

TRANSCENDENCE AND HISTORY IN
KARL BARTH'S AMILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY

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ABBREVIATIONS

CD	<u>Church Dogmatics</u>
Institutes	<u>Institutes of Christian Religion</u>
KD	<u>Kirchliche Dogmatik</u>
Romans II	<u>The Epistle to the Romans</u> , 2nd ed.
Römerbrief I	<u>Der Römerbrief</u> , Erste Fassung.
WGWM	<u>The Word of God and the Word of Man</u>

ABSTRACT

Barth's early claim that "Christianity which is not wholly eschatology and nothing but eschatology has nothing to do with Christ" reflects his understanding of theology as basically an eschatological concept. Though Barth does not explicitly identify himself with any of the three dominant millennial traditions, namely, amillennialism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism, this study seeks to demonstrate that the key to understanding Barth's eschatology is to see him as an amillennial thinker by arguing that his concept of the three-stage parousia along with his doctrine of "nothingness" reflects the key notions of amillennial eschatology. Not only does the amillennial tradition provide a vehicle for clarifying Barth's eschatology but placing him broadly into the amillennial school of thought resolves the debate among Barthian scholars over the tension between transcendence and history (immanence), eternity and time, the divine and the human, not only in Barth's eschatology but also in his theology in general.

Through his doctrine of three-stage parousia Barth brings to light the architectonic structure of amillennial eschatology. The first stage relates to God's transcendence as it deals with Christ's first coming and the revelation of his lordship and kingship through his death on the cross and his resurrection, a revelation which runs through the whole period of the parousia or the millennium. The second stage concerns God's immanence, that is, God's direct involvement in the history of this world. On this level, Christ's coming and presence is represented by the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whose task consists in

carrying into effect Christ's work of reconciliation of God with the world. The third stage is characterized by Christ's final appearing, which will bring history to an end and usher in the final kingdom in which reconciliation will be revealed as redemption.

That Barth is an amillennial theologian is made evident by his identification of the period between Christ's first coming and his final return with Christ's parousia, which he understands as Christ's "coming" and "presence" as Lord and King. This period coincides with what Barth calls Christ's "kingdom of reconciliation," the church era, the climax of salvation history, the fulfillment of the covenant, and the binding of Satan, which Barth terms "the limitation of nothingness."

The merit of Barth's doctrine of parousia and "nothingness" is that it constitutes a positive contribution to the establishment of the amillennial principle by presenting it as a unified system. At the same time, it is also an adequate response to the dispensationalists' charge of "spiritualizing" as it seeks to do justice to history and to God's immanence, although it also holds to God's transcendence.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the millennium is found only in one place in Scripture, Revelation 20. Yet this has not prevented it from becoming the primary distinguishing element in the three major eschatological views in Christian orthodoxy, amillennialism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism. The question may be asked, however, whether a position taken on the millennial question is the determinative factor in every eschatology. This is particularly true for post-Kantian modern theology that is deliberately agnostic about all possibility of predicting future events. Are the various eschatologies of Albrecht Ritschl, Albert Schweitzer, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, or Jürgen Moltmann, to pick some significant nineteenth-and twentieth-century theologies in which eschatology plays a significant role, really adequately explained by placing them into one of the three classic millennial pigeonholes? Is chiliasm in any form even a significant factor in these eschatologies?

To the point of our investigation in this study---does it help us to understand Karl Barth's eschatology if we think of him as an amillennial theologian? It is interesting that Donald Bloesch, though he does not include Barth in his list of amillennial theologians of the modern period,¹ does cite Barth along with Calvin² and G. C. Berkouwer³ in his

¹Cf. Donald G. Bloesch, Essentials of Evangelical Theology, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 191.

exposition of the amillennial point of view. Is Barth an amillennialist? On what basis would one decide?

Nowhere does Barth affirm explicitly that he is amillennial, but this investigation is an attempt to demonstrate that, under the influence of the two chiliastic Blumhardts and in his rejection of liberalism, there was a time when Barth apparently drew near to premillennialism before he moved to amillennialism. This development in Barth's eschatological thought will be traced with our main focus on his understanding of the three forms of the parousia,⁴ the binding of Satan, in the light of his doctrine of "nothingness." Taken together, these constitute the structure of Barth's thought and clearly place him in the amillennial tradition.

The basic thesis of this dissertation can be formulated as follows: thinking of

²Bloesch speaks of the amillennialists' stress on the eschatological character of the interadvent period and takes the examples of Calvin and Barth as the best illustration of this position. Bloesch writes: "Finally, amillennialism tends to take away the expectancy of Christ's second coming by seeing this coming realized, at least in part, in the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The view advanced by Calvin and Barth that we are already in the last days (since we are living in the period between Christ's resurrection and second advent) is acceptable so long as a role is still given to the last day (as distinct from the last days) and so long as the biblical signs of the imminent appearing of Christ are not disregarded" (Evangelical Theology, 197).

³Bloesch draws a profile of amillennialism, pointing out that "amillennialists generally hold that the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ rules his people by the Word and Spirit . . . They perceive the forces of evil gaining momentum as the world history draws to an end and predict a time of persecution and tribulation for the church prior to the parousia" (Evangelical Theology, 191); and immediately afterwards he illustrates this statement of the amillennial basic structure with the examples of Karl Barth and Berkouwer. As far as Barth is concerned, Bloesch says that "in his Church Dogmatics IV, 3b Barth maintains that the greatness of the 'Word of God' in the course of history also means the deepening of darkness and contradiction" (Evangelical Theology, 191).

⁴Cf. esp. CD IV\1 - IV\3.2.

Barth's eschatology as amillennial conceptually clarifies and helps settle some significant scholarly debates about time and eternity, history and transcendence in his thought.

The real issue in the millennial debate has to do with the relation between history and transcendent ideals. Is the kingdom of God to be understood as a this-worldly reality in history or as an eternal ideal that forever judges all earthly kingdoms until the consummation? Both premillenarians and postmillenarians tend to judge the amillennial position as too "spiritual," as not sufficiently concrete and historical. The dispensationalist John Walvoord, for example, identifies the amillennial method of interpretation as a "spiritualizing method," which brought about a spiritualizing of all the elements constituting the structure of the millennium as it is taught in Revelation 20, including the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years, the binding of Satan during the millennium, and the idea of "first resurrection." To this "spiritualizing hermeneutic" Walvoord opposes the premillennial method of "'grammatical-historical' literal interpretation,"⁵ which in his opinion does justice to the historical character of Christ's millennial reign. Similarly, the postmillennialist Gary North describes amillennialism as a static doctrine of the millennium, lacking the dynamism of history. North contends that postmillennialism exhibits a good balance between "definitivism" and "progressivism,"⁶ while amillennialism discloses "masochism"⁷ and "cultural defeatism,"⁸ having "no vision of

⁵John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Findlay, Ohio: Durham Publishing Co.: 1959), 59.

⁶Gary North, Westminster Confession (Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 186.

⁷North, Westminster Confession, 177.

the progressive realization of Christ's definitive conquest in history."⁹

This is also the critique tossed at Barth. According to von Balthasar, Barth indeed tried to shake off the yoke of the post-Kantian idealism but he still remained under its spell. The Kierkgaardian dialectic of the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and creature is still retained.¹⁰ God's transcendence and sovereignty are made manifest in his sending of his "grace in Jesus Christ" to the effect that Jesus Christ has become the "ground of all being and history" and the "event that could never be anticipated or derived from another principle but that itself determines and decides everything: the movement of God from No to Yes."¹¹ Barth's christocentric approach enabled him to speak of the relationship between God and creature in terms of "analogous relationship" based on a christological foundation and made possible a "compatibility of the divine and human in Christ."¹² But in the end "Barth's one goal is to defend and give expression to the priority of Christ over creation and the fall of Adam."¹³ And, according to von Balthasar, "that theological position should be the real focus of any critique."¹⁴

Von Balthasar's critique is that Barth's christocentrism "has not left enough room

⁸North, Westminster Confession, 181.

⁹North, Westminster Confession, 186.

¹⁰Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Theology of Karl Barth, trans. E. T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 82.

¹¹Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 83.

¹²Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 228.

¹³Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 241.

¹⁴Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 241.

between creation and covenant."¹⁵ He means that christocentrism has intensified transcendentalism and idealism in Barth's theology, so that history (the covenant), the freedom of creature, and even "the possibilities that are still open to God,"¹⁶ that is, God's freedom in relation to creation have become determined. The upshot of von Balthasar's attack is that Barth's transcendentalism and idealism are totally incompatible with the historical and anthropological realities.

For Anthony Hoekema, Barth's theology is not only defective in its neglect of history but also in its treatment of eschatology. Hoekema wonders how Barth would reconcile eschatology and transcendentalism if he holds to his concept of the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity.¹⁷ In point of fact, though transcendentalism is an important characteristic of amillennialism, its proponents reject the claims of postmillennialists and premillennialists that amillennialism is exclusively transcendentalist in its orientation,¹⁸ but the question arises whether Barth's eschatology is exclusively transcendental or whether there are also significant historical this-worldly elements in it.

It is in fact interesting that Barth does have his defenders who see, particularly in the early Barth, an eschatological defense of the very this-worldly political socialism. By relating Barth to the Blumhardts and to J. T. Beck, Stadtland argues for the priority of

¹⁵Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 242.

¹⁶Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 243.

¹⁷Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 307.

¹⁸See, Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, chaps. 2, 6).

"immanence" over "transcendence" in Barth's theology.¹⁹ F. W. Marquardt writes in the same vein, calling attention to the precedence of "praxis" and "socialism" over "theory" and "theology" in the early Barth.²⁰

In the next section we will examine the polarized debate about Barth's eschatology in greater detail. However, this study will demonstrate that this either/or interpretation of Barth misses the subtle both/and character of the amillennial eschatological position and that thinking of Barth as an amillenarian helps to acknowledge the dimensions of truth in both extremes of the scholarly debate while not conceding the accuracy of either as a full description of Barth's thought.

At the same time, reversing the interpretive process is also illuminating. Barth's thoughtful and subtle understanding of the three forms of the parousia and the binding of Satan are an enrichment of classic amillennial thought. Thus while our primary concern is to use the amillennial tradition as a vehicle to clarify Barth's eschatology, a second benefit will be to provide a fresh perspective on amillennialism from Barth's theology.²¹

¹⁹Tjarko Stadtland, Eschatologie und Geschichte in der Theologie des Jungen Karl Barth (Neukirchen Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1966), 41-51.

²⁰F. W. Marquardt, "Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth" in Karl Barth and Radical Politics, ed. G. Hunsinger (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976).

²¹Strictly speaking this study is not the first to relate Barth to amillennialism. Even though amillennial theologian G. C. Berkouwer did not speak of Barth directly as an amillennialist in a constructive fashion, he frequently and favorably alluded to him in The Return of Christ (trans. James Van Oosterom [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963]). Apart from Berkouwer, Adrio König also made use extensively of Barth's doctrine of three-stage parousia in his treatment of the millennial question against the background of the amillennial tradition in The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

PART I

BARTH'S ESCHATOLOGY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER I

BARTH'S ESCHATOLOGY: THE SCHOLARLY DEBATE

A. König's Use of Barth's Eschatology

A helpful entry into Barth's eschatology, particularly his millennial position, is the use made of it by the South African theologian Adrio König in his The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology. König's intention is to transcend the debate among the three millennial schools over the question "whether Jesus will return once or twice, and whether there will be one or two resurrections and judgments."¹ König's conceptual scheme to accomplish this is a Barth-like three-stage notion of the parousia,² understood Christologically as Christ realizing creation's covenantal goal "for us," "in us," and "with us."³

Yet, König professes not to follow Barth here. He takes issue with Barth on the difference between "coming" and "presence." König blames Barth for laying more stress on the idea of "coming" in relation to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit rather than on that

¹Adrio König, The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1989), vii.

²In Barth's scheme the first form of the parousia was the beginning of the revelation. This revelation took place particularly in the Easter-event when Christ rose from the dead. The second form of the parousia began with the impartation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The third form of the parousia is the return of Jesus Christ, the time for the final and "complete revelation," which is nothing other than a repetition and the consummation of the event of Easter.

³For his interpretation of each of these concepts, see respectively König, Eclipse of Christ, chapters 3, 4, and 5.

of "presence." König says:

I have not joined with Barth in taking the comings (parousias) of Jesus as the basis for the structure of eschatology. This is because the New Testament does not deal explicitly with his coming in the Holy Spirit, favoring rather the concept of his presence and work through the Holy Spirit.⁴

This seems to be a strained disagreement since König's three stages do appear virtually identical with Barth's. König is not very clear in his reference to Christ as the one who realizes the covenant "for us," "in us," and "with us." He relates the first stage to Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection, which he understands as Christ's fulfillment of the covenant. "Therefore God's goal for creation is reached in Christ," König says. "This goal is the covenant."⁵ The second stage is connected with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which makes possible our union with Christ and the presence of the kingdom in us---Christ himself being the kingdom.⁶ And finally the third stage concerns Christ's second coming,⁷ in which "the realization of God's goal in creation" will be made manifest⁸ through the coming of the "new earth," this being "nothing other than the full realization of the covenant."⁹ "With us" means that God "bound himself to be our God,"¹⁰ and "we come to be God's faithful covenant partners and children."¹¹

⁴König, Eclipse of Christ, 145-46.

⁵König, Eclipse of Christ, 82.

⁶König, Eclipse of Christ, 109.

⁷König, Eclipse of Christ, 64.

⁸König, Eclipse of Christ, 220.

⁹König, Eclipse of Christ, 240.

¹⁰König, Eclipse of Christ, 240.

Apparently, König's argument against Barth depends simply on a sharp distinction between "coming" and "presence." König wants so desperately to avoid all temporal notions of Jesus' first and second coming that he reduces the very idea of the eschaton to the permanent and immanent presence of Christ in the Spirit. The person of Christ is the eschaton for König and thus "the first coming and earthly ministry of Jesus are described in a radical and absolute way as the end and the last days."¹² This continuing and permanent eschatological presence of Christ is, in König's judgment "of greater importance than disputes over whether Jesus will return once or twice."¹³

This seems to be an odd critique of Barth. It is true that the idea of "God who comes"¹⁴ in Jesus Christ is central to Barth's eschatology in general and his concept of the kingdom of God. But König overlooks the fact that Barth's idea of Christ's "coming" or parousia is also intended to convey the idea of "effective presence."¹⁵ For Barth, Christ is present even now by the Holy Spirit. König also seems to lose sight of the reason why Barth came to embrace a transcendent doctrine of the Holy Spirit and to repudiate an immanent one. Barth vigorously rejected the Liberal Protestant immanentist pneumatology which ended up in a manipulation of the Holy Spirit. But this is not a denial of the presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Barth by no means contrasts the two

¹¹König, Eclipse of Christ, 241.

¹²König, The Eclipse of Christ, 2.

¹³König, Eclipse of Christ, vii.

¹⁴Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," in The Way of Theology in Karl Barth, ed. H.M. Rumscheidt (Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 42.

¹⁵CD IV3,1, 292.

words "coming" and "presence" as König supposes. Barth never understood the idea of Christ's "coming" without the idea of Christ's real "presence," at least his presence through the Holy Spirit, therefore König is only here playing with words.

König's primary concern is to emphasize the presence of Christ as a historical reality. The threefold structure of The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology, focusing on Christ's presence for us, in us, and with us, is an attempt to emphasize the reality of Jesus' earthly history and avoid both spiritualizing and idealizing eschatology. Barth indeed may be criticized for his transcendentalism. Yet König's own view as well as his critique of Barth are not entirely consistent or coherent on this point since he does at one point speak favorably of the "imminent return of Christ"¹⁶ and even defends Barth's emphasis on the significance of the return of Christ as final revelation.¹⁷ But we must also say that König's eschatology, with its strong aversion to a "second coming," is also one-sided by emphasizing the "already" and the historical at the expense of the "not yet" and the transcendent.¹⁸

¹⁶König, Eclipse of Christ, 193.

¹⁷See König, Eclipse of Christ, 210.

¹⁸This study differs from König's position, particularly from his tendency to eliminate the three stages in Christ's coming by insisting on the presence of the eschaton now as a unity. König does not seem to follow Christian orthodoxy when he argues that "Theology usually distinguished between the first coming of Jesus, the second coming, and the interim between the comings. But the New Testament knows nothing of these expressions" (Eclipse of Christ, 16). It will be demonstrated in the second part of this dissertation that, despite Barth's rejection of the term Heilsgeschichte and his preference of the term "reconciliation," for his apparent devaluation of history and his insistence on the idea Geschichte, Barth still sees salvation as an event unfolding in history in a teleological fashion, being earmarked by what he calls three stages of the parousia. As such, not only the transcendent side but also the historical are both emphasized in Barth's eschatology. Additionally, in spite of his christocentric approach to the presence of Christ

Is König correct in faulting Barth for being too transcendent and failing to do justice to the historical and the immanent? In point of fact, scholars differ widely in their assessment of the historical and transcendental aspects of Barth's eschatology. When Tjarko Stadtland¹⁹ and Eberhard Jüngel,²⁰ for example, focus their attention on the key influences upon Barth's theology, they come to different conclusions on this very point. Stadtland emphasizes influences that favor a historical weight, while Jüngel alleges more transcendentially oriented influences. F. W. Marquardt²¹ and Helmut Gollwitzer²² concentrate on Barth's social and political involvement, but in the end find themselves at two opposite poles in their conclusions. Marquardt argues that underlying Barth's theology were his social, political, historical, and practical experiences, while Gollwitzer holds that Barth's theology remained idealist and transcendental. Other scholars like Hans Urs von Balthasar²³ and Bruce L. McCormack²⁴ try to settle this issue by closely analyzing Barth's theological method. The former became convinced that Barth's

as the eschaton, Barth could still speak of the parousia from a trinitarian perspective. Christ's presence as a trinitarian presence does not receive its due emphasis in König's scheme.

¹⁹Tjarko Stadtland, Eschatologie.

²⁰Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Barth, a Theological Legacy, trans. G. E. Paul (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986).

²¹Marquardt, "Socialism," in Radical Politics.

²²Helmut Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God and Socialism," in Karl Barth and Radical Politics, ed. G. Hunsinger (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976).

²³Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth.

²⁴Bruce L. McCormack, Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

"conversion" from the dialectical method to the analogy of faith was his last resort to reconcile time and eternity, history and transcendence, while the latter contends that Barth's theological method remained dialectical and thus transcendental.

In what follows in this chapter, we shall consider Stadtland's argument that, influenced by the Blumhardts and J. T. Beck, Barth's ethics is the key to his eschatology. A combination of chiliast expectation concerning the kingdom of God along with a Beckian immanentism eclipsed all future eschatology in the early Barth. By contrast, E. Jüngel, though acknowledging the eschatological influence of the Blumhardts, insists that Overbeck's otherworldly emphasis on Urgeschichte led to a more radical eschatology that tends to subordinate the historical to the transcendental.

The Stadtland line of Barth interpretation was taken up by F. W. Marquardt's "political," praxis-oriented, socialist interpretation of Barth. This apparent reversal of the conventional wisdom about Barth's theological method moving from above to below was directly challenged by Philip Rosato and Helmut Gollwitzer. For both, discontinuity between the this-worldly and political (particularly socialism) and the eschatological is greater than the continuity.

This leads us to a discussion of Barth's theological method and a discussion of Von Balthasar's thesis about a move from a dialectical method to an analogy of faith method. We conclude (with McCormack and Roberts) that for Barth the hypostatic union is the synthesis of history and transcendence in Christ, which then leads us to the question whether the history of the parousia (which is Christ) is genuine history. The key here is Barth's actualistic understanding of presence characterized by a continuing crisis in

human beings. Barth's notion of Geschichte, we conclude, is not a version of timeless eschatology but real history moving through Christ's binding of Satan (victory over "nothingness") to final full parousia: It is the sum total of all these features in Barth's eschatology, we shall argue, that legitimates considering Barth under the amillennial rubric.

B. Influences on Barth's Eschatology

Von Tjarko Stadtland considers Barth's attitude toward chiliasm in relation to his ethical principles and concludes that Barth's eschatology in his early career was decidedly this-worldly. Stadtland examines the way Barth relates eschatology to his view of history as Geschichte in his early writings between 1909 and 1931 and asserts that the early Barth became a chiliast under the influence of Christoph Blumhardt and J. T. Beck.²⁵ He views Barth's chiliastic expectation as a blend of Blumhardt and Beck's teaching, characterized by a "temporalization" of future eschatology and the possible realization of the millennium on earth. Stadtland speaks of "die Verdieesseitigung der futurischen Eschatologie, d. h. die Möglichkeit der Vollendung der Geschichte in der Jetztzeit, im innerweltlichen Geschehen, verbunden mit Barths chiliastischen Erwartungen."²⁶ Stadtland argues that ethics is the key to understanding Barth's millennial views and eschatology. In his judgment Barth's eschatology is entirely absorbed by ethics. "Die Eschatologie löst sich in Ethik auf."²⁷ In the last analysis, Stadtland's statement is tantamount to the

²⁵Cf. Stadtland, Eschatologie, 43-51, 55; esp. 50 and 55.

²⁶ Stadtland, Eschatologie, 55.

²⁷Stadtland, Eschatologie, 51.

assertion that, in Barth, ethical concerns control the understanding of the millennium. He does not really argue for the subordination of the so-called transcendent to the "this-worldly" but emphasizes strongly the "existential" and "immanent" aspects of Barth's ethical eschatology.

According to Stadtland, Barth took up from the Blumhardts the strong chiliastic expectation of the realization of the kingdom of God on earth, and from J. T. Beck, a chiliast who was at the same time an immanentist, the belief in a kingdom which grows gradually on earth. Hence, Barth's attention was so focused on its realization in human earthly existence that future eschatology, Stadtland argues, was entirely blotted out. In this connection Stadtland assumes that Barth inherited from Beck the idea of a continuity between the old age and the new age, "so-called history" and "real history."²⁸ Jesus Christ is the link between the "passing world" and the "coming world." Therefore, the coming world is by no means an annihilation of the passing world but rather the fulfillment of the latter.²⁹ By referring us to Barth's analogy of God having planted a

²⁸In the first edition of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Barth distinguished between what he called "'sogennante' Geschichte" and "'eigentliche' Geschichte." The former means the time without God, a time of darkness and godlessness, before the coming of Christ, and the latter the time of the full presence of God, that is, the time of salvation in Jesus Christ. Barth teaches that Christ constitutes a link between these two times so that we can say that the latter is not the abolition of the former but its fulfillment. Hence in Christ there is only one Geschichte for all human beings (see, Stadtland, Eschatologie, 37-41).

For Barth's use of the terms "'sogennante' Geschichte" and "'eigentliche' Geschichte" in the first edition of his commentary on the Romans, see Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief, (Erste Fassung, 1919) (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), esp. 46, 77, 80, 82, 85, 87.

²⁹Cf. Stadtland, Eschatologie, 49: "Es handelt sich beider kommenden Welt nicht um eine Entleerung, sondern um eine Erfüllung der vergehenden Welt. Die offenbar

seed in human beings, a seed which must grow,³⁰ Stadtland tries to show that transcendence was verging on immanence in Barth's theology under the influence of Beck.

It is worth noting in this connection that Barth himself draws attention to the emphasis on immanence in Beck's theology. Beck, for example, stated that "the substance of Christian teaching that has entered into man as a spiritual property and has become dynamically immanent in him is a believing gnosis."³¹ However Barth refrained from acknowledging Beck's influence upon himself. He would only admit that Beck deeply influenced his father, Fritz Barth.³²

Stadtland's purpose consists in presenting us with a picture of Barth deeply concerned not so much about human future heavenly life as about human present earthly life. As a confirmation of his contention, Stadtland argues throughout his book that Barth did not have a genuine eschatological concept in the sense of future eschatology until the appearance of his work The Resurrection of the Dead in 1924.³³

In fact, scholars differ widely over the question whether Barth's focus is more on

gewordene Gotteskraft eröffnet nicht eine neue Geschichtszeit nach und hinter der andern, sondern sie bringt als Längsschnitt durch die Zeiten die göttlichen Möglichkeiten aller Perioden zur Erscheinung und zur Realisierung."

³⁰"Gott hat einen Keim in uns gepflanzt, der wachsen muss." Römerbrief, first edition, 105. Quoted by Stadtland in Eschatologie, 48.

³¹Karl Barth citing J. T. Beck in Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century Its Background and History, trans. unnamed (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973), 618. (Emphasis added).

³²Barth, Protestant Theology, 622.

³³Stadtland, Eschatologie, see esp. 159.

the earth or on heaven in his eschatological concept. While Stadtland traces Barth's idea back to the influence of the two Blumhardts and J. T. Beck, Eberhard Jüngel insists that Barth had rather heavily drawn upon the two Blumhardts and Overbeck.³⁴ These different combinations led Stadtland and Jüngel to different conclusions.

Unlike Stadtland, Jüngel argues that Barth's theology was thoroughly eschatological from the beginning under the influence of the Blumhardts and Overbeck, with a special focus on the future. Jüngel admits that Barth's famous statement "any Christianity which is not utterly and absolutely eschatological has utterly and absolutely nothing to do with Christ" does not appear in the first edition of the Römerbrief, but he demonstrates with many examples that Barth already referred from time to time to eschatology in that first edition of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, especially when he spoke of the certainty of salvation, of the coming world, and of eschatology as the only solution to the riddles of the world.³⁵

Barth himself acknowledges Overbeck's influence on his thought, particularly in an essay "Unsettled Question for Theology Today,"³⁶ which was inspired by Overbeck's Christentum und Kultur. Overbeck argues in this work that Christianity is thoroughly an eschatological concept and that its deterioration is due to its loss of its eschatological character. Overbeck was a historian, but he found Christianity and history to be two

³⁴Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Barth, a Theological Legacy, trans. Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 60-67.

³⁵E. Jüngel, Theological Legacy, 65-66.

³⁶Karl Barth, "Unsettled Question for Theology Today," in Theology and Church, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

incompatible realities. For Overbeck, whatever is this-worldly, historical, temporal, and human is revealed to be futile when confronted with the eschatological. Christianity is intimately bound with the return of Christ, and is therefore eschatological but has nothing to do with the events of this world.³⁷ Even church history cannot reveal what Christianity really is. He therefore placed Christianity within the circumscription of what he called Urgeschichte³⁸ and the "eschaton." Colm O'Grady puts it more clearly this way:

From the point of view of the past the only possible abode of Christianity is super-history [Urgeschichte], and from the point of view of the future its only possible abode is the "eschaton."³⁹

In Jüngel's opinion "Overbeck enabled him [Barth] to radicalize what he learned from the two Blumhardts."⁴⁰ Barth took over from Overbeck the insistence on the radical character of Christianity. Christianity deals exclusively with the kingdom of God which is drawing near. It has nothing to do even with the church which is a reality within the bounds of the relativities of history. Christianity is then entirely transferred to the sphere of the transcendent.

³⁷Cf. Franz Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur. Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 68.

³⁸Barth took over the term Urgeschichte from Overbeck and interprets it as the origin of history, the history prior to history, and at same time the "new history" which enters our world when God breaks into human history from the eternal world. Urgeschichte is rendered "superhistory . . . or creation-history" in English (Barth, "Unsettled Questions," in Theology and Church, 58).

³⁹Colm O'Grady, The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth (Washington, Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1968), 11.

⁴⁰Jüngel, Theological Legacy, 65.

Both Jüngel and Stadtland started off by looking at Barth's eschatology in light of the Blumhardts' chiliastic expectation, but they subsequently diverged in the understanding of Barth's use of the Blumhardts and turned to other influences on Barth's thought. Jüngel appealed to the transcendentalist Overbeck, while Stadtland turned to the immanentist J. T. Beck. Consequently, while Stadtland tends to emphasize the subordination of eschatology to history, Jüngel underscores the subordination of the historical to the transcendental.

However, Jüngel's conclusion was challenged by recent studies which led to the discovery that the early Barth was preoccupied with the problem of the unity between "theory" and "praxis."⁴¹ This investigation was undertaken mainly by Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt who argued that in Barth's theology "praxis" preceded "theory." This presupposes the reversal of the order in the relationship between history and the transcendent as an advocacy of the priority of history over the transcendent.

C. A Triumph of History?

One could say that Stadtland's principles were taken up and carried to extremes by Marquardt as he attempted to discover the key to Barth's theology in the realm of "praxis," not in that of "theory." Klauspeter Blaser defines the content of the "theory" as a thorough study of the Bible and the writing of the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, and that of the "praxis" as his adherence to the Social Democratic Party in order to make his "radical socialism" prevail within the organization as "mithoffender und

⁴¹See above, 6.

mitschuldiger Genosse."⁴² From this definition we may infer that "theory" relates to the "other-worldly," while "praxis" relates to the "this-worldly."

Marquardt started from the attempt to find a harmony in Barth between "theory" and "praxis," the "this-worldly" and the "other-worldly," and claims that he could find the source of Barth's theology not in the "theory" but in the "praxis," not in the "other-worldly" but in the "this-worldly." He formulates a radical thesis according to which

. . . the Church Dogmatics subjects the dogmatic tradition of Christianity to the canon of a socially reflected concept of God. Those who think that it establishes a theological ontology of transcendence are wrong. Those who see that it is essentially political are correct.⁴³

Marquardt's view first appeared to be in line with Barth's principles when he says that "Barth's concept of God . . . elaborates the ethical and social goal of human action."⁴⁴ But then Marquardt proceeds to substitute the idea of Barth's being "essentially political" for his "theological ontology of transcendence."

This is obviously a reversal of Barth's theology of "from above to below." Barth's basic principle is put upside down to become "from below to above." This implies a dependence of the transcendent upon history, a dependence of God upon his relationship to the world. Marquardt says, "It is . . . the content of what, for Barth, 'God' is---not

⁴²Klauspeter Blaser and Denis Maffli, Karl Barth 1886-1986: Combats -Idées- Reprises (Bern - Frankfurt am Main - New York - Paris: Peter Lang, 1987), 20.

⁴³Marquardt, "Socialism" in Radical Politics, 68.

⁴⁴Marquardt, "Socialism," in Radical Politics, 67.

what God 'means' but what he 'does' and 'wants' and therefore 'is.'⁴⁵ That is, God is what he is as we first discover his nature as "love in freedom" in social experience, before we discover him in Scripture. And it is there that the process begins in Barth's theological method.

