that its actions prove successful, leading to attempts to control the outcome, which introduces conflict and often violence.


Ibid., 171.

Ibid., 171, 172.

Ibid., 172.

Ibid., 173.


679 The indirectness of their application lay in the fact that the whole of Scripture was theologically interpreted by Barth.


681 The work remained incomplete due to his ill-health in later life, but a vast work remains nonetheless.

682 Biggar, “Barth’s Trinitarian Ethic”, 214.

683 The terms are Biggar’s. I’ve restated their definitions here.

684 Karl Barth, *CD* III/4, 15.

685 Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 214.


687 Ibid. Conditional imperatives are themselves described as nothing more than the ‘risk of obedience involved in the encounter and communion between Christian brothers.’ They are allowable, argues Barth, only when one’s courage is ‘nourished by humility before God and his fellow men.’ At the same time their use requires that the individual be equally prepared to receive direction from another should the need arise. Such occurrences Barth identifies with ‘realized ethics’ and ‘only indirectly or not at all a part of ethics proper’ itself only ‘theory and not practice.’ “The Gift of Freedom”, 86-87.

688 Ibid., 69-96.

689 Ibid., 88 (emphasis added).

690 Ibid., 73 (emphasis added).

691 Ibid., 73f. (emphasis original).

692 Ibid., 74.

693 Ibid.

694 Ibid., 75.

695 Ibid.
What follows is already available in outline from the earlier work. I return to the later work in the next section, for the purposes of continuity, with the material that follows their consideration alone.


The Christian Life, 175.

Responsibility to God involves keeping Sunday as a day of worship, bearing express witness to God, and turning to him in prayer (CD III/4, pp. 47-115). Responsibility to fellow humans involves: a voluntary interdependence between the two sexes, in which it is nevertheless given to the male to ‘lead’ and the female to ‘follow’; a mutual honouring between parents and children, in which parents should guide and children should obey; and a reciprocity between neighbours, whether near or distant, in which national loyalties are held to be radically provisional (CD II/4 pp. 116-323). Responsibility for life involves respecting and protecting one’s own life and that of one’s fellows as a loan made by God to be used through the Christian community in the service of the sanctification of the world (CD III/4 pp. 324-564). Responsibility within the limits of a certain time involves cooperating in this task by heeding one’s own special vocation to exploit a few unique opportunities (CD III/4 pp. 565-685).

Barth’s avoidance of the use of ‘orders of creation’ because of their application in the Lutheran tradition, their lack of support in a Christologically centred reading of Scripture, but also his
awareness of the fluidity of familial and national phenomena, is offered as one reason for the obliqueness of Barth’s position, as is his ‘explicit and quite uncompromising repudiation of the ethical tradition of natural law.’ Biggar, “Barth’s Trinitarian Ethic”, 217-8.


710 For an account of the Casuistry, the practical reasoning in particular, that bears some similarities to that which follows here, see: Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning, (Berkeley Cal.: University of California press, 1988). As the title suggests, this work also offers a detailed accounting of the sort of abuses that would have discouraged Barth from identifying with Casuistry.


712 Ibid., 180-181 (emphasis added).

713 Ibid. 181 (emphasis added).

714 Biggar, “Barth’s Trinitarian Ethic”, 221.

715 Karl Barth’s Table Talk, 80. With the above method applied one is able to make sense of Barth here and of his controversial decision defence the use of armed force in Church Dogmatics III/4.

716 Barth does not list the other available options, but his interpreters are constantly arguing his theology was impacted by the political context of the day. I suggest he is doing no more here than appealing to those he deems most appropriate, from the options available at that time.


718 Karl Barth’s Table Talk, 80.

719 Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 179.

720 Ibid., 182.

721 Herberg, 35. Herberg describes this series of illustrations as a ‘detailed elaboration’ of what he accurately calls Barth’s ‘theory of correspondence’.

722 Barth continues: ‘Conversely, no democracy as such is protected from failing in many or all of the points we have enumerated and degenerating not only into anarchy but also into tyranny and thereby becoming a bad state.’ “The Christian Community and the Civil Community”, 181.

723 Ibid., 170.
For a definition of what is intended by aesthetic here, see note 611 above.

A complement for its application, in the social/political sphere, is something like the enculturation espoused in the missiological writings of Charles H. Kraft. In the same way that direct correlates for elements of the Gospel narrative may not necessarily be found in certain cultures and therefore its message needs to be applied analogically, so too political judgements, once made, may not be as clearly applicable in another or future social/political context and reconsideration required before action taken. What needs to be common to all contexts is that the Word of God, not historical precedents, be the controlling determining factor and it be consulted from within the contemporary social/political context. However, earlier judgements may serve in the determination of future courses of action, but in subordination to Scripture.

George Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, 48-49. Quoting G.C. Berkouwer, “The Voice of Karl Barth,” in A Half Century of Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 73. On whether the level of objectivity Hunsinger seeks is even possible, see the remarks in note 624 above and the works cited there.

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I/2, 470.

Church Dogmatics I/2, 7.