Marquardt finds this to be the content of Barth's chiliastic ethics, calling it "a programmatic socialist goal of a Christian-chiliastic ethics."⁴⁶ Thus, in this program everything is reversed: it was not the Bible that sheds light on the truth about human life and sinfulness, but it was rather "the atrocious situation of the proletariat [which] interpreted the real content of the Biblical-apocalyptic eschatology."⁴⁷ It was thus "social experience [which] determined Barth's theology."⁴⁸ In Marquardt's eyes, the choice of "chiliasm in his ethics" instead of an "abstract Heilsgeschichte" is an evidence that Barth first focused his attention on earthly realities before moving in the direction of theological reflection. "Love in freedom" was the "guiding idea of his ethics," "the goal of human action"; it was the "concept of God" itself, "the image of the thousand-year kingdom."⁴⁹ But Barth first fully understood it in a social and political context. At this point Barth's emphasis on the absolute supremacy of the Word of God is totally removed.

From this perspective the content of the millennium is simply a projection of a

⁴⁵Marquardt, "Socialism" in Radical Politics, 68

⁴⁶Marquardt, "Socialism" in Radical Politics, 68.

⁴⁷Marquardt, "Socialism," in Radical Politics, 63.

⁴⁸Marquardt, "Socialism" in Radial Politics, 65.

⁴⁹Marquardt, "Socialism" in Radical Politics, 68.

human ethical ideal. The millennium loses its transcendental character and becomes a mere product of human ethical principles. Marquardt however does not seem to deny the reality of the millennium in its eschatological nature. His only contention is that Barth found its interpretation and understanding from the social situation on earth.

Marquardt rightly argues that Barth, in his political activity and writing, is interested not so much in a supernatural heaven as in a transformation and perfection of this world. But in the last analysis, does not Marquardt's view suggest the idea that Barth is more a social revolutionary figure than a theologian? Bloesch warns us against any attempt to identify Barth as "an ideologically committed social revolutionary."⁵⁰ Indeed, the "love in freedom" which is the foundation of Barth's ethics, as Marquardt claims, sounds like an ideology when it is not primarily founded in the Bible but only read into the Bible. If "love in freedom" does not start from God himself but from earthly ethics to God, then it becomes more a human initiative than God's action toward human life. For Bloesch, reliance upon human achievement is doomed to end up in utopianism and cynicism. And he maintains that "Barth's position is a corrective to both a visionary utopianism and a socially enervating cynicism. . . ."⁵¹

Marquardt is not entirely wrong in assuming that "praxis" may have preceded "theory" in Barth's theological method. No theologian would deny that the world, society, and politics are part of Barth's preoccupation, not only in his early career as a church

⁵⁰Donald G. Bloesch, Jesus is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 24.

⁵¹ Bloesch, Jesus is Victor, 148, n. 9.

minister in Safenwil and in his early writings, but also in his mature theology. Eduard Thurneysen testifies that Barth's thought was politically oriented from the beginning.⁵² Barth officially joined the Social Democratic Party in 1915.

Barth's political and socialist involvement were awakened by his encounter with Christoph Blumhardt, Leonhard Ragaz, and Hermann Kutter, the spokesmen of the Religious Socialists.⁵³ They enabled him to discover that "the gospel not only concerned the salvation of the individual before God but also a world upheaval, a world revolution."⁵⁴ Barth then had a vision of a new world, a new society, which he apprehended as a reflection of the kingdom which has already broken into this world. According to Gollwitzer, the early Barth was even prepared to identify true socialism and the kingdom of God. "The true socialism is the kingdom of God---both as goal of God's history with man, as the present movement on earth and now."⁵⁵

⁵²Antwort. Karl Barth zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag (Zollikon/Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956), 832.

⁵³These three representatives of Religious Socialism were tempted to identify the fulfillment of the kingdom of God on earth with the success of this movement, which means that the coming of the kingdom is a result of human efforts. Ragaz was the most extremist who maintained that the consummation of the kingdom is now but does not await Christ's return (Blaser, Karl Barth, 33). Kutter's attitude was more or less moderate. His principles consist in bringing God directly into human affairs to prove that God is indeed a living God (Blaser, Karl Barth, 11). Barth's subsequent break with this movement arose from his disagreement with these Religious Socialist leaders' position. For Barth, Torrance says, "their 'fight for the kingdom' . . . could but lead back again into the deserts of secularization" (Thomas F. Torrance, Karl Barth, Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931 [London: SCM, 1962], 37).

⁵⁴Helmut Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God and Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth," in Karl Barth and Radical Politics, ed. and trans. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 77.

⁵⁵Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God" in Radical Politics, 78.

But this does not necessarily imply that Barth's concept of the Word of God or the kingdom of God was inspired by his experience of social life. In fact, Barth never withdrew from the fight on behalf of the workers of Safenwil, but his break with the Religious Socialists is quite significant. Barth's departure from Religious Socialism in 1917 signifies his repudiation of whatever arises from below to above and highlights the radicality of "God's revolution," which means that whatever is decisive is attributed to the eschaton, not to human ethics or human struggle.⁵⁶ Barth's rediscovery of God's transcendent nature finds expression in the first edition of his commentary to the Epistle to the Romans which he began to write in 1918. Here God's deity, sovereignty, faithfulness, and redemption in Jesus Christ are reaffirmed.

In his study of Barth's pneumatology, Philip J. Rosato contends that the direction of Barth's theological method is always exclusively from the divine to the earthly and not vice-versa, which is exactly the opposite of Marquardt's claim. Rosato does not believe, however, that this means that Barth is indifferent to the this-worldly and the historical. With Marquardt he acknowledges the centrality of Barth's concept of "love in freedom," but he does not find it to be an ethical principle originally inspired by Barth's social or political experience before being used for the construal of the divine nature. Rather, he insists strongly that the origin of "love in freedom" is exclusively divine and that it is purely trinitarian in character. According to Rosato,

⁵⁶Cf. Klauspeter Blaser, Karl Barth, 22: "Pour Barth la radicalité de la révolution de Dieu conduit à penser que ce qui est décisif est réservé à l'eschaton, qu'il n'y a au fond plus d'éthique possible au vu de l'ultime et que la lutte pour un ordre juste et socialiste de la société sera désormais vaine."

Barth insists that the new reality of Christian freedom as well as the very possibility of erecting such signs of love in the world are not within the power of the Christian himself. They reflect the force of God's love within him, and thus it is to the Holy Spirit Himself that the Christian attributes not only his initial hearing but also his subsequent obeying of the Word of God.⁵⁷

Helmut Gollwitzer is also very critical of Marquardt's radical position. He also emphasizes the decisive importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in Barth's theology and argues that the Trinity is the only key to understanding the relationship between the kingdom of God and socialism in Barth.⁵⁸ Here Gollwitzer's criticism does not apply only to Marquardt but also to Stadtland who argues for Barth's emphasis on the divine immanence thanks to the influence of J. T. Beck. Gollwitzer draws attention to Barth's turning away from Beck and insists that Barth attempted to hold transcendence and immanence in balance in his theology.⁵⁹

Gollwitzer also reminds us what Barth means by divine revolution.

Revolution means a fundamental transformation, a decisive qualitative difference from what has preceded. The discontinuity is greater than the continuity. . . . It is a transformation so radical that it cannot be forged by the old powers; only new powers can produce it.⁶⁰

Here Gollwitzer's remark contradicts both Marquardt's orientation from the world to God, from history to the transcendent, from the human to the divine, and Stadtland's idea of continuity between the "old world" and the "new world."

⁵⁷Philip J. Rosato, The Spirit as Lord - The Pneumatology of Karl Barth (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 89.

⁵⁸Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God" in Radical Politics, 87.

⁵⁹Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God" in Radical Politics, 358-61.

⁶⁰Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God" in Radical Politics, 91.

Gollwitzer insists that Barth holds to a radical eschatological transformation of the world instead of a simple improvement of what existed before. This means that there is indeed a continuity between socialism and the kingdom of God, but there is no "identification." We can only speak of "parable," Gollwitzer maintains, so that "what ought here to take place in social affairs is capable of 'reflecting' the kingdom of God 'indirectly as a mirror-image.'"⁶¹

The upshot of Gollwitzer's argument is that the radical transformation of the world and its history does not imply total discontinuity. There is both continuity and discontinuity between socialism and the eschatological kingdom of God, between time and eternity, between history and the transcendent. However, he makes it clear that discontinuity outweighs continuity.

In fact, the transcendence-history relation is a dialectical matter. But the opinion is divided between whether this kind of relationship should be approached through Barth's dialectical method or his "analogy of faith."

D. The Dialectical Method and the Analogy of Faith Debate

Barth sought to unpack the nature of the relationship between God and creature, eternity and time, and history and transcendence by having recourse to the so-called dialectical method. In Barth's theology a dialectical tension stems from the infinite qualitative difference between God and human beings, for "God is God." Yet God can bridge the gap between creature and himself through Jesus Christ.

⁶¹Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God" in Radical Politics, 98.

But Von Balthasar points to two incompatible realities that Barth attempted to reconcile through this principle: first, what we have just mentioned as the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and creature---the "exalted holiness of God and the appalling sinfulness of the creature"⁶²; second, what von Balthasar calls "the miracle of total reversal and transformation,"⁶³ that is, God's grace manifested in his sending of Jesus Christ and the restoration of sinners to righteousness, with the dialectic which finds expression in "the very movement of God from No to Yes."⁶⁴

According to Von Balthasar, Barth's dialectical method failed to settle this question due to its inability to express theological knowledge. He shows that Barth himself felt this failure by confessing that the "dialectician is as such no better than the dogmatician or the critic."⁶⁵ Von Balthasar then argues that this discovery of the inadequacy of the dialectical principle led to Barth's "conversion to analogy."⁶⁶

In the analogy of faith, Von Balthasar says, the tension between God and creature is replaced by "God's action" in his revelation and the "human decision" of faith." "It is human decision that is similar to God's action despite their fundamental dissimilarity."⁶⁷

⁶²Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 82-83.

⁶³Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 83.

⁶⁴Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 83.

⁶⁵Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 84. Cf. Karl Barth, WGWM, E.T., 211: "The dialectician is no better than the dogmatician and the self-critic."

⁶⁶Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 86-112.

⁶⁷Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 108.

Von Balthasar ties up this concept to Barth's actualistic principle⁶⁸ by which Barth tried to preserve God's freedom and sovereignty in his revelation.

However, Von Balthasar's claim of a "conversion" in Barth's method has been recently challenged by Bruce L. McCormack. McCormack rejects totally Von Balthasar's idea of a "turn from dialectic to analogy"⁶⁹ arguing that "Karl Barth remained even in the Church Dogmatics(!--a dialectical theologian."⁷⁰ McCormack's objection hinges on the idea that the analogy of faith cannot replace the dialectical method since the former is not a theological method. McCormack argues that

The analogy of faith refers to the result of a divine act over which human beings have no control. "Method," on the other hand, is a procedure, a conceptual tool which enables human thinking to perform certain tasks, to accomplish certain goals. In other words, "method" is something humans do.⁷¹

In fact, McCormack does not entirely discard Barth's analogy of faith but includes it in his dialectical theology, calling attention to "the inherently dialectical character of the analogia fidei" which is grounded in the "dialectic of 'veiling and unveiling'!"⁷²

⁶⁸Actualism is the basis of Barth's doctrine of revelation. Actualism implies that revelation takes place through the work of the Holy Spirit who makes possible an "encounter" between God and human beings. Actualism also means that revelation cannot be a human permanent possession but depends upon God's freedom. As such, revelation takes the form of "event." See, CD I/1, 304-332; CD II/1, 257-321; Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, esp. p. 70; George Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. 67-70; Herbert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 1964, 32-37.

⁶⁹Cf. McCormack, Dialectical Theology, 12.

⁷⁰McCormack, Dialectical Theology, 18.

⁷¹McCormack, Dialectical Theology, 19.

⁷²McCormack, Dialectical Theology, 18.

Von Balthasar may be wrong in speaking of a "conversion" in Barth's method since Barth indeed retains the dialectic of divine and human in his mature theology. But Barth's shift of emphasis from the "otherness of God" to the "humanity of God" is effectively an indication of his new emphasis on the analogy of faith, although the dialectical method was not abandoned. McCormack's contention that even the analogy of faith remains dialectical in character is insightful.

McCormack, however, is at pains to demonstrate the possibility of a relationship between time and eternity, God and creature because of the transcendental implications of the dialectical method. Seeking the support of Marquardt, McCormack attempts to show that Barth's dialectical method was not related to a "timeless" theological concept but "was always zeitmässig; that is, it was always directed to a particular situation."⁷³ However, it could be argued that Barth's dialectical method led him to concentrate more on God's transcendence than on his immanence. His dialectical theology did not allow for a God whom humans could really experience in their earthly existence.

It is on this point that Richard H. Roberts sees the failure of Barth's dialectical system.

In so far as [the reconstruction of reality on Barth's theological foundations] remains dialectically transcendent, [it] stays systematically at one remove from the texture of reality as normally experienced.⁷⁴

Thus, Roberts sees the crucial importance of Barth's concentration on the analogy

⁷³McCormack, Dialectical Theology, 26.

⁷⁴Richard H. Roberts, A Theology on Its Way. Essays on Karl Barth (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 36.

of faith. He insists on the inability of a dialectical method to reconcile the finite and the infinite, time and eternity. He says that "in the dialectical phase of Barth's development this overcoming of the antithesis was by the annihilation of time by eternity."⁷⁵ The analogy of faith, on the other hand, is made possible by a Christological synthesis, resulting in "a transformation that has elements of both continuity and discontinuity."⁷⁶ Only a Christological synthesis can establish a relationship between time and eternity, history and the transcendent because

the problem of the identity of "God's time," the time of revelation, with human time, is to be understood Christologically and its solution is directly analogous to that postulated in the doctrine of the hypostatic union.⁷⁷

Thus the possibility of a compatibility of time and eternity, history and the transcendent can be found exclusively Christologically in Jesus as both God and human.

Roberts puts his finger on the key to understanding the notion of unity and continuity between eternity and time, transcendence and history in Barth by referring it to the doctrine of hypostatic union, which he relates directly to Barth's concept of analogy of faith. But this does not annul McCormack's contention that the analogy of faith is an intrinsic part of Barth's dialectical principle. And our contention in this study is that the doctrine of hypostatic union is a solution to the dialectical tension since in this christological synthesis the dialectical antithesis is removed.

Barth attempts to ease the tension by referring to God's "freedom" and "sovereign

⁷⁵Roberts, Theology on its Way, 10.

⁷⁶Roberts, Theology on Its Way, 10.

⁷⁷Roberts, Theology on Its Way, 40.

decisions."⁷⁸ But at the same time he admits the reality of contradiction and paradox in this kind of relation. Barth says that

God is free to ally Himself, with creation, to the spirit as against rebellious nature, but also free to ally Himself with nature in opposition to the undoubtedly more rebellious spirit. God is free to be provoked and to be merciful.⁷⁹

This relationship involving God and creature must be understood in the light of the analogy of faith, but it also occurs within the context of a dialectical tension. This justifies McCormack's argument according to which the analogy of faith is an element within Barth's dialectical method.

However, a question still remains unsettled: it is true that for Barth the hypostatic union is a synthesis of transcendence and history in Christ, and that Jesus's history is the only real history.⁸⁰ It is so because Jesus' history is God's covenant history and the history of the reconciliation of God to humans. According to Barth, this all happens during the parousia which is also the time of reconciliation and the time of the millennium. As such it is also the history of the millennium and that of the Parousia.⁸¹ But not many scholars are convinced that Jesus' history which occurs during the period

⁷⁸CD II\1, 314.

⁷⁹CD II\1, 315.

⁸⁰Cf. CD IV\3.1, 183.

⁸¹Barth's notion of parousia clearly coincides with the amillennialists' understanding of the millennium when Barth speaks of the parousia as the period which covers Christ's first coming, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and Christ's final return. Barth puts the parousia within the framework of Christ's first coming and his final advent, that is, "in the first parousia of the risen Crucified which began on Easter Day, and by virtue of it He is the same then and now, yesterday and to-day, the One who lives, who has come, who is present; and in His final parousia, in which . . . He is the One who will be revealed and come at the end and as the end of all time and history" (CD IV\1, 333).

of the parousia is genuine history in Barth's theology.

E. The Parousia and Jesus's Earthly History

Some scholars doubt that Barth's understanding of the historical Jesus allows for the possibility of God's real involvement in earthly history. We have seen Adrio König's assault upon Barth who, in his judgment, failed to give prominence to Jesus' presence as a historical reality. Unfortunately this has also led König to lose sight of the other dimension of Christ's presence, namely, his spiritual presence. Barth emphasizes this point through his actualistic principles according to which Christ's real presence takes place as an event, as a real encounter between Christ and the believer through the Holy Spirit. In fact there is in Barth an attempt to do justice to both Christ's real presence and his spiritual presence.

John Thompson caught sight of this positive aspect of Barth's view of Christ's parousia. Under the title "The Coming Lord ('Parousia')" he refers to Barth's eschatology and depicts it as "an impressive, balanced and convincing treatment of the subject in contrast to many one-sided modern versions."⁸² Thompson insists that, according to Barth, the Holy Spirit precisely denotes Christ's presence among his people. "He is his presence with his people as the earnest of their inheritance of eternal life, as their sure companion on the way as well as himself being the way."⁸³ Thompson, then, finds Barth's idea of parousia as Christ's presence as a well-balanced presentation of Christ's

⁸²John Thompson, Christ in Perspective. Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth (Edinburgh: The Saint-Andrew Press, 1978), 126.

⁸³Thompson, Christ in Perspective, 130.

presence in history and his spiritual presence.

Unlike König, Hoekema is critical of Barth, not so much with respect to the lack of emphasis on Christ's presence as on the lack of emphasis on Christ's future coming. Hoekema's criticism is here levelled against Barth's "vertical" eschatology which in his judgment connotes a "timeless eschatology." For Hoekema, "timeless eschatology" denotes more "presence" than "future coming." Hoekema is pleased that Barth paid more attention to future eschatology in his later writings and is prepared to accept Barth's concept of parousia as long as Barth holds in balance the present and the future in his eschatology.⁸⁴

When we turn to D. G. Bloesch, it seems that he sees in Barth's eschatology what Hoekema requests. He looks at the concept of parousia as "presence" from the perspective of salvation, that is, as presence of salvation, and says that the "three forms of the return of Jesus Christ" is Barth's "seeking to unite futuristic and realized motifs."⁸⁵ In regard to the realized motifs Bloesch declares that "the great events of the end of the world have already taken place in the resurrection and ascension of Christ." Concerning the futuristic motifs he says that "they have still to take place in history of the community of faith."⁸⁶ Thus, the presence of Christ as presence of salvation has already taken place in the resurrection of Christ, but it also has still to take place in the history of the church. Interestingly, Bloesch expresses this balance between "the already" and "not yet" in Barth,

⁸⁴Cf. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 307-08.

⁸⁵Bloesch, Evangelical Theology, 176.

⁸⁶Bloesch, Evangelical Theology, 176.

using the terms "inaugurated eschatology" and "consummated eschatology,"⁸⁷ terms which are just reminiscent of the theory of the great exponent of amillennialism, Anthony Hoekema.⁸⁸

Barth's concept of parousia is also approved by Colm O'Grady who looks at it from the perspective of the church. For O'Grady, all three stages of the parousia fit perfectly in the concept of eschaton since "each form contains the other two by way of anticipation or recapitulation, as a kind of perichoresis, in analogy with the doctrine of the Trinity."⁸⁹ O'Grady here refers to the parousia as "presence" in a trinitarian sense. The parousia as presence is a "perichoretic" presence of the three persons of the Trinity, the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

O'Grady's view is interesting in view of the important role that the church plays in classic amillennialism. For O'Grady, the church is intimately bound with the parousia in that "the beginning and goal of the coming again of Jesus Christ is also the beginning and goal of the time of the community."⁹⁰ O'Grady definitely echoes the three stages by referring to the three terms "beginning," "goal," and "the coming again" of Jesus Christ. That the "time of the community" is tied up with "the beginning and goal of the coming of Jesus Christ" suggests an identification of the Parousia with the church community. From this we can infer that, if the parousia is the millennium, there is a sense in which

⁸⁷Bloesch, Evangelical Theology, 176.

⁸⁸Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 1.

⁸⁹O'Grady, The Church, 339.

⁹⁰O'Grady, The Church, 339.

the millennium is identified with the church⁹¹ in Barth as it is in the great amillenarians like Augustine and Calvin.

Apart from his attack on some points of Barth's theory of the parousia P. J. Rosato also expresses his approval of this concept from the perspective of pneumatology. For Rosato, Barth is right in including the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the parousia because not only has the parousia taken place in the past and will take place in the future, but it also "is taking place today. . . ." ⁹² Rosato seems to come close to O'Grady's perichoretic view of the parousia by seeing the Holy Spirit in the middle as the link between the first and third stages of the parousia.

Barth's understanding of Christ's parousia or presence in three forms is widely supported by theologians. As a matter of fact, any insistence on Christ's presence as a spiritual ruler on earth denotes an amillennial view of Christ's millennial reign. Christ's presence is emphasized, but it is a spiritual and transcendent, not a physical or immanent-historical presence. But what does it mean to understand the parousia as the transcendent presence of Christ?

F. God's Transcendence and the Parousia

What is the impact of Barth's insistence on the divine transcendence on his doctrine of parousia? Is a transcendent presence of Christ a presence at all?

⁹¹Barth refers to the parousia as "the time in which He [Christ] was and continues to be and ever again will be revealed and active in the community by His Spirit, the power of His accomplished resurrection" (CD IV\1, 318).

⁹²Rosato, The Spirit as Lord, 117.

In fact, Christ's transcendent presence is Barth's theory of actualistic presence, which Barth's critics understand in two different ways, namely, as a "crisis" and as "timeless eschatology." Berkouwer, following Folke Holmström, observes that along with the crisis resulting from time's encounter with eternity, that is, the crisis generated by the human encounter with God in Christ, Barth also sometimes entertained the thought of a parousia in the form of a "timeless" eschatology, that is, a parousia as "a timeless symbol of the endless seriousness of eternity in every existential situation."⁹³ In other words,

there was no end of history in terms of time on a horizontal plane, but only a vertical eschaton marked by the permanent crisis in life and the actual gravity of the nearness of God.⁹⁴

Stadtland also argues along these lines. He starts with the timeless conception of eternity that was characteristic of the thought of the first edition of the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans and describes Barth's concept of parousia as an nunc aeternum ("Eternal now").⁹⁵ Stadtland relates the nunc aeternum to Barth's idea of "supra-temporality" (Überzeitigkeit), which corresponds to the time of the parousia in its three forms, and at the same time interprets it in connection with Barth's actualistic understanding of the encounter between God and humans. He then speaks of a "moment

⁹³G. C. Berkouwer, Return of Christ, 27. See also Folke Holmström, Das eschatologischen Denken der Gegenwart (Gütersloh: Verlag K. Bertelsmann, 1936), 241: "Die Parusie Realität nur als zeitloses Symbol für den unendlichen Ewigkeitsernst in jeder existentiellen Situation besitzt."

⁹⁴Berkouwer, Return of Christ, 27.

⁹⁵Stadtland, Eschatologie, 122: "Barth insistiert darauf, dass nur im existentiellen Geschehen des nunc aeternum, in dem Zeit und Ewigkeit zusammenfallen, die Parusie, die Gegenwart Jesu Christi geschieht."

of eternal now" (der Augenblick des nuc aeternitatis)⁹⁶ which he understands as a timeless encounter, an endlessly repeated vertical phenomenon that cannot be horizontal.

Christ's actualistic and transcendent presence is then characterised by a continuing crisis in human beings. The transcendence is here made evident in the fact that this phenomenon cannot be limited by time which is itself entirely under the sway of eternity. Hence the parousia is earmarked by the subordination of time and history to eternity and the nearness of the kingdom of God.

D. N. Snyder attempted a different approach to this issue in order to do more justice to history by looking at it from the perspective of the link between reconciliation and redemption in Barth's theology. His view does not differ considerably from that of Berkouwer and Stadtland, but he did try to consider Christ's dealing with human beings in a horizontal rather than in a vertical direction. He calls attention to Barth's assertion that in the light of Christ's resurrection and reconciliation as an event under way, there is a sense in which our future redemption is "a concrete real presence." Snyder says that

The presence of the future in the resurrection is the implanting of the new seed of life in the world event at Easter. Thus redemption as the eternalisation of our lives, was really present in the Easter event.⁹⁷

The parousia is here presented as something closely related to the world's history, in a horizontal and not in a vertical line. By "eternalisation" of human life (Verjenseitigung

⁹⁶Stadtland, Eschatologie, 148.

⁹⁷Dale Norman Snyder, Karl Barth's Struggle with Anthropocentric Theology ('S-Gravenhage: Boekhandel Watez, 1966), 196. Snyder is here referring to CD IV3.1, 316.

ihres diesseitigen Lebens)⁹⁸ Barth simply means the certainty of salvation but not humans already made eternal or timeless beings. Snyder's intent is to highlight Barth's focus on immanence instead of an exclusive transcendence.

Robert Jenson also argues along these lines by bringing a corrective to the meaning of the term "timeless eschatology." After a thorough study of Barth's idea of time and eternity, Jenson remarks that when Barth speaks of "a present without future," "of an eternal presentness of God's time,"⁹⁹ he simply means "God's radical temporality." It is only expressed in terms reminiscent of timelessness in order to make "God's temporality radical."¹⁰⁰ Jenson's argument here is consistent with the fact that Barth subsequently discarded the idea of God's timelessness from his theological concept and confined himself to the idea of God's eternity¹⁰¹; but God's eternity is also his temporality in Jesus Christ now.

Another important insight of Jenson's is his calling attention to Barth's position according to which "God's transcendence is his futurity rather than his timelessness."¹⁰² This seems to be a counterpoise of Stadtland's idea of nunc aeternum and his doubt about Barth's future eschatology. Barth indeed lays stress on the crucial importance of the future

⁹⁸KD IV3.1, 363.

⁹⁹His revised translation of KD IV2, 126 (CD IV2, 115)

¹⁰⁰Robert Jenson, God after God (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), 153.

¹⁰¹Barth argues that "we cannot understand God's eternity as pure timelessness." (CD III1, 617).

¹⁰²Jenson, God After God, 171.

return of Christ which he associates with final and "complete revelation."¹⁰³ In this sense it is the future which is decisive and not timelessness.

Thus, here again we see an attempt to make prominent God's "temporality" and "historicality" in the context of the parousia. But what does this mean if Barth is only speaking of history as Geschichte? What is the parousia if it is Geschichte and not Historie?

G. The Parousia as Geschichte

Can we speak of Christ's historical, "effective" presence on earth if we only understand his presence as Geschichte and not Historie? Fred Klooster thinks not. An "encounter-event," he argues, presents us only with a Christ "in the form of a theophany."¹⁰⁴ If Barth then speaks of Christ's presence on earth, he speaks of a "docetic" presence.¹⁰⁵ Geschichte, therefore, distorts the picture of Christ as a historical figure. It presents Christ as a cosmic being who cannot be apprehended by history. Many theologians find Barth's concept of Geschichte far removed from the concept of history by tracing it back to Kant's so-called noumenal realm.¹⁰⁶

D. G. Bloesch, however, opposes this assumption, arguing that Barth derived the

¹⁰³CD IV3.2, 904.

¹⁰⁴Fred H. Klooster, Quests for the Historical Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 37.

¹⁰⁵Klooster, Quests, 40.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Van Til, Christianity and Barthianism (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), esp. 261-62; F. H. Klooster, Quests, 41; Stadtland, Eschatologie, 126-27; Alvin. S. Zerbe, The Karl Barth Theology or The New Transcendentalism (Ohio: Central Publishing House, 1930), 172, 207.

notion of Geschichte from the Bible.

We believe that Barth is here profoundly biblical in his assertion that only faith can discern the supernatural reality and mystery that lie within and behind the historical events related to Jesus' life, death, and rising again.¹⁰⁷

R. Birch Hoyle agrees with Barth and even expresses his gratitude to him for this insight.

Hoyle writes: "We ought to be thankful to Barth for his stiffneckedness on this point when making distinction between 'historical event' and Christian fact."¹⁰⁸

We are here confronted with an argument in defense of Geschichte as the only way to understand biblical stories. This would mean that Barth is not wrong at all in downplaying historical realities and seeking rather to extract their significance. To do justice to Barth's principles we need to acknowledge that he does not deny that a redemptive event really happened in history. He contends, however, that the real geschichtliche significance of these events can be seen only by the eyes of faith. This does not mean that Barth deals with history in an abstract fashion. God's history is viewed as a transcendent history, an "eternal history," that is, as events in eternity which are the decisive factors of Jesus' history. Barth states in his Romans commentary that "there is no history to record, because it only occurs, and occurs eternally."¹⁰⁹ The history between God and the world thus seems to be a history kept secret in heaven to which human beings apparently have no access. We must acknowledge the importance

¹⁰⁷D. G. Bloesch, Jesus is Victor!, 53.

¹⁰⁸R. B. Hoyle, The Teaching of Karl Barth (New York: Charles and Scribners, 1930), 218.

¹⁰⁹Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. from the sixth edition by E. C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 76.

of Barth's insight when he affirms that Christ's eternal history is the presupposition of all subsequent earthly history which took place. Now, this still invites the question, is this a reason to conceive of the resulting earthly history as a history which cannot be recorded or narrated?

At this point Berkouwer calls attention to a change in Barth's attitude to history. According to Berkouwer, Barth recognized his unduly exclusive stress on the "far-sidedness" (Jenseitigkeit) of the kingdom of God and finally lost sight of its imminent coming in history. Barth confesses here that he missed the teleological aspect of history.¹¹⁰ Berkouwer sees Barth's consideration of the reality of the telos, the goal and the end of history, as a way to put an end to "an actual timeless eschaton." In fact, Berkouwer does not advocate a renunciation of Barth's actualistic approach to eschatology. He simply argues that it would be meaningless unless it is also characterized by a teleological aspect, that is, as something moving towards an end and a goal. Berkouwer then suggests that Barth's actualistic principle be re-shaped to become an "actual-teleology."¹¹¹

Berkouwer's suggestion seems to be a good solution to the tension between the vertical and horizontal lines, the transcendent and history, eternity and time in the period of the parousia. Here both the reality of an actualistic encounter with God and history moving to a telos are respected. Berkouwer apparently means that the idea of parousia as

¹¹⁰ Referring to Romans 13:11f. Barth says, "I missed the distinctive feature of the passage, the teleology which it ascribes to time as it moves to a real end." (CD II/1, 635).

¹¹¹ Berkouwer, Return of Christ, 30.

Geschichte need not be discarded, but it must be a Geschichte corresponding to concrete historical events moving towards a telos.

Bloesch agrees that a real shift takes place in Barth's view of history, noting that in Barth's later concept of revelation in history,

the coming of Christ was described no longer in terms of the fulfillment of time in Eternity but the Eternal One meeting us in the future as he has come to us in the past. Barth could even speak of God having time and history within himself.¹¹²

Bloesch suggests that God's history now corresponds to the earthly history moving to an end. And most importantly, Bloesch also points out that Barth was willing to affirm that "world history' is in reality 'Church history.'"¹¹³ On this basis there is a sense in which Barth moved closer to the great amillenarians, Augustine and Calvin.

In fact a mere timeless eschatology would remove Barth far from amillennialism. Amillennialists do not teach a timeless eschaton. Rather, they see the millennium as a limited period between Christ's first coming and his final return and relate its reality to the life of the church and the whole world. This period must be a real history which moves to a real end, which may be called the goal of history.

H. The Goal of History: Christ's Victory over Nothingness

If God's history is moving to a goal, what is that goal? For Barth, God's history is the history of the covenant, the eternal history (Urgeschichte), which is nothing other

¹¹²Bloesch, Jesus is Victor!, 97.

¹¹³Bloesch, Jesus is Victor! 119.

than God's purpose to reconcile sinners with himself.

Robert Jenson sees this history as the story of a battle because created beings, which Barth calls the "outer basis" of the covenant, are threatened by "nothingness," a term that Barth coined to designate the Devil. The battle that God is fighting consists in preserving the creature from falling into nothingness. Bloesch shares this view and says that "Salvation is primarily from the chaos and only secondarily from sin, which is man's succumbing to the abysmal darkness."¹¹⁴

In Barth's theology, Christ's victory is expressed in terms of victory over "nothingness," that is, the Devil. The great chapter on the millennium, Revelation 20, speaks of the "binding of Satan" as Christ's victory over the Devil. Do scholars understand Barth's idea of Christ's defeat of nothingness and the notion of the "binding of Satan" as the same concept?

Robert Jenson complained about the ambiguity in Barth's use of the term "nothingness" (das Nichtige).¹¹⁵ G. Wingren's analysis of this concept led him to the conclusion that "there is no devil in Barth's theology."¹¹⁶ Herbert Hartwell responded by arguing that "it does exist in a most terrifying and menacing manner" as revealed in the agony of the cross.¹¹⁷ Arthur C. Cochrane observes that the term das Nichtige may be only used to denote the "chaos," "sin," the "devil," and the "demons." "Used in any

¹¹⁴Bloesch, Jesus is Victor!, 151, n.33

¹¹⁵Jenson, Alpha and Omega, 36-37

¹¹⁶Wingren, Theology in Conflict (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), 25.

¹¹⁷Hartwell, Theology of Barth, 120.

other way, it is too strong, too sharp."¹¹⁸

The reality of Satan expressed in terms of "nothingness" is indeed central to Barth's theology. He even conceives of God's history as nothing other than the history of his victory over the principalities and powers through Jesus Christ. However, we encounter some difficulties in Barth's understanding of the devil since he regards him as an adversary who has been defeated as early as the creation of the world and who does not exist as a personal being. How can this be related to the binding of Satan according to Rev. 20:3?

Bloesch, who adopts an amillennial interpretation of the binding of Satan,¹¹⁹ attempts to set forth the reason why Barth came to adopt this view. Here is a part of his explanation:

Barth was uncompromising in his fidelity to the message of the gospel as disclosed in Holy Scripture, but in his attempt to make this message intelligible to a post-Christian age, he had to employ insights and symbols drawn from the present as well as the past . . . as a truly modern man he could not avoid the infiltration of various themes and concerns of the culture into his theology; and this means that certain truths of the biblical revelation became necessarily overshadowed by other truths, which for the most part are also fully biblical but more in accord with the spirit of the times or the wisdom of the recent past . . . His denial of the devil as a personal being signif[ies] a cultural intrusion into a genuinely biblical perspective.¹²⁰

Bloesch here detects a blend of two incompatible elements in Barth's demonology.

¹¹⁸Cf. Otto Weber, Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, vol. I, trans. A. C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), 187, n. 1.

¹¹⁹For Bloesch "Satan's binding means his inability to deceive the nations, to prevent the Gospel from being proclaimed with power and efficacy to the nations." (Evangelical Theology, vol. II, 195)

¹²⁰Bloesch, Jesus is Victor!, 19-20.

Barth's demonology is an eclectic theology including "cultural intrusion," and "genuine biblical perspective." "By genuine biblical perspective" Bloesch apparently means that apart from Barth's denial of a personal being to the Devil, which actually arose from his intention to make the reality of the Devil intelligible to modern minds, Barth's theory of Satan is more or less in harmony with the teaching of the Bible.

Jenson echoes not only the teaching of Revelation 20:3 but especially the amillennial theory of the binding of Satan when he says that, according to Barth, "The sole recourse of nihilism, post christum, is the attempt to hinder our knowledge of our reconciliation with God, to create an illusion."¹²¹ This idea brings Barth very close to the amillennial tradition, which interprets the binding of Satan as God's act of restraining Satan in his evil intention to hinder the spread of the Gospel.

I. Conclusion

The purpose of this survey of opinion is to see if scholars assess Barth's eschatology from an amillennial perspective, whether this be done explicitly or implicitly. We have seen that theologians indeed discuss Barth's eschatological principles against the prominent features of amillennialism: the endeavor to hold transcendence and history in balance; the view of the millennium as salvation history and the present church age; and the battle against Satan who attempts to thwart the propagation of the gospel and people's acceptance of Christ as their Lord and King.

The opinion is divided with respect to Barth's handling of the relationship existing

¹²¹Robert H. Jenson, Alpha and Omega. A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 106.

between transcendence and history, but the development in Barth's eschatology exhibits a serious attempt to do justice to the crucial role played by history in the history of salvation. There is no denial of Barth's identification of his notion of parousia with the church age, that is, with the amillennial view of the millennium. Finally, it is suggested that the amillennial idea of Satan being bound so that he cannot prevent the preaching of the Gospel holds an important place in Barth's concept of nothingness.

Scholars apparently did not find the necessity of affirming explicitly that Barth is an amillennial thinker. Yet, theologians like Donald Bloesch and Adrio König seem to take for granted Barth's being an amillennialist. Additionally, scholars like R. Birch Hoyle argues that there is no point labelling Barth and the other Barthian theologians such as Emil Brunner and Eduard Thurneysen as premillennialists. Hoyle writes,

It should be observed that "eschatological" is never used by these writers in the Pre-millennial sense of the term; nor do they think the doctrine of the Lord's return as historical curiosity tacked on the Gospel, as a survival of moods in late Judaism, probably derived from Persian sources.¹²²

Is Barth an amillennial theologian? This study purports to answer positively this question after a comparison of the amillennial tradition and Barth's eschatology.

¹²²Hoyle, Teaching of Barth, 219.

CHAPTER II

TRANSCENDENCE AND HISTORY IN THE AMILLENNIAL TRADITION

This chapter proposes to show that the essence of the millennium, according to the amillennial tradition, resides in the relation between the transcendent and historical aspects. This means that the real nature of the millennium can be disclosed through a systematic analysis of these two realities which constitute its structure. That the millennium involves both historical and transcendent aspects means that it does take place in time and history and that it is also a heavenly reality beyond history. Special attention will be paid throughout this survey to Augustine and Calvin since they are the key traditional sources of the amillennial doctrine. Moreover, Karl Barth is indebted to them for his theology in general and his eschatology in particular. Our analysis will not be confined only to Augustine and Calvin, however, but will include contemporary amillennial thinkers such Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos, and Anthony Hoekema. We will also refer to the later Jonathan Edwards¹ as a postmillennialist who moved to

¹In his article "America as Kingdom" (in Religion and Political Society, ed. J. Moltmann [New York: Harper & Row, 1970]) M. Darrol Bryant shows convincingly that Edwards moved increasingly from postmillennialism to the amillennial posture. Edwards' conversion began to emerge as he now "affirms the priority of divine initiative over human efforts" (65) to change the world. In Bryant's view the change in Edwards' theology was generated by the discovery of Augustine (86). Instead of insisting on a "golden age" which would be ushered in within human history, Edwards now looked into a real fulfillment of the covenant between God and his people beyond history (85).

amillennialism and because of his view of history as a "history of redemption" in which both the transcendent and historical dimensions of the millennium are considered.

But first, let us briefly consider the criticism leveled against the amillennial tradition.

A. The Charge against Amillennialism of Spiritualizing

Briefly stated, amillennialism is charged by its critics with completely distorting the millennial concept by de-eschatologizing its apocalyptic aspects and spiritualizing its meaning. The former may be viewed as a consequence of the latter, which means that "spiritualizing" is regarded as the root of the evil.

When the opponents of amillennialism saddle its exegetical method with the label of "spiritualizing," they do so in the conviction that amillennialism fails to do justice to the historical, earthly dimensions of Christ's future millennial reign. The rule of Christ is judged to be only transcendental in amillennialism. Thus "spiritualizing" has become the term used to characterize the amillennial interpretation of Christ's kingship, the prophecies concerning the nation of Israel and the Davidic kingdom, the apocalyptic literature, the covenants, the binding of Satan during the millennium, the teaching of the book of Revelation concerning the resurrection of the dead, the intermediate state, and the future apocalyptic cataclysm foretold in the New Testament. Each of these dimensions requires further clarification, so let us take them one by one.

Finally Bryant indicates that "Edwards grew to be a theologian of the glory of God" (86), that is, to be more Augustinian and Calvinist.

1. Spiritualizing Christ's Kingship

The question is asked of amillennialism whether Christ's kingship over the world in its social and political dimensions is real if his kingdom is spiritualized. To the amillennial spiritualizing and transcendental method of interpretation, John F. Walvoord, the great representative of dispensational premillennialism, opposes the so-called "'grammatical-historical' literal interpretation"² in which the focus is on the expectation of a literal and historical fulfillment of all biblical prophecies. Premillennialists believe that the restoration of the nation of Israel will be followed by the restoration of the Davidic reign in Jerusalem by Christ who will literally set up his throne and will visibly rule in the same location during the millennium.

Premillennialists then ask amillennialists, what kind of millennial reign they teach if it only consists in a spiritual reign. Is Christ really directly involved in the social and political life of this world, or does his authority simply hover above the earth? The charge seems to be justified since even amillennialists are divided among themselves on the question of Christ's kingship. While Augustine and Calvin argued for both an earthly and heavenly millennial reign of Christ, some modern amillennial thinkers, such as Anthony Hoekema,³ identify the millennial reign of the saints exclusively with the intermediate state.

This is not a simple disagreement about location. It is the nature of the amillennial

²John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Findlay, Ohio: Durham Publishing Co., 1959), 59.

³A. A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), esp. 233.

millennium itself which is at issue: is it then a historical reality or purely a heavenly and transcendental reality? From this Charles L. Feinberg comes to the conclusion that amillennialism is "far from being a unified system or scheme of eschatology."⁴

2. Spiritualizing the Covenant

In the dispensationalists' opinion, amillennialists do not honor the close connection between the prophecies concerning Israel, the Davidic dynasty, and Christ's millennial reign because of their error in the interpretation of the covenant. In amillennialism, they charge, the covenant theology which is centered in the covenant of grace loses sight of the strong contrast between law and grace.

For Feinberg, the amillennial doctrine of grace is so spiritualized that "in spite of the positive and definitive distinctions between the principles of law and grace, amillennialists hopelessly mix and confuse them."⁵ Feinberg states that in the premillennial system "law corresponds to the dispensation of the law, grace corresponds to the dispensation of grace. There is no continuity between the law and grace."⁶

Spiritualizing is here identified as a factor of confusion of irreconcilable entities. This means that it is the amillennial theological system itself which is questionable. The biblical history is governed by different dispensations, which amillennialists are said to confuse miserably by mixing them in the covenant of grace. This results in the conviction

⁴Charles L. Feinberg, Millennium; The Two Major Views: The Premillennial and Amillennial Systems of Biblical Interpretations Analyzed and Compared, revised edition (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 102.

⁵Feinberg, Millennialism, 218.

⁶Feinberg, Millennialism, 199.

that Israel has been superseded by the church and that the place of Israel in salvation history is entirely overlooked, if not eliminated.

3. Spiritualizing the Binding of Satan

Premillennialists find the amillennial spiritualizing hermeneutic climaxing in their interpretation of the binding of Satan. They do not see in what way Satan can be said to be bound today if he still continues to inflict human beings with all kinds of evil. Even some amillennialists such as G. C. Berkouwer wonder whether it really makes sense to assume that Satan is bound if he is still so active in his evil deeds.⁷

The greatest contemporary spokesman of historic premillennialism, George E. Ladd, sharply distinguishes between the binding of Satan achieved in Jesus' ministry and the one narrated in Rev. 20:1, arguing that "the former meant the breaking of the power of Satan that individual men and women might be delivered from his control. The latter binding meant that he should deceive the nations no more."⁸

Premillennialists maintain that, strictly speaking, this world is not yet the kingdom of Christ. This world is still under the rule of Satan, who will not be bound until Christ returns. So premillennialists contrast the present kingdom of this world with Christ's millennial kingdom which will not be established until Christ's second coming.

⁷G. C. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ, trans. J. van Oosterom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 305-07.

⁸G. E. Ladd, "Historic Premillennial Response," in The Meaning of the Millennium, ed. R. G. Clouse (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 189.

4. Spiritualizing the "First Resurrection"

Amillennialists refuse to follow the premillennialists in interpreting the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5 as a reference to a bodily resurrection but spiritualize its meaning. However, premillennialists believe they have discovered a weakness in amillennialism when amillennialists differ widely over the application of this concept. Does it refer to the regeneration of the souls of living believers, as Augustine⁹ and Calvin¹⁰ argue? Or does it refer only to the souls of the departed believers who reign with Christ in heaven during the intermediate state?

Luther's doctrine of "soul-sleep" is not a solution since it leaves unanswered the question concerning the way the believers reign with Christ according to Revelation 20:4. However, it was taken over by the Lutheran Paul Althaus to launch a violent attack against the amillennial doctrine of intermediate state. Althaus' position is summarized in his statement: "die orthodoxe Lehre vom Zwischenzustande verkennt die Bedeutung des Todes, der Leiblichkeit, der Auferstehung, des Gerichtes."¹¹ Althaus means that the reality of death, the impossibility of human survival without a body, the crucial

⁹Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans, XX, 6, trans. Henry Bettenson (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1972).

¹⁰ Calvin followed Augustine in his exegesis of the two resurrections and Quistorp is quick to associate it with spiritualizing: "The dual resurrection of Rev. 20:5ff. is, according to Calvin's exegesis which again is plainly a spiritual one, on the one hand the spiritual resurrection of the soul in regeneration, on the other, the resurrection of the flesh at the second coming" (H. Quistorp, Calvin's Doctrine of the Last things, trans. Harold Knight [London: Lutterworth Press, 1955], 161).

¹¹Cf. Paul Althaus, Die Letzen Dinge (Gütersloh: Carl Bertelsmann Verlag: 1957), 154-55: "The orthodox doctrine of intermediate state does not do justice to the significance of death, the body, the resurrection, and judgment."

importance of the resurrection, and the reality of judgment at the end-time all rule out the possibility of the intermediate state. In fact, Althaus takes the last day, the time of the general resurrection as his linchpin, and then directs his attention to death, and from death to the consummation and the final restoration of all things¹² without looking into what may happen in-between. He is satisfied with assuming that the soul sleeps until Christ returns. Then Althaus turns to the Augustinian and Calvinist doctrine of the separation of the soul and the body and assails it as a late Jewish teaching, reflecting a Platonic, dualistic, and individualistic principle of Greek eschatology.¹³

Are these charges a fair criticism of amillennialism? Let us respond to them by taking a closer look at the amillennial doctrine.

B. The Amillennial Interpretation of the Millennium

In fact, a spiritualizing method does not constitute the main difference between premillennialism and amillennialism since nondispensational premillennialism also resorts to this principle in its interpretation of some prophetic passages of the Old Testament. The misunderstanding between these two schools of thought is to be found elsewhere. It is rooted in their different views of the relationship between the church and Christ's millennial reign.

¹²Althaus, Letzen Dinge, 158: "Es bleibt für uns bei dem Doppelten: dass wir jenseits des Todes bei Christus zu sein hoffen dürfen - und dass wir zugleich ausschauen auf das Ende der Geschichte, den Jüngsten Tag, der das Reich bringt, Gemeinde vollendet, die Schöpfung und all Leiblichkeit erlöst."

¹³Althaus, Letzen Dinge, 157: "Die aus dem Spätjudentum überkommene Vorstellung eines Zwischenzustandes ist der Schlupfwinkel für den Platonismus, für den Dualismus und Individualismus der hellenistischen Eschatologie geworden und geblieben."

Let us first proceed to formulate a brief response to the charge of spiritualizing before we take a look at the way amillennialism differs from its premillennialist opponent in its basic principles.

1. A Spiritualizing Hermeneutic

Amillennialists do not deny that "spiritualizing" is one of the distinctive features of their eschatology and marks it off from the other millennial views. But it is incorrect to assume that amillennialists give all prophecies only a spiritual sense. Neither do amillennialists interpret all prophecies spiritually, nor do they "spiritualize" only prophecy while understanding the rest of Scripture in a literal sense.

Besides, to say that all premillennialists are adamant in adopting a purely literal interpretation of scriptural prophecy is not true. Some premillennial scholars, mainly among the historic premillennialists,¹⁴ acknowledge the necessity of using a spiritualizing method to unpack the meaning of some Old Testament prophecies¹⁵ and apocalyptic literature. The main point on which premillennialists and amillennialists cannot agree is the interpretation of Revelation 20. In this context premillennialists adopt Walvoord's formula "'grammatical-historical' literal interpretation," while amillennialists argue for a

¹⁴The historic premillennialist George E. Ladd, for example, dissociates himself from the dispensationalists in their denial of the identification of Israel with the church. Cf. "Historic Premillennialism" in The Meaning of the Millennium, 20.

¹⁵Ladd, for example, rejects the dispensationalists' literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies (see, Meaning of the Millennium, 20-29). For instance, in his interpretation of Isaiah 53 Ladd says: "Here is an utterly different picture. The Messiah is to rule; he is to crush evil; he is to slay the wicked. How can such a victorious ruler be at the same time the meek and lowly one who pours out his soul in death (Is. 53:12)?" (22).

spiritual sense, knowing that the language of the book of Revelation is symbolic and figurative.

How can we then define the amillenarian interpretive method? Floyd Hamilton has provided us with the fundamental principles of the amillennial approach to biblical figurative language when he urges that

... the clearest New Testament passages in nonsymbolic books are to be the norm for the interpretation of prophecy, rather than obscure or partial revelations contained in the Old Testament.¹⁶

Then he adds that we must also "accept the clear and plain parts of Scripture as a basis for getting the true meaning of the more difficult parts of Scripture."¹⁷ Hamilton has in mind the biblical passages like Revelation 20 in this second statement. Of course, this theory is far from being fully satisfactory, but it means at least that any temptation to work out a theological construct from an unclear or unique part of Scripture should be avoided.

In fact, the premillennial and especially dispensational literal hermeneutic is only an exaggerated and abused sense of history. All prophecies and symbolism in the Scriptures are pressed to yield a fulfillment in history. As far as amillennialists are concerned they are prepared to apply literal hermeneutic when they find it appropriate. But they find spiritualizing more appropriate in connection with the prophecies and the apocalyptic literature. The former dispensationalist Stanley J. Grenz, who later on came

¹⁶Floyd E. Hamilton, The Basis of Millennial Faith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 53.

¹⁷Hamilton, Millennial Faith, 53-54.

to embrace amillennialism, finds the strength of amillennial principles on this point. He writes:

Amillennialists are correct in finding the general charge of inappropriate spiritualizing wide of the mark. There seems to be no overriding categorical reason to interpret the symbols of the text in accordance with their literal meanings. Amillennialist exegetes are quick to note that all interpretations of prophecy and apocalyptic literature must by necessity be nonliteral at points.¹⁸

Grenz here puts his finger on the basic principles of the amillennial exegetical method. Amillennialists are by no means dogmatic about spiritualizing. A low evaluation of history is not included in its principles. Instead amillennialists are concerned about holding a good balance between the historical and the transcendent, the earthly and the spiritual realities in the millennium, and show that there is effectively more continuity than discontinuity between these two concepts.

Now there are some other factors of difference which lie in the background and which we cannot ignore. Three of them appear to be the most prominent. These are, first, the Christian background of amillennialism and the Judaic background of premillennialism, second, the millennium as a reality going on now both in heaven and on earth, and, third, the amillennial concept of the relation between the church and Christ's kingdom. Let us now see these points in more detail.

2. The Amillennial Background

Amillennialism distinguishes itself as "the historic Christian teaching, whereas premillennialism has adopted the historic judaic teaching." R. G. Currell and E. B.

¹⁸Stanley J. Grenz, The Millennial Maze (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 167.

Hurbert came to this conclusion after tracing the history of amillennialism back to the apostolic and church fathers in The Ruler of the King of the Earth.¹⁹ Indeed, the fundamental difference between amillennialism and premillennialism lies in this fact. While amillennialists are preoccupied with salvation history, the restoration of creation after the fall, and the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God, premillennialists focus their attention on a future reign of Christ on earth which will accompany the restoration of the national Israel in Palestine. What results from these two divergent theories is the amillennial association of the millennium with a spiritual kingdom and with the church, and the premillennial view of millennium as a future, historical and earthly kingdom with a visible throne of Christ in Jerusalem.

The premillennial concept of the millennium rests on the Jewish apocalyptic and messianic hope for the future. This chiliastic teaching was already the object of criticism in the writings of some early church fathers,²⁰ but Augustine was the one who transferred the millennium from a Jewish background to a Christian background as he found the church to be the foundation of the millennial concept.²¹ For this, Augustine eliminated all apocalyptic and revolutionary aspects from the millennial expectations and eschatological visions of the church and presented all realities pertaining to the

¹⁹R. G. Currell and E. P. Hurburt, The Ruler of the King on the Earth A Clear Look at Amillennialism for the Lay Person (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1982), 14. See also Gary DeMar, The Debate over Christian Reconstruction (Texas: Dominion Press, Atlanta: American Vision Press, 1988), 96-97.

²⁰Apostolic and church fathers like Barnabas, Polycarp, and Origen rejected chiliasm.

²¹Cf. City of God, XX, 6-15.

millennium as something intimately bound with the history of the church. The millennium is then a phenomenon inextricably connected with the process of history and a reality unfolding in the present rather than something to be expected in the future.

That the millennium coincides with church history does not mean that the millennium is purely a historical concept. We have just mentioned above the dual aspect of the millennium: it is temporal and historical in relation to the church on earth; it is eternal and transcendent in relation to Christ's throne now in heaven. And most importantly, the earthly millennium itself, as the church age, is at the same time a historical and an eschatological concept. For amillennialists, the millennium as the period from Christ's first coming onward is already the eschaton. This assertion is well-grounded in the teaching of Scripture which speaks of "the last days" (Acts 2:17) and is emphasized in Calvin's theology. Calvin insists that Christ's death on the cross, his resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit have inaugurated the last times. The renovation of the church which began with Christ's coming is the hallmark of the inception of the eschatological era.²²

The interadvent period is already the eschaton, even though it is still qualified by the tension between the "already" and the "not-yet," as we still await the coming of the state of blessedness at the consummation of the kingdom. We may say that the amillennial view of the millennium is at the same time a historical and an eschatological

²²"Now by the last days, or the fullness of time," said Calvin, "is meant the stable condition of the Church through the manifestation of Christ" (Comm. on Acts 2:17, in Calvin's Commentaries on The Acts of the Apostles 1-13, trans. John W. Frazer and W. G. J. McDonald [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 56).

millennium. In other words, history and eschatology are united in the millennium.²³

Amillennialism differs markedly from premillennialism on this concept of the unity of history and the eschatology. Unlike the dispensationalists, premillennialists, such as G. E. Ladd, seem to follow amillennialism in the view that the eschaton has already begun. Ladd makes it clear that "Christ began his Messianic reign at his resurrection-ascension."²⁴ Here Ladd sounds like an amillennialist who understands the millennium as a historical reality going on now on earth and as well as in heaven. Now he thinks that, although the millennium has already begun, it has nothing to do with history and the earth for the time being. It is only something which takes place in heaven now. The millennium, he says, "is a spiritual reign in heaven which has already been inaugurated."²⁵ Ladd's view here does not do justice to the close relationship between history and eschatology within the millennium.

This, however, is not only a misunderstanding between amillennialism and premillennialism, it is also an unsettled question within amillennialism itself. Amillennialists disagree about Christ's millennial reign is a purely heavenly one or there is an earthly millennial reign of Christ in relation to the church. Some amillennial thinkers such as A. Hoekema, as we have mentioned above, argue only for the second alternative,

²³Hendrikus Berkhof seems to affirm the same thing when he says that "Through Jesus (not only in his opinion, but particularly through his death and resurrection) the eschaton becomes more extensive, and takes on the form of history" (Christ and the Meaning of History, trans. Lambertus Buurman [Virginia: John Knox Press, 1966], 77-78).

²⁴G. E. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in The Meaning of the Millennium, 39.

²⁵Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism" in Meaning of the Millennium, 30.

but this study argues that the present millennium is both an earthly and a heavenly reality.

Let us first clear up this matter.

3. Christ's Millennial Reign Both within and beyond History

The issue concerning the location of Christ's millennial reign arises from the different interpretations of the meaning of the "first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5). Augustine's interpretation of the "first resurrection" as the regeneration of the believer who "comes to life again from the death of sin"²⁶ has been dominant among amillennialists, but amillennialist Oswald Allis notes that Duesterdieck (1859) and Kliefoth (1874) challenged Augustine's teaching and associated the millennium with the intermediate state, as "the blessed state of the saints in heaven."²⁷ This view was also emphasized by B. B. Warfield²⁸ and then taken over by Hoekema.²⁹

Hoekema thus rejects Augustine's understanding of the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:6 as a spiritual rebirth of the Christians³⁰ and argues that it must be interpreted only in the sense of the intermediate state. If we add the premillennialists'

²⁶City of God, XX, 9.

²⁷O. T. Allis, Prophecy and the Church (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), 5.

²⁸B. B. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," Biblical Doctrines (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 653.

²⁹See also, James A. Hughes, "Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium," Westminster Theological Journal 35/3 (Spring 1973): 288; Arthur H. Lewis, The Dark Side of the Millennium (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 54-59.

³⁰Cf. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 233, n.8.

contention that the "first resurrection" means the resurrection of the body, we see how widely scholars differ over this question, and each view has some credibility.

At first glance, the interpretation of the first resurrection as referring to the intermediate state fits with the reference to the "souls" who reign with Christ in heaven. But premillennialists counter that the idea of resurrection is never given the meaning of survival of the soul after death, but always means bodily resurrection. That "first resurrection" could mean the intermediate state can be inferred from the idea of the "souls" of the martyrs which reign with Christ but this equation is never seen elsewhere in the Bible. Augustine's idea that the first resurrection refers to the regeneration of the believer's soul appears to be less likely since the idea of regeneration appears to be outside the scope of Revelation 20. However, Augustine's view does gain plausibility if the apostle John is considered to be the writer of the book of Revelation since his Gospel refers to the first resurrection as spiritual regeneration: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son and those who hear will live" (Jn 5:25). Augustine's view is also attested to by Paul who declares that "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6).³¹ Additionally, it is very significant that in contrast to Hoekema's one-sided view of the intermediate state, Augustine has both an earthly and a heavenly millennial reign of Christ. Augustine chose Revelation 14:13, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on" to account for the reign of Christ with the departed saints

³¹It is highly significant that the premillennialist George Ladd tends to accept Augustine's idea of spiritual regeneration on the basis of these verses but rejects totally Hoekema's position. See, Meaning of the Millennium, 35-38, 190.

now in heaven.³² It is also interesting to note that Augustine judges that the martyrs and the departed saints together participate in Christ's millennial reign. Regarding the martyrs, Augustine says in connection with Revelation 14:13 that "they all who have to contend even to death for the truth, themselves principally reign after death." Then Augustine turns to the deceased believers and says in relation to the same verse: "but, taking the part of the whole, we understand the words of all others who belong to the Church, which is the kingdom of Christ."³³

Augustine could come to this conclusion because his exegesis covers the whole Scripture. Hoekema tried to confine his analysis to the book of Revelation, but he finally stumbles over the limitations of this part of Scripture. In the end, he is compelled to confess agnosticism with regard to the state of the believers who are still living on earth. He declares that he has nothing to say concerning the bearing of Christ's millennial reign on the believers who are still on earth because

Nothing is said in verses 4-6 about the earth. . . . Nothing is said here about believers who are still on earth during this millennial reign---the vision deals exclusively with believers who have died.³⁴

That there is nothing to say about the "earth" and about the "believers" amounts to saying that there is nothing to say about the church, which is a potentially serious omission in Hoekema's millennial principles. If Hoekema were faithful to his restricted exegetical principle he would rather say that nothing is said about the believers who have

³²The City of God, XX, 9, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

³³City of God, XX, 9.

³⁴Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 235.

died since the vision deals exclusively with the martyrs, "the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus" (v. 4).

Many exegetes attempt to extend the idea of martyrs to all believers who died in their faith, but this interpretation seems somewhat forced. Others find two groups of people among those who participate in the heavenly millennial reign: The martyrs and those who did not worship the beasts.³⁵ But the reading of this verse does not seem to mention the presence of the ordinary believers alongside the martyrs when it says: "And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands." The amillenarian James A. Hughes concludes that "most likely [there] is only one,"³⁶ namely, the martyrs.

If we ought to include all believers in the list of those who reign with Christ, we cannot do this with reference to Revelation 20 or the book of Revelation alone, but with reference to the whole New Testament. In the light of the New Testament, Christ's reign embraces the martyrs and the departed saints in heaven, the church on earth, and even the whole world.

Hoekema's interpretive method is problematic because he was unable to relate the church to Christ's millennial reign as Christ's earthly kingdom. One is quite surprised when Hoekema refuses to speak of Christ's millennial reign as present on earth now

³⁵See, for example, W. Hendriksen, More than Conquerors, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1940), 232.