Thus, Barth’s hermeneutic is in accord with Gadamer’s hermeneutic of “dialectic or conversation” which, Thistleton writes, “Constitutes the only non-manipulatory mode of apprehending truth which does not pre-determine what counts as true in advance.” Interpreting God and the Post-Modern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 71.


Ibid., 84f.

Ibid., 85.

Ibid.

Karl Barth, “Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit”, 321 (translation own, emphasis added).
Webster, “Life From the Third Dimension”, 18.

In that way Barth’s mature thought provides something like a theological parallel to the “constitutive responsibility” that J. Aaron Simmons identifies as fundamental to representatives of twentieth century Continental philosophy. See God and the Other: Ethics and Politics after the Theological Turn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics II/2, 585. I believe Gunton correctly defends Barth, in light of the charges of Kantianism brought against him at this point, when he argues: ‘it is one thing to obey power exerted absolutely and impersonally, quite another to obey the kind of personal authority with which we have to do in the gospel.’ Gunton, “Barth the Trinity and Human Freedom,” 320.

Gunton, “Barth, the Trinity and Human Freedom”, 319.


It is my position that the socialist tenor is attributable to what Jüngel describes as Barth’s ‘attempts to bring out the dogmatic significance of the universal claim of the being of Jesus Christ.’ Eberhard Jüngel, God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth: a paraphrase. trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 134.

What is not intended here is a license for reckless, ill-considered action, but freedom for risks taken upon due consideration being given to previously unexamined issues, for which precedence does not exist, even though the certainty required by science may not be found. This explains Barth’s pairing of courage with humility, as early as 1911, in his criticism of the Religious Socialist and once more in a later essay, as I am about to reveal.

Philip Clayton in collaboration with Tripp Fuller, Transforming Christian Theology for Church and Society, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010). This approach, as I construe its application, amounts to a move away from the concern over forms of faith among the parishioners and towards the cultivation of the healthy theological realism Barth proffered at Tambach.


Karl Barth, “Political Decisions in the Unity of Faith” in Against the Stream, 159 (emphasis added). The practical considerations in this work provide an alternative justification for the ecclesial minimalism that Karl Barth is often criticized for and would be complemented by that recently provided by Theodora Hawksley’s “The freedom of the Spirit: the pneumatological point of Barth’s ecclesiological minimalism” in Scottish Journal of Theology 64/2, 2011.
What is not intended here is the suggestion that license is given to sin freely. Rather, it is that courage be allowed to take risks on the promise of forgiveness, when theological discernment suggests actions, for which certainty cannot be claimed, are deemed most appropriate.

Karl Barth, “Political Decisions in the Unity of Faith”, 161.

The move away from capital punishment is already settled throughout much of the Western world.

‘Patience exists where space and time are given with a definite intention, where freedom is allowed in expectation of a response. God acts in this way. He makes this purposeful concession of space and time. He allows this freedom of expectancy.’ Church Dogmatics II/1, p.408. ‘We define God’s patience as His will, deep-rooted in His essence and constituting His divine being and action, to allow another – for the sake of His own grace and mercy and in the affirmation of His holiness and justice – space and time for the development of its own existence, thus conceding to this existence a reality side by side with His own, and fulfilling His will towards this other in such a way that He does not suspend and destroy it as this other but accompanies and sustains it and allows it to develop in freedom.’ (CD II/1, 409f)

Tertullian Apologeticus; The text of Oehler annotated, with an introd. by John E.B. Mayor, Alex. Souter trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917) Open Content Alliance, 111.


Tertullian, Apologeticus, 38 Oehler and Mayor, 111.

“De Corona”, 13.


Cf. Wayne A. Meeks “City, Household, People of God” in The Origins of Christian Morality:
The first Two Centuries. (Binghampton: Yale UP, 1993). Meeks description of the effects of migration on large urban centers bears a striking resemblance to the culture of pluralism that exists, nation-wide, through much of the contemporary Western World. In the work, Meeks observes that ‘Resident aliens had already been a significant foreign body in the Athens of the Golden Age’ and, no doubt informed by more recent migratory patterns, he observes that: ‘When people move from a community with one kind of culture into one that is quite different, very often their moral intuitions no longer match the reality around them.’ (42) The move from countryside into a city often has this effect, and so does immigration.’ (42f) In their response, Meeks notes, that ‘immigrants, too, could take the edge off their sense of foreignness by settling in neighborhoods with people who had come from the same area and by forming ethnic clubs and community centers with them.’ (43) One need only call to mind New Testament references to the Jewish sector and that ‘These centers and associations were normally formed around the cult of the gods of the immigrants’ homeland.’ (ibid.) However, in spite of their efforts ‘pressures to assimilate to the common culture of the city … would be very strong.’ (Ibid.) As a result, Meeks concludes that, ‘The combination of imperialism and migration meant that the world inhabited by urban people in a given place was larger and more diverse than before, but they tended to have less clarity about the things that were demanded or expected of them and, on the whole, less control.’ (Ibid.)


763 The differences between this take on the question and Marquardt’s may sound like hair-splitting, but a more accurate rendering of the man’s intentions is sought. Moreover, the intentions argued for here have a much broader social/political application, a point clearly reflected in Barth’s mature political writings wherein he argues the same approach be taken within whatever political context the Church finds itself.
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