³⁶Hughes, "Revelation 20:4-6," 289.

spiritually, as a reign through the church, although he insists that

the kingdom of God was founded by Christ at the time of his sojourn on earth, is operative in history now and is destined to be revealed in its fullness in the life to come. [Amillennialists] understand the kingdom of God to be the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ.³⁷

We understand that Hoekema's primary concern is to object to premillennialism which teaches that the earthly Jerusalem will be the seat for Christ's millennial kingdom after the parousia. But this unfortunately also led him to ignore the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies and the millennium in the church, a view which finds support in Augustine, in Calvin, and in contemporary amillennial theologians such as Geerhardus Vos. In the chapter titled "The Second Coming of Christ and the Millennium" in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, Vos deals with the millennial question and holds that the kingdom of Christ is now present on earth but it is ruled from heaven.

The kingdom of Christ, which closes at "the end," takes its beginning at the resurrection of Christ and not with an alleged intermediate coming. It is the reign of Christ now being exercised from heaven, in which he reduces all enemies to subjection.³⁸

Christ now reigns on earth by ruling from heaven. He reigns with the departed saints, but he also reigns through the church, that is, through the Christians. Hamilton refers us to some verses from the New Testament which speak explicitly of the Christians reigning now with Christ. Romans 5: 17, for example, says: "Much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life, through the

³⁷Hoekema, Meaning of the Millennium, 178.
(Emphasis added).

³⁸G. Vos, Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 421.

one, even Jesus Christ"; in the same way 2 Peter also says: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."³⁹ From this perspective, Augustine is right in contending that the millennial reign of Christ is not only a heavenly reality but also an earthly reality now.

Amillennialism is not one-sided in its conception of the millennium. It is both earthly and heavenly, historical and transcendent, as it reflects the union of the believers still living on earth and those departed in heaven with the ascended Christ, a union which cannot be interrupted by death.

4. Union with Christ in Life and in Death

For all their disagreement in regard to the heavenly and earthly aspects of the millennium, not many amillennialists deny that the "first resurrection"⁴⁰ in Rev. 20:5 may be also understood in the sense of the intermediate state. It is very unfortunate that the greatest opponents of the intermediate state are to be found among the Lutheran theologians. We have referred earlier to Paul Althaus' rejection of the doctrine of the intermediate state under pretext of warding off the intrusion into the Christian doctrine of the Platonic idea of the survival of a bodiless soul after death. Then, he adduces some other reasons such as the importance of the body for human life, the seriousness of death,

³⁹For the other examples see, Hamilton, Millennial Faith, 133-34.

⁴⁰For the interpretation of this phrase as the intermediate state, I think that James A. Hughes' exegesis is the most accurate. "They lived" (ἐζήσαν) cannot refer to a bodily resurrection and cannot be rendered "they came to life" since for the aorist is construed as a constative (or historical) but not ingressive. Thus, "the first resurrection is the soul's being raised from earth to be in heaven, the effect of which is the living and reigning with Christ a thousand years" ("Revelation 20:4-6," 290-91).

the truth of the resurrection, and the significance of the final judgment. And most importantly, Althaus also argues that the doctrine of the intermediate state, which presupposes an anticipation of the state of blessedness, renders the Last Day obsolete.⁴¹

In reply to Althaus let us first take the case of the body. Althaus looks at the significance of the body from a philosophical and not from a biblical point of view. The Bible never says that our body is required for our union with Christ. What the Bible emphasizes is the fact that our separation from the body enhances our union with the Lord:

as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord . . . We are confident . . . and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6).

The Bible insists that while we are still in the flesh we are already "in Christ" now as a "new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17; see also, Titus 3:5). Christ is now, of course, in heaven, but Vos rightly argues that to be "in the Spirit" and to be "in Christ" are exactly the same thing,⁴² so we are indeed "in Christ" while we are still on earth. But the separation of our soul from the body will bring us closer to the Lord for a life in union with Christ between our death and the resurrection. John W. Cooper lays stress on this point, saying that

If to be absent from the body for me is to be with the Lord---still "in Christ" and "living together with him" as I am already now, then I must exist between my death and the resurrection. And I must be able to enjoy fellowship with Christ in some way, and probably also communion with the saints who have died, since

⁴¹See above, 52-53.

⁴²G. Vos, Pauline Eschatology (Princeton: University Press, 1930), 166.

being in Christ is a corporate reality.⁴³

The thrust of this argument is that there is a continuity between the life of the Christians in the body on earth and the life of the Christians as bodiless souls in heaven. There is a continuity between the life of the Christians in Christ's earthly millennial reign and the life of the Christians after death in Christ's heavenly millennial reign.

Althaus is right in stressing the seriousness of death, but the Bible also emphasizes the seriousness of Christ's redemption: we have "crossed over from death to life" (Jn. 5:24). Life here not only means the interim state but also eternal life. Neither do the Christians fear judgment, as Althaus assumes, since "we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense---Jesus Christ the righteous one" (I Jn. 2:1). The amillennial understanding of the millennium does not allow for any interruption in the union of the believers with Christ whether they are still living or dead. There is no room for Althaus' idea of "soul-sleep" if believers are reigning with Christ while they are on earth and continue in that activity during the intermediate state.

What Paul means by the idea of falling asleep in relation to death remains a thorny question facing biblical scholars. But since Paul calls Christ "the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20; see also 1 Thess. 4:14) it is plausible to consider the union with Christ as the only key for a full grasp of this concept. By "those who have fallen asleep" Paul has in mind the believers only. In this connection Karel

⁴³John W. Cooper, Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 177.

Hanhart points out that "their condition is bound up with Christ who rose from the dead."⁴⁴ This means that the state of the believers who have fallen asleep is to be viewed in relation to Christ who has risen from the dead and who has destroyed the power of death, but not in relation to death itself. If Christ is alive we can assert for certain that "those who have fallen asleep in Christ" must also be alive. Bavinck emphasizes this point saying that "in the fellowship with God, through Christ our Lord, death is no longer death."⁴⁵ This accounts for the presence of living souls who reign with Christ now in heaven. For "it is that the believers upon death are immediately taken up with Christ in heaven in their souls."⁴⁶

Althaus exaggerates the Platonic background of the notion of the soul's survival after death since both Augustine and Calvin hold that the life of the soul after death depends entirely on God's power. The death of the soul, Augustine argues, "takes place when God forsakes it."⁴⁷ Calvin writes in a similar vein: "If you take away the power of God which is communicated to the soul of man, it will instantly fade away."⁴⁸ Union with God through Christ is the foundation of the amillennial doctrine of the intermediate state, rather than the Greek philosophy of the immortality of the soul.

⁴⁴Karel Hanhart, The Intermediate State in the New Testament (Franeker: Wever, 1966), 110.

⁴⁵Bavinck, Our Reasonable Faith, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 557.

⁴⁶Bavinck, Reasonable Faith, 557.

⁴⁷Confessions, XIII, 2.

⁴⁸Calvin's Commentaries, vol. XXI, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 167.

We need not speculate on the kind of life that the saints with Christ in heaven may live since the biblical data do not allow us to fully explore this question. But much may be said concerning Christ's earthly millennial kingdom and its relation to the church.

5. The Church as Christ's Millennial Kingdom

We have noted earlier that the kingdom has already come to earth in the person and work of Christ. How is this kingdom related to the church that Christ promised to "build?" A clear understanding of the link between the church and the kingdom is crucial for a full grasp of the amillennial view of the millennium.

Jesus made a clear pronouncement on the future building of his church along with an allusion to the presence of his kingdom in Matthew 16:18-19: "on this rock I will build my church . . . I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." In this passage the messiahship of Christ was confessed for the first time, and interestingly it was referred to along with the church (vs. 18) and the kingdom (vs. 19). Two Old Testament prophecies lie in the background of this story of the confession of Christ's messiahship, namely, the identification of Israel as a church and the promise to David concerning a future messianic kingdom.

G. Vos argues that Jesus' statement must be understood against this background and that it exhibits Jesus' intention to build a new church after Israel's rejection of his messiahship. Vos says that "Objectively considered, therefore the church is that new congregation of Israel, which is formed by Jesus Christ as the Messiah and stands under

the Messianic rule."⁴⁹ Jesus clearly relates the church to the kingdom when, immediately after his announcement of the building of his church, he refers also to the "keys of the kingdom" (vs 19). Vos sees this relation as a relation of identity as he detects in this metaphor the image of a "house" shared by the church and the kingdom. The church is a house which will be built upon Peter; the kingdom is a house whose keys will be given to Peter. Vos points out that the same image of "house" stands for the church and the kingdom and argues that this shows the identity of the church and the kingdom.⁵⁰ In his exegesis of the same passage, Oswald T. Allis also reaches the same conclusion and states that the church and the kingdom "are two aspects of the same institution which Christ will 'build.'"⁵¹

Augustine and Calvin's teaching concerning Christ's millennial reign is in line with Christ's confirmation of his messiahship, the building of his church, and the close relationship between the church and the kingdom in Matthew 16:13-20. Augustine rejects the chiliasts' teaching according to which Christ's millennial reign will be in the future after Christ's return and argues that it is already present now in the church's life, which he presents as the "City of God."⁵² Then he insists on the kingship of Christ as a reality

⁴⁹Geerhardus Vos, The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church (New York: American Tract Society, 1903), 144.

⁵⁰Vos, Teaching of Jesus, 150.

⁵¹Allis, Prophecy, 82).

⁵²Whether the City of God can be equated with the church in Augustine is very disputed. Van Bavel, for example, argues that Augustine did not equate the "City of God" and the church (cf. T. J. van Bavel, Christians in the World, vol II [New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1980], 103). Johannes van Oort points out that, in the last analysis, Augustine identifies both "the heavenly Church" and the "Church in its earthly

now, for Christ is "the King and Founder of this City."⁵³ The designation of Christ as "King" here paves the way for Augustine's identification of the church with the kingdom of God.⁵⁴ Augustine is straightforward in his declaration on this point: "the church even now is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁵

Calvin also designates Christ as king, and relates his kingship to the church. Calvin does not deny that Christ's millennial reign through the church stands in continuity with the Old Testament church,⁵⁶ the congregation of Israel, and the Davidic messianic kingdom, but, like Augustine, he rejects the hope of the fulfillment of these prophecies in the future after Christ's return and sees this fulfillment in the church. He views the present church as the Old Testament church restored by Christ. "How much more excellent is the condition of the new Church," he declared, "than that of the ancient Church," as he compared the church of Christ with the ancient Israel as a "church" and as a kingdom. Christ's church is far better "since God hath revealed himself as King in his Son."⁵⁷

manifestations" with the City of God (cf. Johannes van Oort, Jerusalem and Babylon [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991], 124-28). Van Oort's position is more likely since all the features of the City of God are projected on both the visible and invisible church, so that the identification is unavoidable.

⁵³City of God, Preface, Book I, 5.

⁵⁴City of God, XX, 9.

⁵⁵City of God, XX, 9.

⁵⁶Milner points out that Calvin even traces the church back to Adam and Eve (see, B. C. Milner, Jr., Calvin's Doctrine of the Church [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970], 9).

⁵⁷On Isaiah: 2:4, Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah, vol. I, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 99.

In Calvin the unity of the church and the kingdom is founded on the twofold office of Christ as King and Priest, which carries with it respectively "government" and "laws." "For where the kingdom and priesthood of Christ are found," Calvin says, "there no doubt is the Church."⁵⁸ That Christ's millennial reign involves both his kingship and priesthood indicates that the millennium must be understood in terms of salvation history. This means that salvation history is the most prominent feature of the millennial kingdom.

The kingdom of Christ and the church during the millennium have only one common purpose: salvation. Concerning the kingdom which is present in the person of Christ, Calvin says that "That kingdom wholly consists in the building up of the Church, or the progress of the believers."⁵⁹ Now the church that the kingdom builds is nothing other than the body of Christ on earth in which people are prepared through justification and sanctification to become citizens of the kingdom. This role played by the church finds expression in Augustine and Calvin's designation of the church as "Mother"⁶⁰ who nurtures all believers, bearing them in her womb, giving birth to them, nourishing them, and preparing them for salvation and for citizenship in God's kingdom.

We note here the mutuality and complementarity between the kingdom present in the person of Christ and the church as the body of Christ. Calvin sees in this kind of

⁵⁸On Jer. 33: 17, Commentaries on Jeremiah, vol. IV, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 257.

⁵⁹Psychopannychia in Selected Works of John Calvin, vol. III, ed. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 465.

⁶⁰Cf Augustine, Faith Hope and Charity, 29, trans. Louis A. Arrand (Westminster: Newman Bookshop, 1947); Calvin, Institutes, IV, 1, 1. The expression comes from Cyprian.

relation the unity and even the identity between the church and the kingdom. Torrance points out that, according to Calvin, "The Regnum Christi considered in itself is Christ in His own person who died and rose again, but considered in its counterpart it is the Church which is His body."⁶¹

Can we then establish a perfect identity between the church and Christ's kingdom? We may say that the church is indeed a sign of the presence of Christ's kingdom on earth; however, the church does not represent exhaustively Christ's kingdom which is ultimately of cosmic proportions. Highly significant is the fact that even Augustine who was straightforward in establishing an identity between the church and the kingdom still insists on the presence of members of the church who are not citizens of Christ's kingdom. Augustine refers to the "tares [who] do not reign with him"⁶² in his earthly kingdom. "They are included in it until the collection and removal of all stumbling-blocks at the end of the world."⁶³ In this sense Augustine qualifies his equation of the church and the kingdom. Calvin also speaks of the church in a similar vein, insisting that "In this church are mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance."⁶⁴ The true citizens of the kingdom of God are to be found in the invisible church which "includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all elect

⁶¹T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), 114.

⁶²City of God, XX, 9.

⁶³City of God, XX, 9.

⁶⁴Institutes, IV, 1, 7.

from the beginning of the world."⁶⁵ The church is "visible to the eyes of God alone."⁶⁶ Calvin's view seems to be conclusive as he defines the relationship between Christ's kingdom and the church as follows: "It is in the Church that Christ holds the seat of his kingdom."⁶⁷ This statement implies that Christ reigns over the whole world through the church. For Calvin, Christ is "the Lord and king of heaven and earth" who "establishes his throne on earth" by constraining people to obey him through the preaching of the Gospel by the church.⁶⁸ Christ is ruling over the world from heaven and through the church. This is possible since the God who now reigns in Christ is a trinitarian God. Christ exercises his kingship over the church through the Holy Spirit. And "it is the highest ornament of the kingdom of Christ," says Calvin, "that he governs his church by his Spirit."⁶⁹

Christ's throne is in heaven but his kingdom is on earth. This suggests a unity of transcendence and history.

C. The Amillennial View of the Millennium: Unity of Transcendence and History

The good balance that amillennialists attempt to establish between transcendence

⁶⁵Institutes, IV, 1, 7.

⁶⁶Institutes, IV, 1, 7.

⁶⁷On Tim. 1:20, Comm. on the Epistle to Timothy, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 48.

⁶⁸On Matt. 28:18, Comm. on a Harmony of the Evangelists, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 382.

⁶⁹On Jn. 7:39, Comm. on the Gospel of John, Vol. I, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 310.

and history stems from their conviction that the relationship existing between these two realities is that of unity. By unity we mean that transcendence and history complete one another in the millennium, making an organic whole. This unity is also characterized by the ongoing process of God's program of salvation and restoration of creation during the millennium. But what is of fundamental importance is the fact that this unity is grounded in Jesus Christ.

1. Christ as the Foundation of the Unity of Transcendence and History

There is an inclination to discredit amillennialism by arguing that its transcendental and spiritualizing tendencies are not biblical and that its chief originators, Augustine and Calvin, were influenced by Neoplatonism⁷⁰ and late medieval nominalism⁷¹ respectively. Attention is called to the fact that, against the background of Neoplatonism and nominalism, God's transcendence, his sovereignty, and his glory have become a barrier isolating God from his people and the whole world.

It is true that the idea of God's transcendence and his glory played a significant role in the theology of both Augustine and Calvin. Johannes Van Oort apparently started from this premise to come to the conclusion that in his early career as a theologian "Augustine identified the kingdom of God with the Neoplatonic mundus intelligibilis, the transcendental, spiritual world that is only accessible to the intellect."⁷² In Augustine's

⁷⁰Cf. Van Oort, Jerusalem and Babylon.

⁷¹Cf. E. Randolph Daniel, "The Spread of Apocalypticism, 1100-1500. Why Calvin Could not Reject it" in Calvin Studies (January 1990): 61-71.

⁷²Van Oort, Jerusalem and Babylon, 109.

mature work City of God, God is still depicted as an absolutely transcendent God and as the Supreme Good.⁷³ From this perspective, it may be tempting to deny any belief in God getting entangled in this corrupt world.

Attempts have also been made to understand divine transcendence in Calvin as rooted in the late medieval nominalist notion of potentia absoluta. E. Randolph Daniel, for example, does not deny that providence and the potentia ordinata are the key to understanding the divine transcendence in Calvin, but he also holds that the nominalist potentia absoluta also obtains in his theology. "Calvin's theology," he argues, "was always written de potentia ordinata, but the Nominalist potentia absoluta always hovered over Calvin."⁷⁴ Thus, if Calvin's God is the God of the Nominalists, he is "transcendent, unknowable, and chiefly concerned that his human creatures acknowledge and pay tribute to his glory."⁷⁵ However, neither in Augustine nor in Calvin, do God's transcendence and his glory create a distance between God and his people. Augustine's City of God is less inspired by Greek philosophy than by the historical reality of Rome's sack by Alaric in 410 A.D. It is this historical reality that Augustine seeks to interpret within the framework of God's power and providence. Augustine is not attempting to sever God from history but strives to bring history under the viewpoint of divine transcendence.

For Calvin, God created us, not simply to glorify him, as Nominalists teach, but so that he may share his glory with us, and that he himself may be glorified in us. As

⁷³City of God, XIX, 1-4.

⁷⁴Daniel, "Spread of Apocalypticism," 66.

⁷⁵W. J. Bouswma, John Calvin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107.

such human life has God's glory as its goal, "Parce qu'il nous a créés et nous a mis au monde pour être glorifié en nous. Et c'est bien raisonnable que nous rapportions notre vie à sa gloire puisqu'il en est le commencement."⁷⁶ However, God's glory is not confined to God's redeemed people, the whole universe itself is the "theater of his glory."⁷⁷ This means that despite God's transcendence, we can still speak of the immanence of God's glory in his creation. Instead of separating God from his creatures, there is a sense in which his transcendence and glory constitute a factor of relationship and union between God, his people, and even his whole creation. The millennium as part of salvation history is characterized by a union of God's transcendence and the history of the world since it is God's will that his creation reflect his glory.

It was Christ's death on the cross that made possible a unity between earthly history and divine glory and transcendence. Anthony Hoekema caught a vision of the significance of Christ for history when he says that "the supreme New Testament illustration of God's control over history is, of course, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ."⁷⁸ God's intervention in history in Jesus Christ is decisive for the history of this world.

⁷⁶"He created us and brought us to the world so that he himself may be glorified in us. And it is fit that we live our lives to his glory, for they originated from him." For the French version, see Confessions et Catéchisme de la Foi Réformée, ed. Olivier Fatio (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1986), 30.

⁷⁷ "For our salvation was a matter of concern to God in such a way that, not forgetful of himself, he kept his glory primarily in view, and therefore, created the whole world for this end, that it may be a theater of his glory" (Consensus Genevensis, CO 8:294, cited by Susan Schreiner in The Theater of His Glory (Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1991), 5. See also Institutes, I, v, 2, 8; I, vi, 2, 9; I, xiv, 20; II, vi, 1.

⁷⁸Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 27.

Because of God's involvement in history, history has become salvation history and the millennium serves as a framework for the final unfolding of God's plan of redemption. In this connection history must not be judged from the perspective of its outward appearances. The true meaning of history is something transcendent as the presence of God who directs it to its final goal.⁷⁹

Augustine seems to perceive the transcendent and true meaning of history when he urged that we rise above history and transcend historical facts in order that we may catch sight of the real substance of history. We have "to rise above the level of mere historical fact and search for meanings which the historical record itself was intended to convey."⁸⁰ Calvin presents us with a good illustration of Augustine's contention when he says that Pilate truly sealed Christ's resurrection with his own ring; and those stationed as guards at the tomb, by their silence or their lying, became the heralds of the same resurrection.⁸¹ Calvin means that the mighty work of salvation that God achieved in raising Christ from the dead was confirmed by the historical facts related to Pilate and the guards at the tomb. To put it plainly, what is behind the history of Pilate is God's love, grace, and salvation in Jesus Christ. But this also means that the person and work

⁷⁹Referring to Calvin's view of God's dealing with history Holwerda sees God both behind and before history leading it towards its final destiny. He speaks of "push-view of history" in which "God is pushing history towards its destiny," namely, the kingdom of God, and of "pull-view of history" in which God is "pulling us into the future" (D. E. Holwerda, "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin, ed. D. E. Holwerda [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976], 112).

⁸⁰City of God, XVIII, 44.

⁸¹Institutes, III. 25, 3.

of Jesus Christ is the essence of history. And it is in this sense that Jesus Christ is the unity between earthly history and divine transcendence.

In Christ, transcendence and history are united in the millennium which is the period of his earthly reign. The millennium is a specific period for a specific purpose, namely, Christ's work of redemption and restoration of creation. The unity of the millennium is reflected in this purpose. It is symbolically represented by the one thousand-year period, a term which is intended to express the duration of the binding of Satan, but also that of the reign of Christ with the saints. We note that even premillennialists like Ladd do not interpret this figure literally but acknowledge that it "may well be a symbol for a long period of time, the extent of which is unknown."⁸²

Augustine's suggestion that one thousand represents "totality"⁸³ appears to be conclusive. This view is adopted by B. B. Warfield and Hoekema who refer to the term "completeness,"⁸⁴ a synonym to "totality." "Totality" and "completeness" here refer to the fullness and perfection of the work of redemption accomplished by the three members

⁸²G. E. Ladd, Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 147-48.

⁸³ Augustine said, "It seems that 100 is sometimes used to stand for totality . . . If this is so, how much more does 1,000 represent totality, being the square of 10 converted into a solid figure" (City of God, XX, 7).

⁸⁴Warfield takes a slightly different approach and says that "the sacred number seven in combination with the equally sacred number three forms the number of holy perfection, ten, and when this ten is cubed into a thousand the seer has all he could say to convey to our mind the idea of absolute completeness" (Warfield, Biblical Doctrines, 643-44). Hoekema argues along the same lines saying that "since number ten signifies completeness, and since a thousand is ten to the third power, we may think of the expression 'a thousand years' as standing for a complete period" (Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in Meaning of the Millennium, 161).

of the Trinity during the millennial age. This reflects the unity of the millennium, making of it an organic whole. Jonathan Edwards definitely means this fullness and perfection when he insists strongly on the "success of Christ's work of redemption in this period,"⁸⁵ although it still awaits its consummation at Christ's second coming. This perfection is not expected to usher in a "golden age," for the millennial period is only a preparation for a transition to the consummation of God's kingdom after Christ's return. But Christ's millennial kingdom cannot assume this function unless unity is inherent in its nature.

The amillennial concept of the doctrine of covenant of grace,⁸⁶ as the unity of all other covenantal dispensations is a corollary of the unity of the millennium. Covenant theology views all the dispensations from Adam to the end of human history as aspects of God's work of redemption. Underlying these dispensations is the covenant of grace

⁸⁵J. Edwards, A History of the Work of Redemption, ed. John F. Wilson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 350.

⁸⁶There is a disagreement among amillennialists whether covenant theology is an important characteristic of amillennialism or not. William E. Cox, for example, denies that covenant theology can be particularly associated with amillennialism (Cox, Amillennialism Today [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966,] p. 2.) The case of Calvin is often adduced to lend support to this position. E. H. Emerson denies the attribution to Calvin of the title covenant theologian (E. H. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," in Church History XIV, 1956, 136-144). G. Vos also argues that Calvin's theology was built not so much on the basis of the covenant as on the Trinity (Vos, The Covenant in Reformed Theology, trans. S. Voorwinde and W. Van Gemeren [Philadelphia: Published Privately by K. M. Campbell, 1971], 2). It is true Calvin that remained silent in regard to the covenant of works, but the covenant of grace, nevertheless, held an important place in his theology. He focused his attention on the covenant concluded with Abraham and confirmed in Christ and held that the same covenant was already underlying the relationship between God, Adam, and Noah. Additionally I. J. Hesselink argues that, Calvin who dealt extensively with the question of the law, found the covenant of grace as "the cradle of the law," that is, the Mosaic law (I. J. Hesselink, Calvin's Concept of the Law [Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1992], 87).

which is the factor of their unity and continuity. Hoekema stresses the amillennial position on this point against the wedge that dispensationalists drive between law and grace and insists that

Amillennialists do not believe that sacred history is to be divided into a series of distinct and disparate dispensations but see a single covenant of grace running throughout all of that history.⁸⁷

William Masselink also stresses this point, describing the covenant of grace as "one organic whole,"⁸⁸ a "historic progressiveness."⁸⁹

If both the millennium and the covenant can be described as an organic whole, this means that Christ's kingdom also forms a unified whole. But the question that we must now answer is this: What kind of place do the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel and the Davidic reign hold in this unified kingdom, given their close relation to the covenant of grace.

2. Israel and Amillennialism

It is important to note from the outset that amillennialists disagree sharply with the dispensationalists in their tendency to assume that Israel as the elect people of God is already saved. Referring to the place of the law in the redemption of Israel, the "new" Scofield Bible stresses that the

law is not here proposed as a means of salvation, but as a means by which Israel,

⁸⁷Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in Meaning of the Millennium, 186.

⁸⁸W. Masselink, Why Thousand Years (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 40.

⁸⁹Masselink, Why Thousand Years, 41.

already redeemed as a nation, might through obedience fulfill her proper destiny.⁹⁰

Dispensationalists seem to adopt a purely Judaistic outlook and discard Christ entirely from the salvation of Israel. Amillennialists do not deny that Israel may have a place in God's plan of salvation by virtue of its election and the covenant made with it, but they see the election of Israel to be grounded in Jesus Christ and Christ as the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Israel. Therefore, Israel's salvation depends also upon Jesus Christ. In this connection David Holwerda argues that "as the promised descendent of Abraham and David, Jesus represents the whole Israel in his person and mission."⁹¹

How then does amillennialism conceive of the place of Israel in the covenant? Here Augustine and Calvin's concept of "shadow" and "substance" is illuminating. Augustine sees the Old Testament "historical events and the narrative of them" as "always some foreshadowing of things to come, and are always to be interpreted with reference to Christ and his church, which is the City of God."⁹² Referring to the history of Israel, Augustine identifies "Jesus as the substance of that people from whom he derived that physical nature."⁹³ Thus Christ's life and existence are not derived from Israel. On the contrary, Israel's life and existence as a nation are derived from Christ.

⁹⁰"New" Scofield Bible, 94, n. 2.

⁹¹David E. Holwerda, Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 147.

⁹²City of God, XVI, 2.

⁹³City of God, XVII, 11.

Calvin writes in a similar vein and refers to Christ as "substance and reality,"⁹⁴ contrasting it with Israel as "shadow."⁹⁵ Calvin means to say that Christ is the fulfillment of all prophecies related to the nation of Israel, including the covenant, their election, and Israel as a congregation and a monarchy.

We note that, unlike the dispensationalists, amillennialists adopt a retrospective view of history: Christ's coming as Lord and King of the world through the church is not grounded in the history of Israel. Rather, the nation of Israel is founded on Christ---Christ as the real "substance" and Israel as a simple "shadow." It is on this point that amillennialists and premillennialists are diametrically opposed in their principles. Instead of starting from Christ himself as the meaning of history, premillennialists focus their attention on the history of Israel and the Davidic kingdom and then turn to Christ on whom they apply their understanding of these prophecies. Amillennialists go the opposite direction: they focus their attention on Christ before taking a retrospective look on Israel and the Davidic dynasty.

The Old Testament prophecies include the promise that the Messiah will be born of David's descendants (2 Samuel 7:11-14; 23:1-7). Amillennialists find the promise in relation to the kingdom of David fulfilled in the church as Christ's millennial kingdom. The Davidic kingdom was no more than a prelude to Christ's reign through the church. Again, Augustine applies the idea of "shadow" and "substance" to the relationship

⁹⁴Institutes. II, 10, 2.

⁹⁵For the different metaphors and similes that Calvin used for this contrast, see I. John Hesselink, Calvin's Concept of the Law, 174.

between David's kingdom and Christ's kingship. He says that "In the course of the temporal history of the City of God, David at first reigned in the earthly Jerusalem, which was a shadow of what was to come."⁹⁶

Amillennialists insist on the "literal," "earthly," and present fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in Christ. But that Christ's kingdom is an earthly and a present reality does not mean that it is a materialistic and political realization of the Davidic kingdom. Rather, it is a spiritual kingdom but more real than the Davidic kingdom since the kingdom of David is merely its "shadow." We see here an archetype-ectype relation which indicates the primacy of Christ's kingdom.

In The Christ of the Covenants O. Palmer Robertson presents us with an interesting exegesis of Acts 2:30-36 in which he points to two matters that represent the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Davidic messianic kingdom in Christ's present millennial kingdom. The first is Christ's resurrection, his ascension, and his exaltation to the right hand of the Father; the second is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Palmer Robertson says that

As a fulfillment of this prophecy concerning the seating of one of David's descendants on David's throne, Peter immediately points to Jesus' resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God.⁹⁷

But then the same Peter relates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the covenant concluded with David. Robertson stresses this fact saying,

⁹⁶City of God, XVII, 4.

⁹⁷O. Palmer Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 220.

The culminating evidence that this prophecy concerning David's descendant has reached its fulfillment, according to Peter, is found in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.⁹⁸

Amillennialists, then, interpret the Old Testament prophecies concerning the future Davidic messianic kingdom as fulfilled in Christ's reign now in heaven and on earth, and reject the localization of Christ's throne in the earthly Jerusalem in the future. David's throne in Jerusalem was only a prophetic image of Christ's throne in heaven from which he rules over the whole world. Calvin declares in this connection that "It was the office of Christ to spread throughout the whole world the kingdom of God, which was at that time confined to the corner of Judea."⁹⁹ We can infer from Calvin's statement that again the purpose of Christ's millennial reign is salvation which reaches out to the whole world.

D. The Millennium and Christ's Kingship

If Christ really reigns with the saints during the church age, how can the nature of that kingship be defined? Can amillennialists affirm the presence of Christ as king on earth during the period that they delineate as the millennium?

Amillennialists assert the presence of Christ as Lord and King on earth during the millennium by considering it from a christological perspective; but they also insist that any reference to the person and work of Christ must be extended to the divine

⁹⁸Robertson, Christ of the Covenant, 220.

⁹⁹On Matt. 12:18, Comm. on the Har. of the Ev., vol. II, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 60.

Trinity.¹⁰⁰ Thus, let us first look at Christ as king during the millennium, and then we will examine his kingship from a trinitarian standpoint.

1. Christ's Presence in his earthly Kingdom

The amillennial view of the millennium begins with Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and his resurrection in which he achieved a once and for all victory over sin and death and was enthroned as king of the universe after the defeat of all powers and principalities. In his ascension to heaven this victorious king was removed from the earth. Amillennialists have to reckon with the absence of this king from his earthly kingdom.

Augustine was the first to face this dilemma; but he is explicit in his position: the church cannot be Christ's kingdom without Christ's permanent presence. For Augustine,

His saints must be reigning with him, the saints to whom he says, "See I am always with you, right up to the end of the world"; for otherwise the church could surely not be called his kingdom, or the kingdom of heaven.¹⁰¹

In Christians in the World T. J. van Bavel convincingly demonstrates that the conviction of the presence of Christ on earth through the life of the church was the guiding idea in Augustine's theology.

Augustine's ideas of the believing community (the church) are only to be understood in connection with their relationship to Christ. What is meant here is a dynamic union with and in one another of Christ and the faithful.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Amillennialism is associated with Reformed theology. See in this connection John Bolt's contention that to be Reformed is to be trinitarian in theology (Christian and Reformed Today, esp. 19-30).

¹⁰¹City of God, XX, 9.

¹⁰²T. J. van Bavel, Christians in the world: An Introduction to the Spirituality of Augustine, vol. II (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1980), 82.

Jonathan Edwards also argues along these lines as he saw a real intercourse between Christ and the church, which results in the church reflecting the whole of Christ and Christ's glory shining brightly in the church. Edwards writes:

Thus the Church of Christ, (toward whom, and in whom are the emanations of his glory, and the communication of his fullness) is called the fullness of Christ; as though he were not in complete state without her; like Adam without Eve. And the Church is called the glory of Christ, as the woman is the glory of man.¹⁰³

So the presence of Christ through the church is so brilliant, so to speak, for Edwards, that no eyes could miss it.

Calvin looks at the reason why the glory of Christ now shines so wonderfully. He traces the cause of this glorious brilliance back to the cross and says,

Nowhere has it shone more brightly than in the cross in which there has been an astonishing change of things, the condemnation of all men has been manifested, sin has been blotted out, salvation has been restored to men, and in short, the whole world has been renewed and everything restored to order.¹⁰⁴

The presence of the glorious Christ along with the work of salvation that he has wrought for the world is so conspicuous that no eye can be averted from it.

This led Calvin to emphasize something which appears to be self-contradictory: Christ's bodily absence after his ascension has made his presence more real. He comes to this conclusion as he relates Christ's ascension to his resurrection and thus perceives that the ascension was not his abandonment of the world but his presence, for it was his

¹⁰³Jonathan Edwards, "A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," in The Works of President Edwards, vol I (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 463.

¹⁰⁴On Jn. 13:31, Comm. on the Gospel according to John, vol. II, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 73.

enthronement for rulership over the world.

Christ by rising again began to show forth his glory and power more fully. Yet he truly inaugurated his kingdom only at his ascension into heaven. The apostle [Paul] shows this when he teaches that Christ ascended . . . that he might fill all things.¹⁰⁵

Underlying this assertion is an important doctrine that amillennialism has inherited from Calvin and is expressed by the inadequate term "extra Calvinisticum."¹⁰⁶

"Extra Calvinisticum" affirms that Christ, in his divinity, is not confined to the human body either during his incarnation on earth or when he was ascended to heaven in our flesh. In other words, Christ remained present everywhere, as the Lord of the universe.¹⁰⁷ Calvin was well aware of the apparent dichotomy between Christ's spiritual presence and his presence in the flesh, but he insists that it is Christ's divinity which makes him present in the whole universe:

Although the whole Christ is everywhere, still the whole of that which is in him is not everywhere. . . . Since the whole Christ is everywhere, our Mediator is ever present among his own people . . . in such a way that the whole Christ is present, but not in his wholeness. For, as has been said, in his flesh he is contained in heaven until he appears in judgment.¹⁰⁸

The emphasis here is on Christ's existence everywhere beyond the human flesh he is

¹⁰⁵Institutes, II, 16, 14.

¹⁰⁶For a discussion of the inadequacy of the term "extra Calvinisticum," see E. D. Willis, Calvin's Catholic Christology. The Function of the So-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

¹⁰⁷This concept appears clearly in the theology of Calvin (cf. Institutes, II, 13, 14). Now strictly speaking, it is not originally Calvinistic since it already found expression in Augustine (cf. City of God, IX, 15) and in Peter Lombard, and even earlier according to Willis (cf. E. D. Willis, Calvin's Catholic Christology, 8).

¹⁰⁸Institutes. IV, 17, 30.

bearing, as the One who permanently sustains the whole universe. Calvin puts it concisely this way: "He who watches over and tends all parts of heaven and earth and who by his mastery regulates and controls all things above and below cannot be enclosed in a place."¹⁰⁹

We see here the reason why the amillennialists refuse to follow the premillennialists when they teach that Christ will establish his throne in the earthly Jerusalem in Palestine during the millennium. This miserably impoverishes the concept of Christ's presence now among his people, as Lord, King, and ruler of the universe. For amillennialists, Christ's presence and ministry is not either in heaven or on earth, but both in heaven and on earth, not either in the world and in human history or in the heaven and in eternity, but both in the world and in human history and in heaven and in eternity. This is possible because Christ's presence is a trinitarian presence.

2. Christ's Kingship as a Trinitarian Presence

Even during the incarnation Christ's presence on earth was a trinitarian presence. After Christ's ascension to heaven this divine presence continues in the person of the Holy Spirit. This is, of course, a presence which encompasses the whole universe, but it is especially a presence through the church.

In his understanding of the millennium as the church era, Augustine taught that God, as a triune God, dwells in the church. "The temple of God, that is, of the sublime Trinity as a whole," Augustine says, "is the Holy Church---the Church everywhere, in

¹⁰⁹Lib. 3 sentent. dist. 22; CO 20: 75; cited by Willis in Calvin's Catholic Christology, 32.

heaven and on earth."¹¹⁰ In fact, the divine indwelling, whether it is in the church or in the believers, is always a trinitarian indwelling.

The amillennial view of Christ's presence as king during the church age can be understood only in the light of its conception of the believers' union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Amillennialists are unanimous in maintaining that this kind of union mediated by the Holy Spirit is far better than a simple bodily presence of Christ. Calvin does not hesitate to speak of the Holy Spirit as Christ's presence which is "invisible but a more desirable way,"¹¹¹ a "presence more useful to us" if compared to Christ's "presence that had been confined in a humble abode of flesh as long as he sojourned on earth."¹¹² It is when Christ was "raised up above all heavens . . . [that] his power and energy were diffused and spread beyond all the bounds of heaven and earth."¹¹³ Jonathan Edwards discarded the thought of Christ who will be bodily present on earth after a period of peace and prosperity. He rather adopted the idea that Christ reigns on earth "by his Spirit," "which is more glorious and happy for his Church than his human presence would be."¹¹⁴

Interestingly, Augustine takes an actualistic approach to Christ's presence in the

¹¹⁰Augustine, Faith Hope and Charity, 56.

¹¹¹Institutes, II, 16, 14.

¹¹²Institutes, II, 16, 14.

¹¹³Institutes, II, 16, 14.

¹¹⁴Jonathan Edwards, Miscellanies. Typescript by Thomas A. Schafer. Beinecke Rare Book and manuscript Library. (Yale University, no. 827).

church.¹¹⁵ According to Augustine, Christ's presence as Lord and King is indeed a permanent presence through the Holy Spirit. However, for believers, he is sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, sometimes hidden, sometimes manifested depending on their faith and their behavior. Augustine writes:

He remains as He is and He is everywhere totally present. But He comes when He reveals Himself and goes away when He is hidden. However, He is present whether revealed or hidden, as light is present to the eyes of one who sees as well as of one who is blind, but it is present to him who sees it as something actual, but to the blind it is something missing.¹¹⁶

Faith is then the condition for a vision of Christ, but in addition to faith Augustine argues that good behavior is also required: "You have Christ in the present," Augustine says, "but by living evilly you will not have him always."¹¹⁷ For Augustine, the climax of our union with Christ is that "not only that we have been made Christians, we have been made Christ."¹¹⁸ That is, we are the mirror through which unbelievers see Christ. This is real because our union with Christ is real. Augustine expresses the depth of this union by saying that Christ is "in us (in nobis), for us (pro nobis), through us (de nobis)."¹¹⁹

Augustine here presents us with an adumbration of the modern theory called

¹¹⁵For a full exposition of the actuality of the presence of Christ in the Church, according to Augustine, see T. J. van Bavel, Christians in the World, especially 80-105.

¹¹⁶Augustine, Letters, vol III (131-164), trans. Sister Wilfried Parsons (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 23.

¹¹⁷Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John 28-54, trans. W. Rettig (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 269.

¹¹⁸Augustine, Tractates on the Gospel of John 11-27, trans. W. Rettig (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 186.

¹¹⁹Augustine, Contra Felicem, II, 9, in CSEL Vol. 25, 1-2.

"actualism" according to which the Holy Spirit makes possible a real encounter with Christ. Bavinck expresses this concept in connection with the idea of multiple coming of Christ. Bavinck argues that

It is a continuous coming of Christ, that of which the believers of the New Testament are witnesses. They see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power of God and coming upon the clouds of heaven. They see His coming in the preaching of the Word of God and in the operation of His Spirit.¹²⁰

Actualism thus attempts to express that Christ is really a present rather than an absent Lord and King. For Augustine as well as Bavinck, however, Christ's presence is not understood in terms of mere "event" but as an immanent presence in the believers by virtue of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. This presence is only contingent upon Christians' faith and holiness.

As a conclusion we may say that Christ's kingship is real now on earth, although it is only seen by those who have faith. Thanks to the powerful and mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers Christ's presence is made known to the world.

E. Christ's Kingdom and the Kingdom of Evil

Christ's presence on earth becomes more understandable when we realize the presence of a rival king, that is, the Devil. Yet, dualism is immediately ruled out by Christ's binding of Satan who pretends to be a ruler of God's creation.

1. The Presence of "Two Kings"

The Bible indeed calls Satan "prince of this world" (Jn. 12:31) and "the ruler of

¹²⁰Bavinck, Reasonable Faith, 555.

the kingdom of the air" (Eph. 2:2). That Satan tempted Jesus confirms his claim that "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor" belong to him (Matt. 4:8, NIV).

Augustine finds the presence of two kingdoms to be the key to understanding world history. He draws attention to the reality of a continuing conflict between the "city of God" and the "city of the devil," the "heavenly city" and the "earthly city," "Jerusalem" and "Babylon." For Augustine, the presence of two kingdoms also entails the presence of two kings, namely, Christ and the Devil.¹²¹ Should we understand this in terms of dualism? Augustine was torn between the idea of free-will and predestination to explain people's choice between Christ and the Devil, but in his later career he became more inclined to predestination.

Predestination implies that God is perfectly in control of the Devil's activities, which also rules out any hint of dualism. Predestination also means the absolute sovereignty of God's will, on which depends the salvation of those who are destined "to reign with God for all eternity," and the fate of those who are "doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the devil."¹²² And finally predestination also accounts for the binding of Satan, of which the goal is precisely, according to Augustine, that "he cannot lead the Church astray."¹²³ Here we note that Hoekema also argues along the same lines and says:

The binding of Satan during the gospel age means that, first, he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel, and second, he cannot gather all the enemies of Christ

¹²¹City of God, XVII, 16.

¹²²City of God, XVI, 1.

¹²³City of God, XX, 8.

together to attack the church.¹²⁴

Hence it is God's will that Satan may not thwart the advancement of Christ's kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel (Matt. 28: 18-20) and the work of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of God's people.

In other words, the binding of Satan is a phenomenon intimately bound with salvation history. It bears witness to the reality of Christ's kingship and authority, and the presence of his kingdom during the millennium. But it also betrays the power of the enemy with which we are besieged every day.

2. The Binding of Satan

A certain amount of scorn has been heaped upon the amillennialist "naïve" assertion that the Devil is bound now. The amillennial position proves to be untenable on an empirical ground, it is argued, since the power of the Devil is felt and experienced in the evil, sin, suffering, and death which still prevail in the world. The amillennialist Berkouwer joins the premillennialists in faulting amillennialism for overlooking the "radical proportions of the binding of Satan."¹²⁵ The premillennialist Jeffrey L. Townsend argues that amillennialism does not do justice to "the absolute terms of the binding of Satan," such as "great chain," "the abyss [being] shut, locked, and sealed,"¹²⁶ all expressing a real immobilization of Satan. This is all intended to suggest how wrong

¹²⁴A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism" in Meaning of the Millennium, 162.

¹²⁵Berkouwer, Return of Christ, 305.

¹²⁶Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Is the Present Age the Millennium?" Bibliotheca Sacra, (July-September 1983): 216.

amillennialists are in contending that the millennium is identical with the church age. The millennium is something to be expected in the future, after Christ's second coming, a perfect state where Satan the tempter of human beings, the source of sin, death, and all evil will be completely neutralized.

Before we proceed to defend the amillennial position, let us first pause and observe a contradiction in Townsend's contention, a contradiction which represents a fundamental weakness in premillennialism. Townsend turns against his own assertion in arguing that Isaiah 65: 17-25 includes "references to the millennial age which is preliminary to the new heavens and and the new earth," and that "the terms of the passage [are] to be taken in their literal, normal sense."¹²⁷ In the light of this passage the millennium after Christ's second coming is still characterized by "infant" and "old man" who die, women who "bear children." Additionally, Townsend holds along with the other premillennialists that

only saved persons enter the 1,000-year period. During the millennium the offspring of these saved entrants will be saved or lost according to their response to Jesus Christ.¹²⁸

In other words, there are still sin and death during the millennial reign of Christ. Both children and adults still die. The children of the redeemed may still rebel against Christ by refusing to believe in him. Ladd asserts that "Even in such a (righteous) age, the hearts of men remain rebellious and respond to the Devil when he is released."¹²⁹

¹²⁷Townsend, "Is the Present Age the Millennium?" 210

¹²⁸Townsend, "Is the Present Age the Millennium?" 208.

¹²⁹George Ladd, The Last Things (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 110.

We wonder why there is this uncertainty about the faith of the children of the redeemed? Why is this rebellion in the hearts of the redeemed who enjoy the millennium? Does Satan continue to "deceive" God's people even though his binding is an absolute reality? Why does death still obtain in Christ's kingdom after Christ's second coming? What then is the difference between Christ's first coming and his second coming? There seems to be an incoherence in the premillennial view of the millennium. Amillennialists insist that the millennial age must not be confused with the final state of blessedness. The premillennial conception of the binding of Satan vacillates between the millennial age and the final consummation.

Amillennialists believe that Satan is bound now; but can a spiritual being be literally tied with a material chain or confined in a locked room? Whatever the strength of this symbolism, it is not intended to convey the idea of full eradication of the influence of the Devil. Hoekema's description of Satan's activities as not being completely neutralized but "curbed during the thousand-year period"¹³⁰ seems to come closer to the truth.

So what does the symbolism of "great chain," and Abyss being "locked" and "sealed" mean? Apparently these are images used to suggest the power of Satan as a spiritual being. Augustine is of the opinion that the purpose of unloosing Satan before Christ's return is to make God's people realize from what satanic power they have been rescued. Augustine says:

In the end, the Omnipotent will loose him, so that the city of God may behold

¹³⁰Hoekema, "Amillennialism" in Meaning of the Millennium, 161.

how powerful a foe it has overcome, to the immense glory of the Redeemer, its Helper, its Deliverer.¹³¹

Thus two things are all at once displayed in the binding of Satan: the reality of Satan's power, on the one hand, and Christ's victory over him, on the other. Amillennialists are deeply convinced about the reality of Christ's victory on the cross and in his resurrection. Calvin asserts emphatically this truth saying that "Christ, by dying, conquered Satan, who had 'the power of death,' and triumphed over all his forces, to the end that they might not harm the Church."¹³² Premillennialists miss this great truth related to Christ's first coming because of their focus restricted to his second coming. Consequently, they only see the present age as a worldly kingdom under the dominion of Satan, while Christ's kingdom is conceived as a future millennial age.

Amillennialists refuse to associate the present age with a full dominion of Satan. It is Christ who is Lord and King now, not Satan. For the time being, Satan is indeed bound and is thrown into the "Abyss." The Abyss cannot be understood as a final punishment which will also put an end to Satan's power and influence on earth. Hoekema is right as he contends that the "Abyss" mentioned in Revelation 20: 1 and 3 must be distinguished from the "lake of fire" spoken of in verses 10 and 14 which describes Satan's final destiny. Berkouwer and the premillennialists seem to mistake the "Abyss" for the "lake of fire" in their evaluation of the strength of this term. Amillennialism by no means underestimates the significance of this imagery. It denotes the radical measure

¹³¹City of God, XX, 8.

¹³²Institutes, I, 14, 18.

God has taken against Satan, a measure which corresponds to his cruelty and malignity as he seeks to destroy Christ's church. What all this implies is that the Devil's activities are within the jurisdiction of God who uses them for his purpose. Amillennialists follow Calvin in adopting an instrumental doctrine of Satan.¹³³ The devil is still on earth, taking advantage of the limited power which remains to him. But the Christian heart will not be disturbed, Calvin says, for it "will not suffer anything to happen but what may turn out to its good and salvation."¹³⁴ God's final judgment, however, will put an end to evil and put everything in the right order.

3. Judgment as Restoration and the End of Evil

The binding of Satan during Christ's millennial reign does not preclude the fact that his kingdom still stands and grows side by side with that of Christ. This truth is well attested by the biblical metaphor of the "wheat" and the "tares" which are growing at the same time until the day of judgment when they will be separated. Closely related to Satan's kingdom are the presence of the Antichrist who can be portrayed as the incarnation of Satan himself, the tribulation which results from Satan's persecution of the church, and the apocalyptic cosmic events which are expected to terminate this corrupt era and Satan's dominion. These phenomena are usually understood as something strictly eschatological signalling the end of history.

But amillenarians see them as events running through the history of the church,

¹³³Cf. Calvin, Institutes, I, 14, 15.

¹³⁴Institutes, I, 17, 6

and even as something included in God's plan of salvation. For amillennialists, the fact that Satan is bound does not prevent the rise of the Antichrist from within and from without the church. Amillennialists disagree with both the pretribulationist and the posttribulationist dispensationalists who locate the appearance of the Antichrist at the end of history. Amillennialists maintain that the Antichrist has already been present since Christ's first coming as Christ's rival and opponent in this world. Calvin detected the Antichrist in the papacy, in the person of Antiochus, and in "all the heresies and sects which have been from the beginning belong to the kingdom of Antichrist."¹³⁵

Amillennialists, however, do not so much associate the tribulation of the church with the Antichrist as with the cross of Christ. Calvin asserts insistently that the church's suffering is presupposed by the cross, "for it is in this way that God wills to spread his kingdom."¹³⁶ This is also God's way of saving his people. Calvin argues that

It is the heavenly Father's will thus to exercise them so as to put his own children to a definite test. Beginning with Christ, his first-born, he follows this plan with all his children.¹³⁷

It is also from the perspective of redemption that all the apocalyptic references in the Bible must be understood, including the so-called "little apocalypse." E. Randolph Daniel defines apocalypticism as "the expectation of an imminent, final crisis, which will bring to an end the present, corrupt era and inaugurate a new one, whether within history

¹³⁵Institutes, IV, 7, 25.

¹³⁶Institutes, III, 20, 42.

¹³⁷Institutes, III, 8, 1.

or outside it."¹³⁸ This definition is perfectly in line with the premillennialists' expectations as they also speak of a terrifying cosmic cataclysm that would terminate this age and issue in Christ's millennial kingdom.

This view may be held by some amillennialists, but this is not the amillennial position. Amillennialists hold that apocalypticism must be understood in its original sense. It has to do with "revelation" as the term apocalypsis itself indicates. Hence amillennialists are of the opinion that the greatest revelation has already occurred in the death of Christ, in his resurrection, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, even though we still await the final revelation at Christ's second coming. Amillennialists do envisage an end of this corrupt era, but this end is thought of as the restoration of creation through the transformation of the universe rather than through destruction. Calvin, for example, does not deny that the final judgment will be followed by condemnation, punishment, and destruction of Christ's enemies, but its ultimate purpose, he maintains, is "reformation," the "renovation of the world."¹³⁹

What is then the amillennial understanding of the so-called signs of the times? If we turn again to Augustine, we will see him as one who refused to take the idea of "signs of the times" at face value. In Pour Connaître la Pensée de Saint Augustin G. De Plinval observes that Augustine witnessed all kinds of tragic events but refused to interpret them

¹³⁸Daniel, "Spread of Apocalypticism," 61.

¹³⁹On Jn. 12:31, Comm. on the Gospel according to John, vol. II, trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 36.

as signs of the end.¹⁴⁰ Augustine does not even locate the destruction of Gog as Magog at the last judgment. He interprets the fire from heaven for the destruction of these two evil beings as "the firmness of the saints, which will keep them from giving way to those who rage against them and from carrying out the wishes of these opponents."¹⁴¹

Augustine was sometimes criticized for being tempted to date the end of the millennium,¹⁴² but at bottom, he did not expect the return of Christ in the imminent future.¹⁴³ And this is also true of Calvin who focused his attention on God's power and providence in governing the universe.¹⁴⁴ As the millennium signifies the ongoing process of God's work of salvation, it cannot be interrupted until it reaches its final conclusion on the day of judgment.

After this brief exposition of the amillennial doctrine, our task now consists in

¹⁴⁰"A son avis, malgré les malheurs de l'époque, les précurseurs de la fin du monde ne sont pas encore réalisés. . . . Les calamités terrestres, les guerres, les prodiges célestes qu'on lui signale n'offrent rien de plus grave que ce qu'on a connu depuis toujours. Surtout un signe caractéristique de la fin des temps fait défaut parmi tous les symptômes qu'on lui énumère" (G. De Plinval, Pour Connaître la Pensée de Saint Augustin [Bordas, 1954], 174).

¹⁴¹City of God, XX, 12.

¹⁴² Augustine apparently thought of the end of the millennium to be in A.D. 650. Cf. Allis, Prophecy, 3; William Cox, Amillennialism, 3.

¹⁴³In fact, Augustine's view of the end of the millennium is not very clear. He interprets the one thousand years as "the whole period of this world's history," or as a reference to "all generations," or as signifying "the entirety of time by a perfect number" (City of God, XX, 7), which all suggest that, for Augustine, the world will not end in an accidental way. Only God in his predestination and providence knows and sets the date for the end of the world. The end will come when "all generations" have passed to the world, but the end is not imminent.

¹⁴⁴Cf. Bouwsma, Calvin, 162-176.

exploring Barth's eschatology to see the place the millennium holds in his theology. The authenticity of Barth's form of amillennialism will be assessed by confronting it, not only with the amillennial tradition, but also with the teaching of the other millennial schools of thought.

PART II

BARTH'S AMILLENNIAL ESCHATOLOGY

CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BARTH'S ESCHATOLOGY

Considering Barth as an amillennial thinker seems plausible when we closely examine the way he approaches the transcendent and historical dimensions of eschatology. Two factors help us understand the reason why Barth was led to focus on transcendence and history. The first is the war that he waged against the liberalism that he inherited from his university studies, particularly from Marburg, and the second, his discovery of the eschatological nature of Christianity. Transcendentalism is obviously a salient feature of Barth's theology. Barth employs it as a double-edged sword: first, as a weapon to fight the liberal theologians' historicism, psychologism, and moralism; and then as a tool to demonstrate that the essence of Christianity is to be sought in its transcendental and eschatological aspects.

Barth follows Calvin in holding that we are now living in the last days. Donald G. Bloesch puts his finger on what Barth means by last days when he points out that Barth identifies our time with "the last days" "since we are living in the period between Christ's resurrection and second advent."¹ For Barth, the period between Christ's first coming, characterized by his resurrection, and Christ's second coming, characterized by the general resurrection, is already the eschaton. Barth's amillennial orientation becomes

¹Bloesch, Evangelical Theology, 197.

obvious after an analysis of the importance he attaches to this period.

It is my contention that Barth's elaboration of his doctrine of three-stage parousia and his understanding of "nothingness" (das Nichtige) reflect an amillennial approach to the period between Christ's first and second comings. Of course, Barth's thought went through different stages before it reached this final phase, gradually moving from liberalism to a focus on eschatology. We will examine this dynamic character of Barth's theology against the background of his own conviction that all theology must be a theologia viatorum, a theology "on the way," in search for "a place to stand." It will be shown in this study that Barth's theological-eschatological journey is in effect a revision of the millennial doctrine, along the amillennial lines. Two stages can be distinguished in Barth's move from liberal theology to an eschatological focus: a move from liberalism to chiliasm and then from chiliasm to a version of amillennialism.

A. From Liberalism to Chiliasm

To say that Barth's theology was evolving from liberalism to chiliasm seems to suggest that Barth was moving toward premillennialism. It cannot be denied that there was a time when Barth seemed to embrace a premillennial eschatology under the influence of the chiliastic Blumhardts.² However, it is also important to note from the outset that the chiliasm Barth saw even in the two Blumhardts was a modified or revised chiliasm, amenable to formulating an eschatology that tended toward amillennialism.

We begin this survey of the development of Barth's theology from liberalism to

²See, for example, Barth, Protestant Theology, 652.

eschatology by taking a look at his liberal background.

1. Barth's Liberal Background

Barth pursued his theological training in several universities, which apparently all exposed him to liberal theology.³ Even his first university studies at Bern (1904-1906) under the supervision of his own father Fritz Barth---a conservative theologian, who was himself on the faculty---afforded him a glimpse of liberalism as he studied under Herman Lüdemann, an influential theologian in the liberal tradition. The university of Bern was also the place where Barth first encountered both Kant's philosophy and Schleiermacher's theology. But Barth's greatest exposure to liberalism occurred when he moved to the university of Berlin in 1906 and had as mentor the church historian Adolf von Harnack. In 1907, Barth enrolled at Tübingen and studied for a semester with the conservative Swiss New Testament theologian, Adolph Schlatter, but in 1908 he moved to Marburg and came into contact with Wilhelm Herrmann whose theology Barth eventually rejected though he acknowledged him as his most significant mentor.⁴ Barth was also attracted to Schleiermacher and Ritschl whose teaching shaped his mentors Harnack and Herrmann.

Particularly important for our purposes is the liberal interpretation of the kingdom of God. A purely historical and psychological approach to the kingdom of God emerges in Schleiermacher's theology. Barth gives us a full account of what he learned from

³For information on Barth's early years, see Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), esp. 1-52; David L. Mueller, Karl Barth (Waco: Word Books, 1972), esp. 13-17; T. H. L. Parker, Karl Barth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 9-29.

⁴Cf. Mueller, Karl Barth, 16.

Schleiermacher in The Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century. He observes that "The kingdom of God, according to Schleiermacher, is utterly and unequivocally identical with the advance of civilization,"⁵ and "that civilization without religion, without Christian religion, is not a complete civilization."⁶ Schleiermacher grounds his view of the kingdom in his principle of absolute dependence of humans on God, or "the feeling of his connexion with God,"⁷ as Barth puts it. The kingdom of God is then ultimately a question of human relationship with God, but it is a human-centered relationship based on the human awareness of being entirely dependent on God. For Barth, this only means that Schleiermacher turns the relationship between God and humans into "an apparent human possibility."⁸ Religion thus is something that arises from human beings as the manifestation of human feeling of absolute dependence. Barth calls attention to Schleiermacher's emphasis on piety as the reality underlying religion and describes his theology as "the theology of pious feeling," "the theology of awareness," "the theology of pious awareness,"⁹ in a word, an "anthropocentric theology."¹⁰

Schleiermacher's liberal position was taken over and modified by Albrecht Ritschl who, as a church historian before becoming a dogmatic theologian, laid stress on the

⁵Barth, Protestant Theology, 435.

⁶Barth, Protestant Theology, 442.

⁷Barth, Protestant Theology, 454.

⁸Barth, Protestant Theology, 463.

⁹Barth, Protestant Theology, 463.

¹⁰Barth, Protestant Theology, 459.

historical aspects of the former's theology but rejected its subjective features, including pietism and psychologism. To Schleiermacher's subjectivism Ritschl opposed historicism and moralism¹¹ which became the key to understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ as well as the concept of the kingdom of God.¹² The divinity of Christ was viewed simply in relation to the work of salvation he achieved for humanity and the kingdom of God conceived in connection with the moral purposes in the world.

The way Ritschl relates morality to the kingdom of God is reminiscent of Kant, but it is Kant stripped of its metaphysical characteristics and saddled with a view of God's kingdom associated with "a practical ideal of life." The eschatological aspect of the kingdom is set aside; it was understood as a purely earthly reality, and particularly in moral terms as the place in which the love of one's neighbor flowers. At this point, Barth draws attention to Ritschl's insistence on the human contribution to building the kingdom of God,¹³ and even on human beings overtaking God in that task. Barth understood Ritschl to believe that as God is love he is ready to accept the fruits of all human labors which spring from love. According to Ritschl, Barth says, "God is love. That is, he did not have to make man's true goal into his own goal, as he is love he has this goal originally as his own."¹⁴

Herbert Hartwell describes Ritschl's anthropocentric method as "historical

¹¹Cf. McCormack, Dialectical Theology, 50.

¹²Cf. chapter on Ritschl in Barth, Protestant Theology, esp. 661.

¹³Barth, Protestant Theology, 659.

¹⁴Barth, Protestant Theology, 660.

positivism" and "rationalistic moralism,"¹⁵ pointing out that the former gave an impetus to the study of history of religions, including Christianity, which was undertaken by the History of Religions School founded by Troeltsch in the second half of the nineteenth century theology, while the latter paved the way for "Cultural Protestantism," the second main feature of liberalism.

"Cultural Protestantism" found special expression in Harnack. This is particularly noticeable in his Heidelberg lectures of 1899-1900 entitled Das Wesen des Christentums¹⁶ (The Essence of Christianity). Barth presents Harnack as a theologian totally under the sway of Ritschl who looked at Christ from an adoptionist viewpoint. Barth says that

According to Ritschl, Jesus Christ is a great man who on the basis of our value-judgment is found to be the Son of God. For that reason Harnack has to call the ancient dogma a self-expression of the Greek spirit in the sphere of the gospel.¹⁷

Actually, Harnack not only taught that Christ was purely a human being, but he also maintained that Jesus Christ himself had no place in the gospel. "The gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it," he argued, "has to do with the Father only and not with the Son."¹⁸ And even what Jesus really taught is not known since the dogma of the early Church which is handed down to us represents an illicit hellenizing of the gospel of Jesus. Thus Harnack attempted to surmise the original gospel and presented its contents under three heads:

¹⁵Hartwell, Theology of Barth, 5.

¹⁶Cf. E. T. Adolf von Harnack, What is Christianity?, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1958).

¹⁷CD II, 655.

¹⁸Harnack, What is Christianity?, 108.

"Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming. Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul. Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love."¹⁹

Harnack understood the kingdom of God in a purely earthly and historical concept and Christianity as a purely "cultural Christianity."²⁰ In the same vein he presented a high evaluation of humanity in connection with its capacity for morality and even for self-salvation stating that "It is by self-conquest that a man is freed from the tyranny of the matter."²¹ In a word, Harnack was, along with Ernest Troeltsch, the greatest embodiment of liberalism of the twentieth century.

It was Wilhelm Herrmann who tried to make room for the divinity of Christ. In fact, Herrmann's liberalism was a modified liberalism as a reaction against the historicism which was flourishing in Troeltsch. Herrmann apparently did not want to forsake entirely the Ritschlian school but he combined it with the pietism of the early Schleiermacher as well as with neo-Kantianism. He attempted an entirely different approach to the issue raised by the relation of faith to history by relating history to the inner life of Jesus. In the first edition of his book The Communion of the Christian with God,²² written in 1886, Herrmann set forth his theory of the inner life of Jesus as the historical fact on which faith is based.

¹⁹Harnack, What is Christianity, 46.

²⁰Harnack, What is Christianity, 49-50.

²¹Harnack, What is Christianity?, 112.

²²Cf. Wilhelm Herrmann, The Communion of the Christian with God, trans. J. Sandys Stanyon and R. W. Stewart (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

Herrmann's view was seen as a shift from liberalism in view of its emphasis on history as the inner life of Jesus and on God's existence as a transcendent reality. Herrmann wanted to indicate thereby the impossibility of any attempt to acquire any knowledge of God and Jesus Christ through historical inquiry or scientific investigation. It was on the basis of this idea of history as the inner life of Jesus that Herrmann wanted to construct his concept of revelation. The inner life of Jesus, Herrmann claimed, was "the unique bearer of revelation."²³ He related revelation to what he called the "way to religion," a way which, he believed, would make possible a real "encounter with God."

In point of fact, despite the great enthusiasm that Barth displayed in listening to Harnack's history of dogma, the faithfulness that he exhibited vis-à-vis Herrmann's teaching concerning revelation, and the influence of liberal theology which might have been intensified by his first work as assistant editor of the liberal periodical Christliche Welt upon completion of his studies, Barth was never satisfied with what he learned from liberalism.²⁴ The influence of liberalism in Barth remained strong, but his awareness of the inadequacy of this theological system was also considerably increased as soon as he entered the ministry in 1909. Henceforth we will see a Karl Barth very critical of the liberal school of thought.

²³Karl Barth, "The principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Herrmann, 1925," in Theology and Church, Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 266.

²⁴Cf. Mueller, Karl Barth, 17.

2. Barth's Reaction against Liberalism

A growing interest in the Bible and eschatology can be detected in Barth beginning with his study of Calvin which he pursued during his two-year first pastorate in Geneva after his departure from Marburg in August 1909. We have mentioned above Calvin's view of the church era as the eschaton,²⁵ which also became Barth's understanding of the period beginning with Christ's first coming. His pastorate also disclosed to him the weaknesses of liberal theology. During his twelve-year ministry, in Geneva from 1909 to 1911 and particularly in Safenwil from 1911 to 1921, Barth was daunted by the question whether he was really preaching the Word of God or was simply speaking his own words. The historical-critical understanding of the biblical text that he learned from liberalism seemed to obscure instead of clarifying the message of the Bible.

"How can a minister speak of God," was the question that Barth raised in a lecture he delivered at the meeting of the "Friends of the Christian World" in October 1922.²⁶ Barth laid down that "As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God."²⁷ This led Barth to address the issues raised by the incompatibility of liberalism with Christian life. In its historicism, its teaching based on anthropocentric, moral, and cultural Christianity, liberalism seemed to miss totally what the Bible teaches concerning God and salvation. Barth observed that "history" is not what

²⁵See above, 58.

²⁶Barth, WGWM, 183, note.

²⁷Barth, WGWM, 186

people need since "history takes its course without assistance from us."²⁸ Believers do not really see the relevance of history for their faith and salvation. Barth also drew attention to the fact that "people have no need of our observations upon morality and culture, or even of our disquisitions upon religion, worship, and the possible existence of other worlds."²⁹

Barth is here launching a sweeping attack on liberalism from the time of Schleiermacher to that of Troeltsch, the founder of the History of Religions School. He saw that what preoccupied the liberal theologians was not what people need, people whose "whole life is lived in the shadow of death,"³⁰ "people who suddenly awake to a realization that they are walking upon a ridge between time and eternity."³¹ Hence these people were far more concerned about the "theological problem [that] comes into being at the boundary of mortality,"³² that is, the question of "the eschatological, the ultimate."³³ For Barth, this means that, as ministers, "we are supposed to be able to speak words of revelation and finality."³⁴ Barth here highlights his view of theology as essentially eschatological. Theology's primary concern is, on the one hand, the question

²⁸Barth, WGWM, 188.

²⁹Barth, WGWM, 188.

³⁰Barth, WGWM, 188.

³¹Barth, WGWM, 188.

³²Barth, WGWM, 188.

³³Barth, WGWM, 188.

³⁴Barth, WGWM, 188. (Emphasis added).

of God himself, God who cannot be sought in the relativities of history, for he is a God intimately bound with "the eschatological" and "the ultimate," and, on the other hand, the question of the relation of humans with God, which Barth also understands as something having to do with the "last things,"³⁵ as a relationship between eternity and time.

Barth turns against the historicism he learned directly from Harnack. It was with Harnack in Berlin (1906-1907) that Barth became a convinced liberal thinker; but it was also Harnack who became his worst opponent after his conversion from liberalism. The disagreement between Barth and Harnack came to the fore when they were both speakers at the Student Conference in Aarau, Switzerland in 1920. In his address "Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas," Barth's attack was directed against the historical-critical school, against the History of Religions School in particular, and also against Harnack, the advocate of modern scientific theology. After this conference, Barth and Harnack became involved in a controversy through correspondence, which ended up in a strained disagreement and separation.³⁶ David L. Mueller describes the difference between Barth and Harnack as follows:

Where Harnack finds continuity between Christ and culture, Barth finds discontinuity. Whereas Harnack looks with optimism at advancing Western civilization, Barth speaks despairingly of brokenness and decay. Where Harnack sees a merging of the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God, Barth sees radical difference. . . . Where Harnack highlights the humanity of Jesus and his similarity to the rest of humanity, Barth stresses his distinctive difference from all

³⁵Barth, How I Changed my Mind, 22.

³⁶For a good exposition of the debate between Barth and Harnack, see the chapter on "Theologians in Conflict: Harnack and Barth" in David L. Mueller's Foundation of Karl Barth's Doctrine of Reconciliation (Lewiston, Quenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 39-73.

others as the Incarnate Word. While Harnack advocates the progressive realization of the kingdom of God in human history, Barth is a radical eschatologist.³⁷

Eschatology is now the new orientation of Barth's theology. He understands eschatology as a transcendental concept which puts an end not only to Harnack's historicism but also to Herrmann's psychologism. Barth, who showed a passionate interest in Herrmann's deflection from historicism, now also takes Herrmann's psychologism as his target. Barth unmasked the falsity of Herrmann's idea of revelation based on his principle of "way to religion." The "way to religion," Barth explains, is a search for "actuality,"³⁸ that is, an attempt to experience the inner life of Jesus not as a reality which lies in the past but as something that can be experienced in the present. "And this actuality is the Christian revelation,"³⁹ a revelation which occurs, Herrmann believed, through an encounter with God. This "encounter" is a personal experience of God through the "historical" Jesus, that is, through the inner life of Jesus, an experience which remains hidden in the depths of the individual's life and to which historical-critical research has no access.

The weakness of Herrmann's theory did not take long to surface. Barth quotes Herrmann who, for all his theory of the experience of God, acknowledges that "Even where he reveals himself, God continues to dwell in darkness."⁴⁰ For Barth, this is not

³⁷Mueller, Foundation, 54-55.

³⁸Barth, "Herrmann," in Theology and Church, 264. Here we see in Herrmann the origin of Barth's actualism, the principle which subsequently governs his theology.

³⁹Barth, "Herrmann," in Theology and Church, 264.

⁴⁰Barth, "Herrmann," in Theology and Church, 254.

a surprise since Herrmann took an anthropocentric approach to revelation. Herrmann's revelation through the "inner life" of Jesus, Barth argues, is nothing other than "an attempt to build a bridge across from what human truthfulness calls actuality to what is actuality only through divine truthfulness, through 'the truth of God.'"⁴¹ In Barth's view, what Herrmann calls a "way to religion" is a "road from the individually experienced problem of truth and actuality to the also individually experienced solution in transcendence of it through God or in free surrender to him."⁴²

Barth takes as further evidence of Herrmann's identification of revelation with the human attempt to reach out to God the fact that, in his view, "revelation was not a doctrine, and faith was not as an acceptance as true; and that the authority of the Bible rested on the experience and on experience only."⁴³ In other words, everything is reduced to human experience: revelation, faith, biblical authority. This means that humans, not God, are the supreme authority for our knowledge of God and our relationship with him. To this way from below to above Barth opposes his theory of "from above to below." "Here no other 'way' whatever exists," Barth argues, "except the road from above downwards."⁴⁴

A theology from below to above is the legacy that liberalism had bequeathed to Barth. But this is a legacy that he subsequently turned upside down. For Barth, the

⁴¹Barth, "Herrmann," in Theology and Church, 266.

⁴²Barth, "Herrmann," in Theology and Church, 261

⁴³Barth, "Herrmann," in Theology and Church, 261

⁴⁴Barth, "Herrmann," in Theology and Church, 265.

direction that theology takes is not from below to above but "from above to below," not from history to transcendence but from transcendence to history, not from time to eternity but from eternity to time, not from humans to God but from God to humans. The historicism which took root in Ritschl and was blooming in Harnack and Troeltsch, and the pietism and psychologism which were planted by Schleiermacher and were flowering in Herrmann, were soon detected by Karl Barth as methods which ultimately obscured only what God wanted to reveal to this world through his Word. Barth learned from liberalism to make the distinction between what is eschatological and transcendental and what is historical and psychological, to the effect that he went so far as to affirm that "Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, belongs neither to history nor to psychology; for what is historical and psychological is as such corruptible."⁴⁵ When we speak about Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God and God's kingdom, we are addressing an eschatological question and this is possible only in the light of God's revelation.

Barth still remained more or less under the sway of liberalism during the early years of his ministry. However, what Barth learnt from his university studies suddenly came to an unfortunate conclusion when Barth was confronted with the unexpected attitude of the ninety-three German intellectuals, including his teachers, Harnack and Herrmann, who unanimously declared through a manifesto their full support of the war policy of Wilhelm II in 1914. Barth expressed his disappointment in these terms:

Was it . . . precisely the failure of the ethics of the modern theology of the time, with the outbreak of the First World War, which caused us to grow puzzled also

⁴⁵Barth, WGWM, 90.

about its exegesis, its treatment of history, and its dogmatics?⁴⁶

Barth was willing to say that a faulty theology was the deep cause of the First World War, and he lays this calamity to the charge of liberal theology to prove the deficiency not only in its ethics but even in its exegetical, historical and dogmatic approach. What resulted from this was Barth's decision to reject liberalism. "The ship was threatened to run aground," Barth says, "the moment was at hand to turn the rudder an angle of exactly 180 degrees."⁴⁷ Barth is determined to strike out in a new direction and this new direction was a move toward eschatology, an exclusive concentration on God and his kingdom.

3. Barth's Focus on Eschatology: The Influence of Kierkegaard and Overbeck

The contribution of Søren Kierkegaard and Franz Overbeck to Barth's conversion from liberalism to eschatology is worth considering. Barth's new theology is backed up by a principle borrowed from Kierkegaard. Barth says,

If I have a system it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity. . . . "God is in heaven and you are on earth." The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.⁴⁸

Barth speaks of relation between God and humans, eternity and time, which he qualifies with the phrase "infinite qualitative distinction." This denotes the presence of a wide gap

⁴⁶Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, trans. John Newton Thomas (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), 40.

⁴⁷Barth, Humanity of God, 41.

⁴⁸Romans II, 10.

between God and humankind, between human religion and divine revelation, between history and transcendence, a wide gap which, the liberal theologians believed, could be bridged through historical investigation and religious experience.

Now what is at stake is human salvation. In Barth's view liberalism was apparently unaware of the fact that humankind was standing in this large abyss of "infinite qualitative distinction" and attempted to attain to salvation through piety, religion, historical inquiry, philosophy, and morality. But this attempt at "self-salvation" only ended up in a crisis. Barth saw human beings caught up in a crisis between time and eternity, history and transcendence.

Barth resorted to a dialectical method to explicate the crisis which came about when, confronted with God's revelation in Jesus Christ, humans become aware of their being fallen creatures because finitum non capax infiniti. In Jesus Christ God reveals himself as the "Wholly Other," the transcendent and hidden One who breaks into human history. The relation between this eschatological revelation and the events which took place in A.D. 1-30 in the life of Christ can only be understood dialectically because Christ cannot be directly identified with Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth can be associated with historical events, while Jesus Christ is the eschatological and trans-historical revelation of God. By this Barth means that God is revealed to humanity but he is at the same time hidden in his revelation. Barth expresses this tension between "veiling" and "unveiling" through the image of a tangent touching a circle without touching it.⁴⁹ What Barth is trying to convey is the futility of all human endeavor to

⁴⁹Romans II, 30.

bring God and his revelation under their control. Being confronted with revelation which is a purely eschatological event from above, human beings are facing a situation of crisis, a crisis which is beyond their possibilities and awaits only a transcendental solution from God, from Jenseits, from above.

In the way God resolves human crisis, Barth is anxious to demonstrate that all initiative belongs exclusively to him, leaving no room for human contribution. In fact Barth presents the crisis as the outcome of God's judgment upon human attempts to take control of their salvation and destiny. God's judgment is God saying "no" to human trying to attain to self-salvation through piety, religion and morality. Yet God opposes to this "no" of his judgment the "yes" of his grace, that is, his readiness to accomplish a work of salvation for us in Jesus Christ. What results from this tension is the "yes" overcoming the "no." Jean Rilliet finds here the key to understanding Barth's dialectical method. It is a combination of the Hegelian and the Kierkegaardian dialectics. In Hegel the thesis "yes" always calls for the antithesis "no," but the synthesis is the Kierkegaardian "yes" which must always destroy the "no."⁵⁰ In other words, the synthesis is always God,⁵¹ or more precisely Jesus Christ who is God's "yes", God's grace, which abolishes the "no" of God's judgment to put an end to human crisis.

Jesus Christ is the transcendental solution from above, from heaven, from God,

⁵⁰Jean Rillet, Karl Barth Theologien Existentialiste (Neuchatel: Edition H. Messeiller, 1951). 119. For the same argument, see also Von Balthasar, Theology of Barth, 82-83.

⁵¹"It is only in God that the synthesis can be found; but in God it can be found---the synthesis which is meant in the thesis and sought in the antithesis." (Barth, WGWM, 322).

for human beings who find themselves perplexed in the tension between time and eternity, history and transcendence. The issue can never be settled since instead of beginning from eternity and transcendence we start from time and history. This mistake finds expression in the liberal theologians' method which consists in beginning by identifying Christianity as a "cultural Christianity" rather than an eschatological phenomenon. But this is a wrong way which only leads to condemnation since "In the world of time and of men and of things we are condemned, but in the kingdom of God we are justified."⁵² Barth emphasizes strongly the crucial importance of the victory that eternity has already won over time, insisting that in Christ "time is swallowed up in eternity, and the flesh in the infinite victory of the Spirit."⁵³

But it was especially his discovery of the posthumous writings of Franz Overbeck in 1920, particularly his work Christentum und Kultur, which opened Barth's eyes to the errors of the liberal theologians. Barth was exceedingly impressed by Overbeck for the reason that as a church historian he caught vision of the eschatological nature of primitive Christianity and became a radical critic of the cultural Christianity which had come to flourish in Protestant liberalism. The influence of Overbeck upon Karl Barth was decisive since it was in reliance on this church historian that Barth took the final decision to reject liberal theology and to turn to eschatology. Barth cites Overbeck who stated that "Theology cannot be re-established except with audacity."⁵⁴ Barth understood "audacity"

⁵²Romans, II, 284.

⁵³Romans II, 285.

⁵⁴Barth, Theology and Church, 72.

in the sense of need for courage and boldness to oppose liberalism. He quotes again Overbeck with the conviction that his attack is levelled at the liberal theology's aberration:

The first fresh Christianity is a Christianity without the experience of growing old and it cannot be saved by any theology which does not renounce all its pretensions, historical, scientific, and theological.⁵⁵

Barth highlights Overbeck's total separation of Christianity from history and culture: "Can Christianity," he asks, "claim real significance as an historical entity?" "Is it possible," he continues, "for a historian to treat Christianity apart from culture?" Barth answers this question by using Overbeck's vivid expressions: "If Christianity, then not history; if history, then not Christianity."⁵⁶ Christianity cannot be associated with the relativities of history nor with any ideological principles like socialism.⁵⁷ Barth quotes Overbeck who states that "To include Christianity under the concept of the historical, means to admit that it is of this world, and like all life has lived in this world in order to die."⁵⁸

In Barth's view Overbeck's insight into the true nature of Christianity springs from his discovery of its proper context in the past, in the history before history, which is "suprahistorical," "unknowable," and "inconceivable."⁵⁹ Overbeck calls this kind of history Urgeschichte, "the super-history" or "primal history." Overbeck argues that Church

⁵⁵Barth, Theology and Church, 72.

⁵⁶Barth, Theology and Church, 61.

⁵⁷Barth, Theology and Church, 62.

⁵⁸Barth, Theology and Church, 62.

⁵⁹Barth, Theology and Church, 58.

history's attempt to penetrate Urgeschichte is a vain enterprise since it enshrines a whole life which cannot be discovered through a modern historical-critical method based on analogy, criticism, and correlation.

In fact Barth understands Overbeck's idea of Urgeschichte which is actually a doctrine of the "first things" (protology) in an eschatological sense. The reason is that it deals with the history of Christianity which has to do with Christ himself as an eschatological figure. Barth refers to Overbeck who argues that "Christianity means nothing else than Christ and the faith of his followers in him; it is something above time; in the life-time of Jesus, it had as yet no existence at all."⁶⁰ By relating Urgeschichte to the person of Christ and the faith of the early Christians Overbeck, Barth believes, points to the supranatural and eschatological nature of Christianity.

For Barth, the eschatological character of Urgeschichte points not so much to the past as to the future, for by this term Overbeck had in mind the second coming of Christ.

Barth writes:

It is not from humanist culture and it is not from Christianity that this theologian who does not wish to be a theologian comes. He comes rather from the elemental, the primary, the transcendental, the immediate expectation of the Parousia in the world, which stands behind Christianity.⁶¹

What Barth attempts to demonstrate is the fact that Urgeschichte and the expectation of the parousia are virtually the same in Overbeck's theology. Barth is certain that this equation can really be detected in Overbeck's theological concept since the parousia

⁶⁰Barth, Theology and Church, 62.

⁶¹Barth, Theology and Church, 65.

effectively lies within his concern. Barth quotes Overbeck, lamenting the fact that Christianity of his time "has so little room left for the whole conception of the Return of Christ that it cannot even conceive it historically as belonging to the original Christianity."⁶² That Christianity is inextricably connected with Jesus Christ and his Parousia means that it is strictly an eschatological reality. Barth concludes from this assumption that access to the truth of Christianity is only possible through reception of divine revelation.

Barth may have distorted Overbeck's notion of Urgeschichte by insisting on its eschatological meaning, but what we observe in Barth's interpretation of and reliance on Overbeck is his determination to turn from liberalism to eschatology. In the end Barth is carried away to make an exaggerated declaration which he later retracted by confessing that it was "In an attempt to free ourselves both from these early forms of one-sidedness, especially from that of pietistic and Liberal Neo-Protestantism" that we were led to affirm that "A Christianity that is not wholly and utterly and irreducibly eschatology has absolutely nothing to do with Christ."⁶³

4. The Influence of the Two Chiliastic Blumhardts Upon Barth

We may say that Kierkegaard and Overbeck were the motive power which prompted Barth's move from liberalism to eschatology, while Johann Christoph Blumhardt and his son Christoph Blumhardt were the mold that shaped Barth's

⁶²Barth, Theology and Church, 66.

⁶³CD II1, 634.

eschatological principles. Under the influence of the two Blumhardts, chiliasm came to hold an important place in Barth's early theology.

It was his neighboring pastor, Eduard Thurneysen, a former-fellow student from Marburg, who introduced Barth to the teaching of the two chiliasts, Johann Christoph Blumhardt and his son Christoph Blumhardt, while he was in charge of a parish in Safenwil during the years between 1911 and 1921. Yet according to Barth's biographer Eberhard Busch, Barth was already familiar with the Blumhardts since he met Christoph Blumhardt for the first time on December 27, 1907 as a student in Tübingen, and he even went to visit him "often" in Bad Boll,⁶⁴ though he confessed that "his eyes were not yet fully opened." If Busch is accurate in his report, it may be possible to surmise that chiliasm began to loom in Barth's mind during his early university studies.

Barth himself acknowledged the great influence that the two Blumhardts exerted upon him. Barth not only read the theological writings and the devotional books of the Blumhardts but kept in touch with Christoph Blumhardt in Bad Boll during his ministry in Safenwil. Barth portrays the elder Blumhardt as one who "expects the dawn of a new time of grace on the earth."⁶⁵ He speaks of him as a chiliast and reacts at the same time against the prejudice of equating chiliasm unqualifiedly with heresy. "One cannot," Barth observes, "refrain from bestowing on Blumhardt the heretical name of a chiliast---if that really is a heresy."⁶⁶

⁶⁴Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 43-44.

⁶⁵Barth, Protestant Theology, 652.

⁶⁶Barth, Protestant Theology, 652.

Barth admits that his eschatology was deeply influenced by the chiliast Blumhardts. In the lecture fragments titled Christian Life, which are Barth's last lectures on the Church Dogmatics,⁶⁷ Barth concludes his chapter on the kingdom of God⁶⁸ with the acknowledgment that he is indebted to the two Blumhardts:

If something is now being said about the Blumhardts, it is not with the intention of summoning them as star witnesses for what has been developed. In fact, it could not have been stated and developed as it has without the impulse they gave and their influence through other mediations and modifications.⁶⁹

Just as Barth was indebted to Overbeck for his final decision to turn from liberalism to eschatology, so he owes a debt to the two Blumhardts for the elaboration of his eschatological outlook. Barth sees Overbeck and the Blumhardts standing in the same eschatological tradition although they were looking in different directions, backward and forward. Barth describes the relationship between Overbeck and the younger Blumhardt as follows:

Actually, Blumhardt and Overbeck stand close together; back to back, if you like, and very different in disposition, in terminology, in their mental worlds, in their experience, but essentially together. Blumhardt stood as a forward-looking and hopeful Overbeck; Overbeck as a backward-looking, critical Blumhardt. Each was the witness to the mission of the other.⁷⁰

This means that Overbeck and Blumhardt had exactly the same purpose and the same "mission," which consisted in bringing Christianity back to its eschatological nature. The

⁶⁷Karl Barth, CD IV/4, The Christian Life, (Lecture Fragments), trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

⁶⁸Barth, Christian Life, 205-71.

⁶⁹Barth, Christian Life, 256-57.

⁷⁰Barth, Theology and Church, 56.

only difference lies in the way they fulfilled their mission. While Overbeck had recourse to criticism, Blumhardt reacted through prayer and by setting his hope on God's intervention. While Overbeck was taking action by means of protology, Blumhardt focused his attention on eschatology. While Overbeck refers to the presence of Christ back to the time of the Apostles, Blumhardt speaks of the presence of Christ in his own time and of his future return.

Barth sees in the younger Blumhardt all the theological issues which concerned Overbeck. Barth points out that Christoph Blumhardt "raised a whole series of questions once again that had to break through . . . the limitations of both liberal and pietistic theology."⁷¹ Barth means to say that the fallacy of liberalism was unmasked when confronted with Blumhardt's simple theology. Barth points out that

Blumhardt puts forward no historical and psychological deductions. He neither reasons nor discusses; he talks neither politics nor philosophy . . . He remains silent in face of our urgent questions: idealistic or realistic? . . . Friendly but aloof, he passes by the dogmatic and the liberal, the "religious-ethical" and us socialist theologians . . . He simply tells us the divine truth in the world as it meets him.⁷²

Barth alludes to "hope" as he speaks of the divine truth in Blumhardt's theology. When Barth says that Blumhardt is a "forward-looking and hopeful Overbeck," he means that Blumhardt's theology is a theology of hope. Barth makes it clear that what distinguishes Blumhardt from the liberal theologians is his becoming "a theologian of hope."⁷³ It is a hope which is founded on what Christ has already achieved in his first

⁷¹Barth, Protestant Theology, 652.

⁷²Karl Barth, Action in Waiting, trans. Society of Brothers (New York: Plough Publishing House, 1969), 20-21.

⁷³Barth, Protestant Theology, 646.

coming, but also a hope which is grounded in Christ's second coming and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

Christ who has already come and is present on earth was the basis of Blumhardt's theological thought. Barth says that "Blumhardt always begins right away with God's presence, might and purpose: he starts out from God; he does not begin by climbing upwards to him."⁷⁴ God's presence is his presence in Jesus Christ, hence Blumhardt's attention was in the first instance directed to Jesus Christ who is the revelation of God to humankind, before he turned his attention to Christ in his final appearing. "So in the first place," Barth says, "it is not the eschatological Jesus, the one who is to come, from whom Blumhardt begins, but the present, living Jesus, of whom Pietism could say so much and yet, in Blumhardt's view so little."⁷⁵ Barth means that Blumhardt grounded his eschatological thought and hope not so much on Christ's second coming as on Christ's first coming, as the victorious Christ who died on the cross and rose from the dead.

The Blumhardts concretely experienced the presence and power of Christ when a girl called Gottliebin Dittus, suffering from demon possession, received her healing after two years of prayer for her deliverance. The elder Blumhardt took the word "Jesus is Victor,"⁷⁶ which he heard first in a wood with many other fellow-Christians, and then was pronounced by Gottliebin's sister after the healing, to be a "prophetic utterance"

⁷⁴Barth, Action in Waiting, 24.

⁷⁵Karl Barth, Protestant Theology, 649.

⁷⁶CD IV\3.1. 169.

referring to the presence of Christ in his power and victory on earth. Blumhardt was convinced, Barth says, that "the victory of Christ is 'eternally settled'. . . that it is objectively decided even in the darkest darkness of the world, and that it is now manifested, known and declared."⁷⁷ In other words, Blumhardt took this event as a reality of divine revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth declares that "Blumhardt has faith in God's revelation as the highest, the most remote, and the most wonderful event because he already sees it all the time in the nearest and most ordinary things."⁷⁸

Barth cites Blumhardt saying that "Something is being prepared in Heaven and then comes down to the earth as well so that we are joyful."⁷⁹ It was to the coming of the kingdom that the Blumhardts anchored their faith and hope. Barth says that "Their true theme . . . was the world to come, which they . . . saw in faith and hope as an action and event at the beginning and end of the whole of this world."⁸⁰ They did not see the kingdom of God as something dependent on this world but as

The world to come intervening from outside and from first to last not just limiting or even illumining this world, but with superior severity and goodness storming and smashing it in all its dimensions.⁸¹

The two Blumhardts could make this assertion by relating God's kingdom to the name of Jesus which transcends whatever is historical and earthly: it is

⁷⁷CD IV3.1, 170.

⁷⁸Barth, Action in Waiting, 24.

⁷⁹Barth, Action in Waiting, 35.

⁸⁰Barth, Christian Life, 259.

⁸¹Barth, Christian Life, 258.

. . . the name of Jesus which illumines and infinitely outshines all the miracles at Möttingen and the experiences at Bad Boll, all the expected new outpouring of the Spirit, all the later possibilities which may be noted in science or religion or accepted in politics.⁸²

And what is particularly important about the Blumhardts' treatment of this name is the fact that they are not interested in its theological connotations such as "God-man" and "historical Jesus" because they only understand the name of Jesus "very naïvely, but with axiomatic certainty," to mean

. . . the reality of the risen and living Jesus himself, acting and speaking as a distinctive factor no less actual today than yesterday: . . . the Jesus who has already come and will come again, and who is thus present to his people and---unknown to it---the world.⁸³

At this point let us pause and see the kind of chiliasm that the two Blumhardts are teaching. They may be premillennial theologians as they seem to focus on the promise and hope of kingdom of God grounded in the second coming of Christ. But they also differ from the premillennialists in that they do not solely concentrate on the second coming of Christ and look forward to the beginning of an eternal bliss. Rather, their attention is primarily directed to the significance of the first coming of Christ and his resurrection. The Christ who has already come is present in his power and is victorious over the demonic powers in this world through his resurrection from the dead: "Jesus is Victor." Strictly speaking, the risen Christ is the foundation of the Blumhardts' chiliasm. In this sense, the Blumhardts's chiliasm is a modified chiliasm. In the last analysis, underlying their vision is a conviction that approaches amillennialism.

⁸²Barth, Christian Life, 259.

⁸³Barth, Christian Life, 259.

We note, however, that Barth sees in this the essentials of Christology and eschatology. The real Christ is the One who has risen from the dead, the One who has already come and will come again. The meaning of the kingdom of God is to be sought exclusively in the resurrected Christ, in his first coming and today's presence on earth, and in his second coming to bring all things to consummation. Barth appropriated this from the Blumhardts and it will become the foundation of his eschatology. Eberhard Jüngel rightly notes that "Barth remained theologically close to the two Blumhardts for the rest of his life."⁸⁴

However, Barth was also very critical of the chiliasts, including the Blumhardts. Before we proceed to examine Barth's attempt at a reconstruction of the millennial doctrine, let us first take a look at his statement of the weakness of chiliasm to which he wants to bring some corrective.

5. Identifying the Weaknesses of Chiliasm

Barth was deeply convinced about the value of chiliasm as he saw it mainly in the two Blumhardts. But he also knew that chiliasm is a belief so fraught with doctrinal errors that he was determined to bring some corrective to it. He knew, for example, how much the fanaticism which accompanies chiliasm was destructive to the church. Barth speaks of "'fanatical' parties in the Church" which he identifies as the "chiliastic parties in the Church."⁸⁵ He laments the chiliasts' misuse of the Holy Spirit and their "heretical"

⁸⁴Jüngel, Theological Legacy, 63.

⁸⁵CD III, 337.

division of church history into confusing dispensations.⁸⁶ Barth saw in chiliasm an openness to all kinds of illusions and eclectic principles. The elder Blumhardt expected the second coming of Christ to take place in his lifetime. There was a time when the younger Blumhardt accumulated in his chiliastic doctrine different principles, including pietism, a "concept of evolution in modern science,"⁸⁷ and social democracy which he identified with God's kingdom.

However, the greatest disappointment that the two Blumhardts' elaboration of the chiliastic belief caused in Barth was their confusion of what Barth calls "penultimate" and "ultimate" dimensions of eschatology. Despite their emphasis both on Christ's first coming and his second advent, Barth criticized the two Blumhardts' method in that they "did not speak of the kingdom of God indirectly, in experiments, or with only penultimate seriousness, but directly, thetically, and with ultimate seriousness."⁸⁸ Barth saw that the Blumhardts lost sight of the penultimate things pertaining to the first coming of Christ and the millennium, which still remain provisional. Their attention was immediately focused on the ultimate things belonging to the second coming of Christ and the consummation to the effect that they "confused the resurrection of the dead and eternal life with the thousand-year kingdom."⁸⁹ What the Blumhardts failed to do, Barth says, is "to take the last step that should have been taken, the clear subordination of the

⁸⁶CD II, 336-37.

⁸⁷Barth, Christian Life, 257.

⁸⁸Barth, Christian Life, 259.

⁸⁹Barth, Protestant Theology, 652.

penultimate things to the last things."⁹⁰ In other words, the Blumhardts missed the clear-cut distinction between the millennial reign of Christ and final consummation of the kingdom.

Barth here isolates what he judges to be faulty in the contents of the chiliastic hope. Hence, although he highlights the importance of the millennium in Christian doctrine he does so with reservations. Barth's statement, for example, that "there cannot be any Christian hope at all without a drop of chiliasm"⁹¹ seems to be particularly significant. His choice of the term "drop" may not be incidental but is intended to express something specific, namely, his acknowledgment that chiliasm is indeed an important element constituting the essence of Christianity and Christian eschatology, but that the use of this doctrine also needs "filtering" because of the presence of alien or even heretical elements in its compound. This means that Barth is not prepared to accept chiliasm without qualifications, but he also puts the believers on their guard against losing sight of the object of great value in chiliasm, namely, the hope for sure victory, for "Jesus is Victor."

For Barth, chiliasm is by no means a wrong doctrine. Rather, it is the way it is sometimes handled by Christians that is wrong. Thus, Barth now finds it his task to revise the millennial concept.

⁹⁰Barth, Protestant Theology, 652.

⁹¹Barth, Protestant Theology, 134. "Aber man muss vielleicht, dass es ohne einen Tropfen Chiliasmus . . . überhaupt keine christliche Hoffnung gibt" (Barth, Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert [Zollikon/Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946], 113).

6. Barth's Millennial Concept As a Theologia Viatorum

Referring to the place held by chiliasm in theology Barth says that "more than once in church history chiliasm has been the inevitable transitional stage towards an understanding of authentic redemption, which not only crowns history, but also makes all things new."⁹² According to this statement, although chiliasm could not exhaustively contain the doctrine of redemption, theology had to go through this theological principle before it could come to a full elaboration of a soteriological concept. It is Barth's conviction, as we indicated earlier, that chiliasm involves some fundamental truth that we cannot overlook, so he deems it necessary to penetrate what is so valuable in millennialism.

Barth's investigation may be understood in the light of the principle of theologia viatorum that he took over from the church fathers. It is worth noting, however, that Barth had to be careful in his re-construction of the millennial concept because of his involvement in an endless controversy with his former teacher, Adolf von Harnack, on the "essence of Christianity," as we have noted above. Barth had also been accused of holding heretical views, and Harnack in particular charged him with chiliastic heresy. Barth writes in the preface of the second edition of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans:

Even before the appearance of Harnack's book, Jülicher had already bracketed my

⁹²Barth, Protestant Theology, 134.

name with Marcion's. Harnack joined me to---Thomas Münzer⁹³; Walter Koepler, I think, to Kaspar Schwenckfeld.⁹⁴

As such we might expect that all of Barth's references to chiliasm would be carefully expressed. Moreover, Barth is well aware that this doctrine does not receive full recognition not only from the church fathers and from some modern theologians but also from most of the creeds and confessions in the history of the church.⁹⁵ Barth does not sympathize with this negative attitude and bemoans the Lutheran opposition to chiliasm in the article XVII of the Augsburg Confession.⁹⁶ This suggests that Barth had to deal with this doctrine with great caution.

As indicated earlier, the confrontation between Barth and Harnack began at the Aarau Student Conference in April 1920⁹⁷ and it continued through an exchange of correspondence until 1923. This dating is important in view of the fact that Barth apparently took the opportunity to give a glimpse of his understanding of the millennium

⁹³According to Lewis W. Spitz, "Münzer was more a chiliast religious extremist than a social revolutionary. He preached the imminent coming of the kingdom of God in which all men will be equal and all property would be held in common. He encouraged the masses to kill the rulers and destroy their castles. He urged his League of Elects to wipe out the unregenerate" (Lewis W. Spitz, The Renaissance and Reformation Movements, vol. 2 [St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1971], 344).

⁹⁴Romans, II, 13.

⁹⁵Any belief in an earthly and political reign of Christ is condemned by different church confessions, including the Augsburg Confession, A.D. 1530, the First Helvetic Confession, A.D. 1536, The Second Helvetic Confession, A.D. 1566, the Council of Trent between 1545 and 1563, and the Westminster Confession A.D. 1647.

⁹⁶Cf. Barth, WGWM, 157, 160; Barth, Protestant Theology, 134.

⁹⁷Cf. Barth, "Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas" in WGWM, 51. Footnote.

in an address titled "The Problem of Ethics Today," which was delivered at a conference of ministers at Wiesbaden in September, 1922,⁹⁸ that is, just within the period when the debate between Harnack and himself was heated.

We detect in "The Problem of Ethics Today" Barth's attempt to bring out the true significance of the millennium. Barth begins by speaking of a "remote conception of the millennium," but he hastens to add that the millennium only appears to be a remote conception; that is, the millennium concept only seems to be concerned with the future but it is actually something having to do with the present. "Consider therefore," Barth says, "the apparently, but only apparently, remote conception of the millennium."⁹⁹ That the remoteness of the millennium is only "apparent" means that it deals with human earthly life now, or more precisely it is directly related to the "problem of ethics today," as the title of Barth's address itself indicates.

Barth argues in this lecture that ethics is organically related to the millennium and that the millennium is the key to understanding ethics. In Barth's view "Ethics can no more exist without millenarianism, without at least some minute degree of it, than without the idea of a moral personality."¹⁰⁰ That the millennium is intimately bound with ethics indicates a strong emphasis on the social dimensions of the millennium. This means that the millennium must be interpreted more from an existential standpoint than from the perspective of future expectation. However, Barth is also well aware of the future

⁹⁸Barth, "Problem of Ethics Today" in WGWM, 136.

⁹⁹Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 157.

¹⁰⁰Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 158.

dimensions of the millennium by pointing to the place held by "hope" in the millennial concept. Actually Barth's primary concern is to hold in balance the present aspect of the millennium, that is, its relation to today's human earthly existence, and its future aspect, that is, its status as the focus of human hope. In this connection, Barth says that "It is concerned with the goal of earthly history---and this without prejudice to the hope of eternal life in another world."¹⁰¹ According to this statement, Barth identifies two essential elements within the millennium, namely, the millennium as "the goal of earthly history" and the millennium as "a hope of eternal life." Let us see these two constituents of Barth's chiliastic ethics in greater detail. First we will take a closer look at his view of the millennium as a "goal."

Barth defines ethics as "the idea of a totality of good conduct."¹⁰² In Barth's view the relationship between ethics and the millennium is to be understood in the sense that ethics, as the totality of good conduct, "is really denoted by the idea of the millennium and its derivatives."¹⁰³ In other words, all moral principles are identical with the ethical implications of the millennium. In this respect the millennium becomes the "goal of earthly history" which provides the standard of human conduct. Barth says that the millennial ethics

. . . contains within itself a more or less distinct question as to the historical ideal, as to the goal which lies, as is capable of being realized, not outside of time and within it, as to the order of human society which is to be grounded in what our stammering paraphrases call truth and righteousness, intelligence and love, peace

¹⁰¹Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 158.

¹⁰²Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 158.

¹⁰³Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 158.

and freedom.¹⁰⁴

This statement concisely summarizes Barth's view of the role that the millennium plays in history. The millennium is an historical ideal and even the goal of history since it involves the real needs and desires of human hearts. These are not so much an individual as a social need, and Barth observes that the millennium accordingly "has taken the definite form of the socialistic ideal."¹⁰⁵

Barth finds an application of this kind of ethical idealism in the yearnings of the Western world. Barth says,

The cry of Western humanity is one: let freedom in love and love in freedom be the pure and direct motive of social life, and a community of righteousness its direct objective! Let paternalism cease, and the exploitation and oppression of man by man! Let class differences, national boundaries, war, and, above all, violence and unrestrained power be done away! Let a civilization of Spirit take the place of a civilization of things, human values the place of the property values, brotherhood the place of hostility!¹⁰⁶

The millennial ethics here, as Barth sees it, embraces every dimension of human life: social, political, and economic. Thus Barth's chiliastic ethics by no means remains an ideal or something which is exclusively to be fulfilled in the future. Rather, it concerns directly our present earthly existence. It is Barth's conviction that "we cannot free ourselves from the thought of a something which is to be effected here in time, of a moral objective in which the two lines, morality and history meet."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 157.

¹⁰⁵Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWN, 157.

¹⁰⁶Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 160.

¹⁰⁷Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 161.

However, that "morality and history meet" still remains a "utopia." It would become a reality only when the "goal of earthly history" exhibited in the millennium is reached. Now Barth turns his attention to human nature and becomes pessimistic as to the realization of this chiliastic ethics on earth, for it presupposes something of which humans are not capable, namely, what Barth calls "freedom in love and love in freedom."¹⁰⁸ In Barth's judgment, "man's only possible love is Eros," and "the righteousness possible to man is justitia civilis."¹⁰⁹ Humans cannot attain to the moral ideal because of "the fall of man which precedes and determines all history."¹¹⁰ At this point Barth is certain that the hope for the fulfillment of the goal set by the millennium is to be sought not in humans but somewhere else, that is, in God. God is the only "hope" for the possibility of moral behavior in human beings.

Barth refuses to allow any distinction between ethics and dogmatics because, in his view, ethics is by no means a human enterprise. God is the first to be concerned in regard to the ethical question. Thus Barth calls ethics "a task of the doctrine of God."¹¹¹ He finds ethics to be intimately bound with the covenant God made with human beings and characterizes it as a "witness to the grace of God."¹¹² Ethics is "the truth of the

¹⁰⁸Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 166.

¹⁰⁹Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 166.

¹¹⁰Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 166.

¹¹¹CD II/2, 509.

¹¹²CD II/2, 509.

grace of God," Barth argues, "as it is addressed to man."¹¹³ This association of ethics with "covenant," "grace," and "truth" shows that Barth directly links his ethical theory to Jesus Christ.

In order to understand the kind of relationship that Barth tries to establish between ethics and Christ, we must first remember Barth's theory according to which God is "identical with His act in revelation and also identical with its effect."¹¹⁴ "The work of God is the essence of God."¹¹⁵ Barth applies this theory of identity of God's essence and his activity to his ethical concept and asserts that God's command is God himself. "When having equated the good with the command," Barth says, "we further equate it with the divine command, i.e., with God himself."¹¹⁶ For Barth, God's command, which is God himself, is "ethics of grace . . . For it is in grace---the grace of God in Jesus Christ---that even the command of God is established and fulfilled and revealed as such."¹¹⁷ Thus, Barth relates ethics to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, Christ who is not only the embodiment of the command of God itself (for in him it was "established"), but also the execution of the law (for in him it was "fulfilled") and the revelation of God's command (for in him it was "revealed"). At this point, it becomes clear that the "goal of earthly history" which Barth finds in the millennium is nothing other than Jesus

¹¹³CD II/2, 518.

¹¹⁴CD I/1, 296.

¹¹⁵CD I/1, 371.

¹¹⁶Karl Barth, Ethics, trans. G. W. Bromiley (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 85.

¹¹⁷CD II/2, 539.

Christ himself. Not only does Christ reveal to his people the ethical goal of history but he is also the one who fulfills the ethical goal of history on their behalf. Thus Barth takes a strictly christocentric approach to ethics.

Barth tries to justify this strict christocentrism by pointing out that Paul, Luther, and Calvin immediately turned to Christ when they were confronted with the ethical problem. "They meant Jesus Christ himself," Barth says, "when they preached the certainty of solving the ethical problem."¹¹⁸ Barth ties the fulfillment of the ethical goal to the kingdom of God which has come in Jesus Christ and declares that "Salvation is certain because the new man is present from above, bringing the new heaven and the new earth, the kingdom of God."¹¹⁹

Here we lay our finger on the ultimate goal in the millennium which ethics strives to attain: salvation. And once again Barth takes this opportunity to reject liberalism once and for all saying that

Jesus Christ is not the goal which we hope to reach after conversion, at the end of the history of our heart and conscience. Jesus Christ is not a figure of our history to which we "relate" ourselves. And Jesus Christ is least of all an object of religious and mystical experience.¹²⁰

In what then is salvation, as the object of ethics, grounded? It is anchored to the risen Christ, "the one who was crucified, dead, and buried, who descended into hell, but rose again from the dead."¹²¹

¹¹⁸Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 180.

¹¹⁹Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 180.

¹²⁰Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 181.

¹²¹Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 181.

The goal set by the millennium that we cannot attain through our own efforts means that it is God who must do it for us. And he indeed did it on our behalf in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. Thus it is only on the risen Christ that we can set our hope for the fulfillment of the ethical ideal with which the millennium confronts us. The risen Christ is the One who has already come and will come again for the realization and the consummation of our hope. It is this hope which generates faith, therefore it is only this hope, as a form of ethical conduct, that God expects from us.

It is very tempting to associate hope with idealism in view of human incapacity to satisfy the ethical demands. But the fulfillment of the ethical goal in Christ rules out any form of idealism or utopia. Barth effectively refers to Kant's idealism to explicate Christian hope, in such a way that it seems more accurate to see Barth's view of the millennium in the light of Kant's idea of "highest good" (summum bonum).¹²² Barth also acknowledges the validity of Kant's epistemology which, in his view, rules out all anthropocentric approaches to the knowledge of God found in liberalism. In his critique of metaphysics Kant rejects all confusions of reality with empirical knowledge, the "thing-in-itself" with the "world of appearances." Barth makes use of the corollary of Kant's theory to argue that the "reality" about God in his wholly otherness can be known only through his Word, which is God's self-revelation. Barth, however, does not see the millennium as a mere "postulate" of practical reason as Kant does. The millennium is neither the Kantian idea of God, freedom, or immortality, whose purpose is to stimulate

¹²²Rather than using the term "highest good," Barth speaks of "the good . . . to be realised in history." (Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 161).

human will to meet the moral law. Instead of Kant's idealism, Barth has recourse to biblical realism¹²³ to speak of the millennium.

Through his notion of analogy of faith, Barth accepts Scripture to be the Word of God in which a "realistic" knowledge of God can be derived from the biblical narratives. Biblical narratives render the portrayal of Jesus who is the Word incarnate and God's self-revelation. Barth starts from Kant's idealism in order to show the impossibility of human direct knowledge of God, but then turns to realism in which the focus is on biblical stories which present God through the event of Jesus Christ. God reveals himself in Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, through the stories of his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and his future return.

It is also through this theological realism that Barth presents the millennium. Barth says that

According to the twentieth chapter of Revelation the millennium is by no means an island of the blest, but the kingdom of saints and martyrs built over Satan's bottomless pit in which the dragon is chained.¹²⁴

Barth here rejects the idealistic or utopian depiction of the millennium as a place of eternal bliss and introduces a realistic description by referring to characters, events, and particularities. In this story the characters are the saints and the martyrs, Satan, and Jesus Christ who defeated Satan and bound him in the bottomless pit. The events are the

¹²³For a comprehensive exposition of Barth's realism, see George Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth, esp. 43-49; David H. Kelsey, The Use of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 39-50; D. F. Ford, "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible," in Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method, ed. S. W. Sykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, esp. 77-86.

¹²⁴Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 160.

binding of Satan and the life that Christ's people live over Satan's bottomless pit. And finally, the particulars are Satan's bottomless pit and the kingdom or the abode of the saints and the martyrs. These may be called particulars in the sense that they are realities which do not belong to the realm of generalities but realities which belong particularly to the biblical and theological realm. Through this realism is rendered what the Bible wants us to understand as to the meaning of the so-called millennium.

What picture of the millennium is depicted here? Although this picture is based on a realistic description, the statement is too concise and presents some interpretive ambiguities, so that it may be interpreted from a fundamentalist perspective and would provide a premillennialist view of the millennium in which Satan is literally bound and Christ is ruling with the saints and martyrs over the unbelieving nations on the earth. In this sense Barth could be identified as a premillennial thinker.

But this description is also open to another interpretation. First of all, we note that Barth assumes that the millennium must be a "kingdom." But kingdom here may be understood not in a territorial but in an existential sense. It is a kingdom which exists side by side with a "bottomless pit" in which Satan is bound. By identifying the millennium as a "kingdom of saints and martyrs" Barth probably understands the millennium as both an earthly reality and a heavenly reality---a millennial kingdom for the saints or the believers still living on earth, and a millennial kingdom for the martyrs, probably along with the departed believers in heaven. But Barth seems to concentrate on an earthly millennial kingdom in view of the link he establishes between the millennium and ethics. We notice also the co-existence of two worlds or two kingdoms on earth: the kingdom

of the believers designated by the term "kingdom of saints and martyrs" and the kingdom of Satan symbolized by the term "bottomless pit."

In this interpretation the image of the kingdom of the saints and the martyrs built over Satan's bottomless pit is intended to convey the idea that human life during the millennium is far from being a peaceful and serene one. Rather it is a restless and alarming situation since Satan, humans' worst enemy, is not far but just underneath their abode. This elucidates the need for ethics in the millennial kingdom. Ethics here refers to Christian life. It is a life under threat because of the presence of Satan underneath, just like the presence of a volcano which is preparing to erupt at any time. Moreover if Satan is just nearby, "underneath," his influence must still be strongly felt, even though he is chained.

Barth seems to present the Christian moral struggle as a crisis generated by the presence of Satan who, despite his being bound because of the victory that Christ has already won over him, still uses the small part of liberty left to him to harass the believers. As a consequence Christian life has become an endless moral struggle, a struggle occasioned by the endeavor to reach the goal lying ahead set by the millennium. Barth claims the support of Kant in holding this position. Barth points out that Kant conceived of the millennium as an image of moral struggle due to the attempt to reach a moral ideal. "According to Kant," Barth points out, "it is a kingdom of the practical reason. It is as a task and not as an object of desire, as a goal and not as a termination of the moral struggle."¹²⁵ The millennium then is the representation of a moral goal

¹²⁵Barth, "Problem of Ethics Today," in WGWM, 160.

which is set before human beings and which conditions their present existence in the sense that it has become their duty to attain that goal.

This second interpretation seems to be more in harmony with Barth's chiliastic ethics. His interpretive method is here very close to the amillennial "spiritualizing." Barth's millennial concept presents no hint of an earthly kingdom with Christ's throne located in Jerusalem. Rather he clearly understands the millennium along the line of the amillennial view of the millennium as a spiritual kingdom.

Barth certainly sees the millennial kingdom as a reality going on now. He insists on the location of the millennium in the present and in human everyday life, stating that "those who take it seriously know that it must be concerned first with the events in time."¹²⁶ Yet we cannot avoid the conclusion that Barth was still vacillating between premillennialism and amillennialism in his early eschatological concept. Our next task consists in surveying Barth's progress toward a more elaborate amillennial doctrine as part of a theologia viatorum.

B. From Chiasm to Amillennialism

This survey of the second stage of the development of Barth's eschatology attempts to demonstrate that Barth's theologia viatorum which went through chiasm ends up in amillennialism. We will concentrate especially on the term parousia which is the key-word for Barth's amillennial principles. Parousia will be defined in relation to Christ's resurrection, revelation, and the kingdom of God.

¹²⁶Barth, "Problem of Ethics," in WGWM, 158.

1. The Development of Barth's Doctrine of Parousia
As a Way Toward Amillennialism

An obvious and thoroughgoing move from chiliasm to amillennialism cannot be surveyed through Barth's major writings. Yet different stages in the process of this shift can be discerned if we examine carefully Barth's references to the term parousia¹²⁷ in the second edition of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans and in The Resurrection of the Dead, before this concept reached its full development in the Church Dogmatics,¹²⁸ particularly in The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Volume IV, Parts 1, 3.1 and 3.2.

The term parousia is employed for the first time in the millennial sense in the second edition of the commentary on the Romans which was first published in 1922, the same year as Barth's lecture "The Problem of Ethics Today." The only two places¹²⁹ where Barth refers to the word parousia still present some chiliastic flavor. In the first example chiliasm is still felt in the fact that the meaning of parousia is restricted to the sense of Christ's "Appearance" and "Presence"¹³⁰ in relation to Christ's final return, which has nothing to do with his first coming. Then Barth refers again to the term parousia by taking it simply as a sign of the end of time and history, as "the last Hour."

¹²⁷Parousia is a Greek word employed in the New Testament which has become a technical term in Christian eschatology for the second coming of Christ.

¹²⁸Perhaps Volume V of the Church Dogmatics on The Doctrine of Redemption, which was intended to be an exposition of Barth's eschatology, would be the best source for this question, but that book unfortunately was not written.

¹²⁹Cf. Romans II, 449, 500.

¹³⁰Romans, II, 499.

Barth says that

Standing on the boundary of time men are confronted by the overhanging, precipitous wall of God, by which all time and everything that is in time is dissolved. There is that they await the Last Hour, the Parousia of Jesus Christ.¹³¹

Thus Christ's parousia is seen only as a future reality and is exclusively associated with an absolute end of the world. Obviously, Barth does not follow the premillennialists in their expectation of the end taking place through a cataclysmic destruction. But he nevertheless insists upon the end. Barth writes:

The End of which the New Testament speaks is no temporal event, no legendary "destruction" of the world; it has nothing to do with any historical, or "telluric," or cosmic catastrophe. The end of which the New Testament speaks is really the End.¹³²

Barth emphasizes strongly the idea of Christ's "appearance" which signals the "end" in connection with the term parousia and says no more. At this point we may say that in 1922 Barth's understanding of Christ's parousia was still confined to the premillennial idea of the end of the world.

Regarding Barth's commentary on the Romans, let us note in passing that, although Barth does not yet relate the idea of parousia to Christ's resurrection and revelation he already highlights in this work the equation of the resurrection of Christ with revelation. "The Resurrection," Barth declares, "is the revelation: the disclosing of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God, and the apprehending of God in Jesus."¹³³

¹³¹Romans II, 500.

¹³²Romans II, 500.

¹³³Romans II, 30.

Christ's resurrection as revelation is crucial for the subsequent understanding of Barth's concept of the parousia.

We notice a significant point of advance in Barth's notion of parousia in The Resurrection of the Dead which was published in 1924. Here the word parousia occurs only once but its meaning has become more enriched. It is not confined only to the idea of Christ's appearance and the end of history as is the case in the Epistle to the Romans. Rather, Barth begins to associate it with Christ's resurrection and revelation. Barth declares that

Christ's par[ousia] is nothing different, second next to His resurrection, only the definite coming-to-the surface of the same subterranean stream which in revelation for the first time became perceptible in time, the fulfillment of which in time can only be grasped as a promise.¹³⁴

Apparently it is here that Barth equates Christ's parousia with his resurrection and revelation for the first time. From there he proceeds to speak of revelation as something which still remains a promise and would not be realized in time but awaits Christ's second coming for its fulfillment. We see here an adumbration of Barth's principle of parousia in its three forms which will be fully developed mainly in the Church Dogmatics, Volume IV.

While the doctrine of parousia is still in its embryonic state in The Resurrection of the Dead, we can see Barth preparing its architectonic structure in the first volume and first part of the Church Dogmatics on the Doctrine of the Word of God which first appeared in 1932. We have seen in The Resurrection of the Dead that Barth equates the

¹³⁴Barth, Resurrection, 167.

parousia with Christ's resurrection and revelation, which means that the parousia means revelation. Now, in this first volume of the Church Dogmatics Barth also equates revelation with reconciliation. Barth says:

To the extent that God's revelation as such accomplishes what only God can accomplish, namely, restoration of the fellowship of man with God which we have disrupted and indeed destroyed; to the extent that God in the fact of His revelation treats His enemies as His friends; to the extent that in the fact of revelation God's enemies already are actually His friends, revelation is itself reconciliation.¹³⁵

Thus, for Barth, revelation is nothing other than the reconciliation of humans with God, that is, the establishment of the covenant between God and humanity.

Barth subsequently confirms the identification of the parousia with reconciliation in the first part of the fourth volume of the Church Dogmatics, first published in 1953, by speaking of reconciliation as the purpose of the time between the first and the second coming of Christ. Barth says,

as man who in his perversion, sin and lostness has been visited by the reconciliation of the world with God as accomplished in Jesus Christ, and altered at the very root of his being . . . That is the meaning and purpose of the interval between the first parousia of Jesus Christ and the second.¹³⁶

In fact, it is in this volume that Barth starts to elaborate his doctrine of parousia. Highly significant here is the fact that Barth integrated the doctrine of parousia into the Doctrine of Reconciliation of Volume IV, for this implies that the meaning of the parousia must be understood against the background of Christ's reconciling work.

But before we concentrate on Volume IV on the Doctrine of Reconciliation, let

¹³⁵CD I, 409.

¹³⁶CD IV, 353.

us first turn to an intermediate phase in the development of Barth's notion of parousia. In Volume III, Part 2, Barth begins to construct his doctrine of parousia: against the background of John's Gospel, he begins to speak of the Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and parousia as events which are included in the eschaton and which make up a single epoch. Referring to John's Gospel Barth says,

As is well known, the Fourth Gospel takes its own particular line in this matter. In fulfillment of the promise: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you" (Jn. 14:18), Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and parousia are here seen as a single event, with much the same foreshortening of perspective as when we view the whole range of the Alps from the Jura. This perspective is legitimate and necessary side by side with the other. The fourth Gospel shows that it is necessary to understand the event of Easter and that of the parousia, with the intervening history of the community under the present power of the Holy Spirit, as different moment of one and the same act.¹³⁷

We see here that Barth's notion of parousia conceived against the background of the amillennial view of the millennium begins to take shape. The period between Christ's first coming and his final advent is considered as a single event and is identified with the church age.

As we now come to Volume IV, Part I, 2, and 3 of the Church Dogmatics, we will encounter the architectonic structure of the parousia as the millennium built with greater detail. Barth's very first reference to the term parousia in Volume IV, Part I is an allusion to his principle of parousia in its three forms. Barth attempted his first definition of the first form of the parousia by stating that

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, His living presence, His parousia in the direct form of the events of Easter was, however, a happening in time with a definite beginning and end like other happenings. Its end was marked by the ascension as

¹³⁷CD III2, 497. See also III2, 509.

a sign of His exaltation to the right hand of God, to eternal life and rule.¹³⁸

Then Barth turns to the second form of the parousia, which is Christ's presence in the Holy Spirit, by saying that

With the end of the time of this particular event there began a time of another form of His parousia, His living present---no less complete and sufficient in itself, but quite different. There began a time in which He was no longer, or not yet again, directly revealed and visible and audible and perceptible (as He has been) either to the disciples, the community or the world. . . . There began a time in which He was and continues to be and ever again will be directly present and revealed and active in the community of His Spirit.¹³⁹

Finally Barth makes it clear that these first two forms of the parousia are not complete in themselves but necessitate a third since they do not introduce "the time of the fulfillment of the resurrection which has come to them in Jesus Christ." The third form of the parousia is to be awaited as "the fulfillment of His parousia and the presence and salvation in the world reconciled by Him."¹⁴⁰

Barth proceeds to a fuller exposition of the doctrine of parousia in its three forms in the fourth volume of Church Dogmatics, Parts 3.1 and 3.2, which were published in 1959. Barth begins by laying stress again on the centrality of Christ's resurrection for the understanding of his parousia. Barth argues that Christ indeed came from above as the incarnation of the Word, but he was, so to speak, incognito in that coming. "To be sure," Barth declares, "the Word then became flesh, and his whole work was done in all its

¹³⁸CD IV\1, 318.

¹³⁹CD IV\1, 318.

¹⁴⁰CD IV\1, 319.

dimensions. But the incarnate Word was not yet revealed and seen in His glory (Jn. 1:4)."¹⁴¹ The real coming of Christ which was visible to the world and in the full manifestation of his glory was his resurrection. Barth asserts that

This took place in the event of Easter. In this event we certainly have the coming of the One who came before in that sphere. But it is now His coming in effective presence, because in visible manifestation to the world.¹⁴²

Barth is deeply convinced about the decisive role played by Christ's resurrection as the real manifestation of his coming and presence.

Actually, the most important point that Barth is developing in this work is the unity of the three forms of the parousia. Barth writes:

The New Testament knows only one coming again of Jesus Christ, of only one new coming of the One who came before, of only one manifestation of His effective presence in the world corresponding to His own unity as the One who came before. This does not exclude the fact that His new coming and therefore his manifestation in effective presence in the world takes place in different forms at the different times chosen and appointed by Himself and in the different relationships which He Himself has ordained. Everything depends, of course, upon our seeing and understanding the one continuous event in all its forms. But in the time of the community and its mission after the Easter revelation it also takes place in the form of the impartation of the Holy Spirit. . . . It will also take place in a different and definite form (of which we shall have to speak in eschatology), as the return of Jesus Christ as the goal of history of the Church, the world and each individual, as His coming as the Author of the general resurrection of the dead and the Fulfiller of the universal judgment. In all these forms it is one event.¹⁴³

Barth provides us here with a concise summary of his doctrine of parousia, even a summary of his whole eschatological concept, beginning from Christ's resurrection to the

¹⁴¹CD IV\3.1, 293.

¹⁴²CD IV\3.1, 293.

¹⁴³CD IV\3.1, 293.

last judgment. Barth presents the parousia in its three forms as an organic whole, the unity being founded upon the Easter event, that is, Christ's resurrection. Barth says that

There can be no question that in all its forms the one totality of coming again does really have the character, colours and accents of the Easter event. There can be no question that this is only the first if also the original form of this one totality.¹⁴⁴

The parousia forms only one reality within the framework of Christ's first coming, characterized by his resurrection, and his second coming, characterized by the general resurrection. It is very important to note at this point that, for Barth, the parousia is not only one event at the end of history, putting an end to the present age. It is a period within time and history, commencing from Christ's first coming until his second coming. In this connection we note that Barth places the parousia exactly where amillennialists locate the millennium. We may conclude that Barth's idea of parousia is nothing other than the millennium as understood in the amillennial sense.

2. The Parousia as a Transcendental Concept

Why did Barth choose the word parousia to describe that period between Christ's first coming and his final return which, from the amillennial perspective, is the millennium? Naturally, Barth must have some specific purpose in mind in adopting this term. A continuation of the battle against the liberal historicism and psychologism, as something purely from below not from above, may be the foremost motive; yet, if we accept Barth's idea of parousia as the millennium, the main purpose is to show that the millennium is a phenomenon which comes from heaven but not something which began

¹⁴⁴CD IV\3.1, 294.

here on earth. The parousia is a concept which denotes a direction from heaven to earth, and never the reverse. The millennium as the parousia thereby reflects Barth's insistence on the priority of eternity over time, transcendence over history, the Jenseits over the Diesseits.

Barth is quite consistent with the New Testament when he insists on the meaning of the parousia as Christ's "coming" and "presence."¹⁴⁵ The parousia is Christ's coming from heaven. It is a concrete representation of Barth's theology of "from above to below."

Barth traces Christ's parousia back to the Old Testament prophecy and declares:

What is signified by the term, if not the term itself, is familiar and important in the thinking of the Old Testament. . . . To the men of His people He comes finally as universal King in the unfolding of His power and glory. The coming of the 'one like the Son of man with the clouds of heaven' (Dan. 7:13); the coming of the righteous and victorious Messiah-King abolishing war and establishing peace (cf. Zech. 9:9f); above all the recurrent Old Testament picture of the coming of God of the covenant Himself manifesting Himself in movement from there to here---all these constitute materially the preparatory form of what in the New Testament is called parousia in the pregnant technical sense, namely, the effective presence of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁶

Barth discovers in the Old Testament prophecy the contents of his doctrine of Parousia.

The parousia is a transcendental phenomenon as Christ coming from above, as a "movement from there to here." It indicates the beginning of Christ's millennial reign. It is the revelation of God in Christ in his power and glory. It is for the purpose of reconciliation as it aims at the establishment of the covenant between God and his people.

In a word, the parousia as the millennium is an encounter between heaven and earth.

¹⁴⁵CD IV\3.1, 292.

¹⁴⁶CD IV\3.1, 292.

Barth's concept of the parousia seems to be the key to understanding the strange ideas in the opening chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Barth, for example, seems to have in mind the parousia of Jesus Christ when he speaks of "two worlds [that] meet and go apart, two planes [that] intersect, the one known and the other unknown."¹⁴⁷ What is known is our world; what is unknown is God's world. Jesus Christ in his parousia is the One who makes possible this encounter between two worlds. "Our world is touched in Jesus by the other world."¹⁴⁸ "As the Christ, he brings the world of the Father. But we who stand in this concrete world know nothing, and are incapable of knowing anything of that other world."¹⁴⁹

In Christ two worlds are joined together but at the same time still remain separated as a combination of what is known and what is unknown. In Barth's view, the knowledge of the other world is possible only because Christ's parousia is itself revelation. And revelation as parousia means that revelation is strictly from above but never from below. A comprehension of heavenly things becomes real since Christ's parousia or revelation as implied by Christ's "Resurrection from the dead is . . . the establishing or declaration of that point from above (das "Einsetzen" jenes Punktes von oben), and the corresponding discerning of it from below."¹⁵⁰

Again Barth is here pointing to the inadequacy of the historical-critical

¹⁴⁷Romans II, 29.

¹⁴⁸Romans II, 29.

¹⁴⁹Romans II, 30.

¹⁵⁰Romans II, 30.

investigation that he inherited from Ritschlianism and the impossibility of grasping the divine reality through mere experience that he inherited from Schleiermacher and Herrmann. The parousia is a historical event since it is indissolubly connected with "Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus,---born of seed of David according to the flesh."¹⁵¹ But the historicity of the parousia as resurrection and revelation cannot be established through a historical-critical study or through mere consciousness or experience, for "What touches us---and yet does not touch us---in Jesus the Christ, is the kingdom of God who is both Creator and Redeemer. The kingdom of God has become actual, is nigh at hand."¹⁵² The parousia signifies a Christ who comes "from above," from heaven, as Revealer and Redeemer. It also signifies the kingdom of God which has come down to earth. It "touches us," but it at the same time "does not touch us," as something that we cannot apprehend. In a word the parousia falls under the category of what Barth calls Geschichte, which is beyond the scope of historical inquiry. This tolls the death-knell for the search for revelation "from below" through historicism and psychologism, and the end of the search for salvation "from below," which is nothing other than an attempt at self-salvation.

From this perspective, the concept of parousia in relation to Christ's resurrection and revelation marks the definiteness of Barth's break with liberalism and decisiveness of his orientation toward eschatology. This has brought Barth to a totally new perspective on theology. Barth's theological approach now stands in opposition to that of liberalism.

¹⁵¹Romans II, 29.

¹⁵²Romans II, 30.

Revelation is made possible by Christ's resurrection and parousia, not by the investigation of the life of Jesus or the so-called "inner life" of Jesus. Redemption begins with a reconciliation of sinful humanity with God, not with a pietistic consciousness of God. The true God is the God of the proclamation of the church, not the "non-god" that liberalism seeks in the history of religions.

What the parousia signifies is God's prevenience, which means that salvation is exclusively God's work in Jesus Christ. In the parousia as the "coming" and "presence" of Christ on earth God reveals himself as One who establishes a "covenant of grace" with human beings. "God seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us, and therefore He loves us."¹⁵³ It was through the parousia of Jesus Christ that God's purpose concerning the fellowship between God and human beings could be achieved, for the Christ who has come and who is present on earth constitutes a link between the "wholly otherness" of God and the fallenness of the world, between transcendence and history.

3. The Parousia and Christ's Kingdom

Along with Christ who came from above and is present on earth through his parousia also came the heavenly kingdom. Again Barth explicates the relationship between Christ's parousia and the kingdom in reliance on revelation based on Christ's resurrection. Barth says,

If we ask how is it possible that the coming of Jesus Christ and in and with it God's kingdom could present itself to the first disciples and the apostolic communities as one which was already perfectly past but still perfectly future . . . our simple answer must be that this apparent impossibility became an actuality

¹⁵³CD III, 257.

in the Easter history which expounds, illustrates, and crowns the history of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁴

Thus, in Barth's view, that God's kingdom has already come along with the first stage of Christ's parousia means that it was first revealed in Christ's resurrection. But the future of this kingdom will be revealed again in the third stage of the parousia. Barth assumes that the disciples could not understand this reality before "the Easter days" since it "had been hidden from their eyes from the cradle to the cross."¹⁵⁵ Once again we see here the Easter event at the center of the relationship between Christ, the parousia, and the kingdom, as the factor which elucidates this relationship.

In Barth's theology not only the parousia but also the kingdom is identified with Christ who is God's revelation. This also means that the kingdom is God himself. Hence the kingdom which accompanies the parousia is none other than the descent of God himself in Jesus Christ. Barth is explicit on this point:

God's kingdom is God himself . . . it is God himself as he not merely is somewhere and somehow . . . but as he comes. . . . So God is his kingdom in his own coming: his coming to meet the whole reality distinct from himself.¹⁵⁶

God came in Jesus Christ as the kingdom which came down to earth. For "the kingdom of God is the lordship of God established in the world in Jesus Christ. It is the rule of God as it takes place in Him. He Himself is the kingdom of God."¹⁵⁷

Christ in his three offices as Priest, King, and Prophet embodies and reveals God

¹⁵⁴Barth, Christian Life, 254-55.

¹⁵⁵Barth, Christian Life, 255.

¹⁵⁶Barth, Christian Life, 236.

¹⁵⁷CD IV2, 655.

who came as the heavenly kingdom. Barth says,

To use the terminology of the older dogmatics as the High-priest and King, as the humiliated and suffering and exalted triumphant man, He is also the Prophet, Herald and Proclaimer of the name hallowed in Him, the kingdom come in Him, the will of God done in Him on earth as it is in heaven.¹⁵⁸

By referring to the priestly, royal, and prophetic offices of Christ, Barth draws attention to the soteriological, sovereign, and revelatory dimensions of the kingdom of God. Barth is anxious thereby to show the centrality of the kingdom and argues that "the whole of the New Testament message derives from this coming of the kingdom."¹⁵⁹

Barth combines his concept of God's "essence" being equal to his "work,"¹⁶⁰ with the biblical teaching concerning the kingdom of God according to which the kingdom is present in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and then draws two different conclusions: first, Christ and the kingdom are exactly the same thing. The presence of the kingdom is a historical fact as it is the history of Jesus Christ, "his being and life," his own "words and works," his "suffering and death."¹⁶¹ Barth argues that

There is in the New Testament no trace of any statements about God's work and Word which refer to a kingdom of God that has come or is to be expected apart from the history of Jesus Christ.¹⁶²

Second Christ's kingdom is not so much a "royal dominion" as a service, for Christ as King is at the same time "the Humble" and "the Exalted," "the Crucified" and "the Living

¹⁵⁸CD IV/3.1, 165.

¹⁵⁹Barth, Christian life, 248.

¹⁶⁰CD M1, 371.

¹⁶¹Barth, Christian Life, 249.

¹⁶²Barth, Christian Life, 249.

One," "the Servant" and "the Lord."¹⁶³

This means that we must look at Christ's kingdom only from a soteriological perspective. This sheds light on the different terms that Barth employs to designate the kingdom of Christ. Barth identifies Christ's kingdom as "kingdom of reconciliation,"¹⁶⁴ regnum gratiae ("kingdom of grace"),¹⁶⁵ "kingdom of transition and struggle,"¹⁶⁶ "the Messianic kingdom,"¹⁶⁷ of which "the Israelite kingdom is the prototype and copy."¹⁶⁸ Each of these terms suggests that the kingdom of Christ which commences at the first stage of the parousia would not last forever, but will cease when it has accomplished its mission. Barth lays stress on the crucial importance of this period of time, calling it "time between the times."¹⁶⁹ This time is unique because it is the time "between the first and final revelation of the work of God accomplished in Jesus Christ."¹⁷⁰ It is a special time in the history of the world because of the work of salvation that God has accomplished once and for all in it in Jesus Christ.

Barth does not speak of amillennialism to refer to this period, but this is not a

¹⁶³Barth, Christian Life, 251.

¹⁶⁴CD IV2, 390.

¹⁶⁵Karl Barth, Credo, trans. J. Strathearn McNab (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 164.

¹⁶⁶Barth, Resurrection, 169.

¹⁶⁷Barth, Resurrection, 169.

¹⁶⁸CD IV2, 390.

¹⁶⁹CD IV2, 621.

¹⁷⁰CD IV2, 621.

surprise in view of his usual attempt to re-interpret or even to change traditional terminology. The term parousia is a classical example of this "eccentricity" in Barth. But a fact which does not escape our notice is his usage of the term parousia along the line of the amillennial concept of the millennium and in a purely soteriological sense.

CHAPTER IV

THE PAROUSIA IN ITS THREE FORMS

Barth presents the parousia as a period which includes three stages: the first stage characterized by Christ's first coming as it is revealed in his death on the cross and his resurrection; the second stage his coming again through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; and the third stage his final return at the end of this age. These three forms of the parousia reflect the unfolding of salvation history, which Barth relates to the covenant in which God establishes a fellowship with human beings who, not only are sinners and fallen but also infinitely and qualitatively different from him. In Barth's theological concept this gives rise to a dialectic of the divine and the human, transcendence and history, eternity and time.

This chapter surveys the way Barth approaches this dialectical relation in connection with his concept of three-stage parousia. According to this dialectic, the transcendence of God which is revealed in the first stage of the parousia and is reflected by the term "coming," has as its counterpoint the immanence of God in the second stage of the parousia, which is symbolized by the term "presence" and in which God, who is achieving a work of reconciliation of the world to himself, becomes directly involved in the life of this world, in history, and in time. The third stage of the parousia may be construed as a synthesis of the divine transcendence and immanence. Here the

consummation of human redemption is to be interpreted as the full establishment of the fellowship between God and human beings, as the fulfillment of the covenant.

This is the content of this chapter. Its outline will be patterned on the existence of three stages in the parousia. The first stage has to do with a revelation of the transcendent God as Lord, King, and Redeemer through Christ's resurrection. The second stage concerns God's immanence, as God who is turning to history and time in his reconciling activity. And finally the third stage, which deals with the consummation of God's reconciling work, the fullness of redemption, and the fulfillment of the covenant, will be explained as Barth's dialectical "synthesis" of eternity and time, transcendence and history.

A. The First Form of the Parousia as a Focus on a Transcendental Revelation

The first stage of the parousia deals particularly with revelation. It is in this revelation that Barth's transcendental theology finds its highest expression. What is revealed is Jesus Christ in his lordship and kingship, his kingdom, and the work of reconciliation he has achieved through his death on the cross and his resurrection. We will look at Christ being revealed as Lord and King who has already come. Then we will turn to his kingdom which is described against the background of the parousia itself. And finally we will survey briefly Christ's reconciling work which is revealed in its penultimate and ultimate aspects.

1. Revelation of the One Who Has
Already Come as Lord and King

Revelation is utterly centered in Jesus Christ. He is the bringer of revelation. But he is himself the revelation as the Word of God become flesh. What is revealed is he who has already come before but remained hidden until his death on the cross and his resurrection. Revelation took place in his resurrection.

Actually Barth does not conceive of revelation as a phenomenon restricted to the first stage of the parousia. It runs throughout the whole parousia since, in Barth's theory, the reconciliation which takes place in the second stage of the parousia is at the same time revelation; the third stage of the parousia, on the other hand, is earmarked by final revelation. However, the role played by the first stage is crucial as it harbors Christ's resurrection which is the cradle of the revelation for the other stages. For Barth, without Christ's resurrection, there is no revelation and Christ is not revealed as the One who has already come. Hermann Schulte underscores the centrality of Christ's resurrection calling it the Grundform der Parusie Jesu Christi.¹ He argues that it already includes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the final appearing of the Lord at the end-time, which he describes as the Weiteren Formen of the parousia.² The thrust of Schulte's argument is that just as there is only one resurrection of Jesus Christ, so there is only one revelation

¹Hermann Schulte, "Die Zukunft Hat Schon Begonnen," Evangelische Theologie, no. 11 (1964): 612.

²Cf. Schulte, "Zukunft," 614: "Wir . . . die Auferstehung Jesu aufnehmen, wie sie im Neuen Testament zweifellos gemeint ist: als das Anheben seiner Parusie, seiner Wiederkunft auf Erden, ja als ihre Ur- und Grundform, in der die weiteren Formen---die Geistausgiessung und das Kommen des Herrn am Ende der Tage---schon intendiert sind, sich schon abzeichnen".

and one coming of Jesus Christ.

Since the essence of the revelation of Christ's coming lies in the Easter event, the latter came to be identified with Christ's parousia itself. Thus, Barth calls the Easter event "his new coming as the One who came before."³ Barth insists strongly upon this identification, saying that

it is not merely possible but imperative that what took place in the Easter Event, the fresh coming of Jesus Christ as the One who came before, should be summed up under the New Testament concept of the parousia of Jesus Christ.⁴

Barth maintains that Christ "is not even 'manifest in the flesh'"⁵ before Easter. Barth does not deny that "the Word then became flesh, and [that] His whole work was done in all its dimensions,"⁶ but he argues that "the incarnate Word was not yet revealed and seen in His glory (Jn. 1:14)."⁷ Thus Barth insists upon the idea that

the epiphany of Jesus Christ is the manifestation of His parousia or effective presence, or conversely that His parousia takes place in His epiphany and therefore His manifestation.⁸

It is in his resurrection that Christ is revealed for what he really is. Barth says,

The Resurrection is the revelation: the disclosing of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God and the apprehending of God in Jesus Christ. The Resurrection is the emergence of the necessity of giving glory to God: the reckoning with what is unknown and unobservable in Jesus, the recognition of Him as Paradox, Victor,

³CD IV\3.1, 293.

⁴CD IV\3.1, 292.

⁵CD IV\3.1, 293.

⁶CD IV\3.1, 293.

⁷CD IV\3.1, 293.

⁸CD IV\3.1, 292.

and Primal history.⁹

Jesus Christ who has already come is only known in his resurrection. Only in his resurrection is he effectively revealed to be present on earth.

Although Christ's parousia was manifested in his resurrection as an event which occurred in history, it is not an earthly phenomenon since it concerns the Christ who came from above. This means that revelation is also definitely something from heaven. It is a heavenly reality, something transcendental and actualistic in nature, which reaches out to human beings on earth. Barth's actualistically conceived revelation finds expression in the following statement:

Revelation comes vertically from heaven. It befalls man with the same contingency with which, living in this specific place at this specific time and in these specific circumstances he is this specific man at this specific stage of his inner and outer life.¹⁰

The One who descends from heaven as revelation is Jesus Christ. Barth here presents Christ's coming and presence as something which is real but which can only be grasped in actu. This means that it is purely an act of God in his freedom that humans cannot control. Through God's actualistic presence, his involvement in the life of the world is his personal and therefore actual presence expressed continually in new forms according to His sovereign decisions.¹¹ It happens again and again in the form of an event (actus)

⁹Romans II, 30.

¹⁰CD III, 329.

¹¹Barth explains in greater detail what he means by God's actualistic coming and presence and says that "God is free to be present with the creature by giving Himself and revealing Himself to it or by it by concealing Himself and withdrawing Himself. . . . God is free either to grant His immanence to nature by working at its heart or by exerting His sway at an infinite height above it. God is free to conceal His divinity from the creature,

according to God's will and as a work of the Holy Spirit. As it depends entirely on God's action it cannot be a human permanent possession but depends on God's giving.

It is Christ's parousia tied to the Easter event that is actualistically repeated and experienced throughout the church age and the time of reconciliation. On this basis, Barth holds that there is only one coming of Jesus Christ for the whole millennium:

The New Testament knows of only one coming again of Jesus Christ, "of only one new coming of the One who came before, of only one manifestation of His effective presence in the world corresponding to His own unity as the One who came before."¹²

From this actualistic perspective of revelation, what is seen to be of crucial importance about the first stage of the parousia is the fact that to it belongs the revelation which functions as a proclamation of the reconciliation of God with the world in the second stage and the revelation which is repeated as final revelation in the third stage of the parousia. In the second stage, which we may identify as the culmination of the millennium as it coincides with the church era, this revelation comes to God's people in an actualistic way, as a real encounter between the believers and their Lord and King, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is thereby known in his deity, lordship, kingship, power, and victory.

In sum: what is revealed in Christ's resurrection as parousia is Christ's lordship and kingship, and this means the revelation of God's kingdom. Barth reminds us that the goal of this revelation "is always in all circumstances the promulgation of the βασιλεία

even to become a creature Himself, and free to assume again His Godhead" (CD III, 314-15).

¹²CD IV3.1, 293.

τοῦ Θεοῦ, of the lordship of God."¹³ "Jesus Himself is this kingdom in all its perfection."¹⁴ Barth asks: "What is meant in the New Testament by the presence of the kingdom of God, by its coming as already an event?"¹⁵ And he answers this question by referring to Jesus Christ:

What is meant is the centre, the whence and whither, the basis, theme, and content of all the New Testament sayings, the history of Jesus Christ, the words and deeds and suffering and death of the one Son of the one God as the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the Gentiles, as the One in giving whom God loved the world . . . in whom he has reconciled it to himself.¹⁶

Otherwise stated: it is through his resurrection that we can discover the presence of the kingdom of God in the person of Christ.

It was exactly in this way that Christ's disciples could experience the reality of the kingdom present in their lifetime. Barth observes that

The first disciples found themselves confronted already in their lifetime with the kingdom of God as God revealed and declared Christ to be the One he was in his resurrection from the dead.¹⁷

Barth follows Paul in holding that Christ's resurrection as the revelation of God's kingdom points to the general resurrection which signals the consummation of the kingdom.

Thus, the coming of the kingdom is ultimately the object of the revelation in the

¹³CD I1, 306.

¹⁴CD IV3.2, 792.

¹⁵Barth, Christian Life, 248-49.

¹⁶Barth, Christian Life, 248-49.

¹⁷Barth, Christian Life, 249.

first stage of the parousia. Christ's coming, his presence, his life, his death, his resurrection, his lordship, his kingship, his work of reconciliation and redemption all point to the revelation of the kingdom of God and its establishment on earth. It is for this reason that Scripture identifies Christ with the kingdom. Thus the presence of Christ is also the presence of the kingdom. Barth asserts emphatically the kingship of Christ and the presence of his kingdom here on earth now as a historical fact among the earthly history. Barth argues that

Whether people notice it or not the kingdom has come right up to them. Whether they know it or not, in its own unique and inconceivable way, yet irrevocably and irrefutably, it has become concrete history, unique history yet still history, this history in the midst of all other history.¹⁸

Christ is Lord and King. His kingdom is a reality now. This is what the first stage of the parousia reveals to us. It is a transcendental kingdom from above, which human beings can only acknowledge and proclaim, but which is also beyond their control because they did not contribute to its building.

It is God's work alone, which as it is revealed to them can be known by people in faith, gratefully hailed and extolled by them, and then extolled and proclaimed, but which cannot in any circumstances be made their own operation or promoted, augmented, or perhaps improved by their own action.¹⁹

Barth insists on God's kingdom being revealed so that people do not simply believe in it but also receive it. Revelation means that "it is not just intellectually perceptible like an idea. There are eyes and ears that are called blessed because they perceive as well as

¹⁸Barth, Christian Life, 248.

¹⁹Barth, Christian Faith, 240.

see and receive as well as hear."²⁰

Barth's emphasis on the visibility and the audibility of the kingdom does not suggest that it is to be understood in the sense of a worldly government or an institution. Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, so that its focus is not so much on authority as on redemption. Barth subscribes to Calvin's view of Christ's kingdom as "a spiritual kingdom, contained in the Word and Spirit of God, which carry with them righteousness and life."²¹ Commenting on this statement Barth declares that

Christ is King. He preserves and defends a dominion and its participants. . . . Christ is mighty. . . . Yet mighty through the Word and Spirit of God. . . . Christ reigns---through Word and Spirit. Everything that, we think, has "power" (political or otherwise) is at bottom no power at all. What has real power, real might, real dynamism? The Word, the Spirit: these are almighty.²²

Barth is explicit in his assertion that real power is to be found exclusively in the Word and the Spirit.

The kingdom which is revealed to us is, then, one which is indissolubly connected with the Word and the Spirit and stands or falls with the Word and the Spirit. Barth describes the function of the Word in Christ's kingdom in this way:

We do not know anything about our human existence except through the Word which declares to us judgment and grace. . . . It is the hand that already holds us even as it grasps us. It is the ruling act of the king who was already a king before and who has both the might and the right to perform this act. It encompasses us on every side. It is the Word which has power, the Word of the Lord. And it is

²⁰Barth, Christian Life, 248.

²¹Question 37 of Calvin's Catechism of the Church of Geneva (1545) in Karl Barth, The Faith of the Church, trans. Gabriel Vahanian (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 65.

²²Barth, Faith of the Church, 66.

the Word of the Reconciler who is also the Creator.²³

In other words, we cannot escape the Word of God. It rules over us, it judges us, but it also sustains us. It is through the Holy Spirit that God's Word comes to human beings and takes control of their lives.

Yet, that the power of the Word and the Spirit obtains in Christ's kingdom does not mean that his lordship logically is spared from opposition. Barth takes seriously this opposition to Christ's kingdom and even sees the three offices of Christ as High-priest, King, and Prophet as God's response to this kind of defiance. "His prophetic no less than His high-priestly and kingly service and rule," Barth declares, "thus consist practically in the overcoming of this opposition and answering of this challenge."²⁴

Barth understands this opposition in the sense that

His [Christ's] life is constantly confronted by death, the covenant by unfaithfulness and apostasy, reconciliation by strife. . . . His Word is met by contradiction and His truth by falsehood of His environment.²⁵

In the face of this opposition Barth declares in the words of the Blumhardts that "Jesus is Victor."²⁶ This victory, Barth points out, is clearly taught by the Scriptures. Thus he refers to John 16: 33: "I have overcome the world,"²⁷ and to Hebrews 2:14 "where He

²³CD I1, 445.

²⁴CD IV3.1, 166.

²⁵CD IV3.1, 167.

²⁶CD IV3.1, 165-274.

²⁷CD IV3.1, 168.

[Christ] is said to have destroyed 'him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.'"²⁸

The revelation in the first stage of the parousia is seen to be something transcendental in character. What is revealed is Christ's lordship and kingship, the presence of his kingdom with its power derived from the Word and the Spirit, and the certainty of Christ's victory. In a word, what revelation discloses is the fact that this world is ruled by a Lord and a King. This King and his kingdom are now present on earth. We have seen earlier that Barth construes the kingdom against the background of the doctrine of parousia.²⁹ The question arises whether the parousia in its three forms can be identified with Christ's kingdom. Thus, our next task consists in showing that despite the presence of the different stages included in the parousia, it forms an organic whole. Its unity is grounded in the presence of the Trinity during the parousia.

2. The Parousia and The Trinity: Revelation throughout the Parousia

We have seen that Christ's effective presence is also the presence of the kingdom. Christ's resurrection is the revelation of himself and his kingdom. If the kingdom is also revealed in the first stage of parousia, what is the nature of this kingdom? Christ's kingdom is not conceived of as a territory. Rather, it is defined within the framework of what Barth calls the parousia in such a way that the parousia itself is the kingdom. But can it be conceived of as a kingdom if it is split into three parts according to Barth's idea of three stages in the parousia? Does it represent an organic whole?

²⁸CD IV\3.1, 169.

²⁹See above, 158-62.

As we answer this question, it will be shown that the parousia is, in Barth's view, a real unity, its unity being grounded in the unity of the triune God, whose presence is real during the period of the parousia. This section, therefore, is an attempt to see the correspondence between the trinitarian God and the parousia as a representation of Christ's kingdom.

Barth lays down from the outset that God's presence in the midst of the created beings must be understood in connection with the perichoretic relationship between the three members of the Trinity; and he calls attention to the fact that this kind of relationship is itself reflected in the three stages of the parousia. Barth says that

when we treat of the unity of the three forms or stages of the one event of the return of Jesus Christ, it is perhaps worth considering and exegetically helpful, again in the analogy of the doctrine of the Trinity, to think of their mutual relationship as a kind of "perichoresis."³⁰

Barth identifies the essence of God with his act. God's act is his work of reconciliation of himself with the world in Jesus Christ. This means that the perichoretic relation characterizing God's essence is to be sought in Christ's reconciling work. This is a work of reconciliation which takes place during the parousia. Perichoresis denotes the mutuality and unity of operation of the three persons of the Trinity in the work of reconciliation during the parousia. It is on the basis of this mutuality and unity of operation and the presence of the Trinity during the parousia that the reality of a unity within the forms or stages of the parousia can be conceived.

It is worth noting, however, that God's reconciling work is intimately bound up

³⁰CD IV\3.1, 296.

with the attributes of each member of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit respectively as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. In connection with these distinctive persons and their characteristic work within the Trinity, may it still lend support to the unity of the parousia? Indeed, Barth does not overlook the existence of the distinction within the Godhead and speaks of

. . . the threeness of the revealer, revelation and being revealed, the threeness of God's holiness, mercy and love, the threeness of the God of Good Friday, Easter and Whitsunday, the threeness of God the Creator, God the Reconciler and God the Redeemer,³¹

but he also asserts emphatically that this threeness is "the threeness of the one God,"³² which entails that each of these activities and attributes is shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

It is true that to the Father is attributed the title "Creator"---"The one God reveals Himself according to Scripture as the Creator, that is, as the Lord of our existence."³³ The Son is called "God the Son . . . God as Reconciler."³⁴ But Barth argues that both the Father and the Son appropriate the work of creation and reconciliation.

Only in the One who acts on us as the Reconciler through the cross and

³¹CD, I, 361-62.

³²CD I, 361.

³³CD I, 384. A word needs to be said in regard to the meaning of God being Creator, for Barth is deviating from the traditional sense of this term. Barth does not understand the word "Creator" against the background of the creatio ex nihilo but in the sense that God is "the Lord of our existence." In other words, God as Creator is the One who has authority over human life, death, resurrection, and eternal existence. "The life that His will creates," Barth points out, "will be a life that passes through death, that is risen from death; it will be eternal life, truly a new birth" (CD I, 388).

³⁴CD I, 399.

resurrection do we perceive the Creator, and only in the Creator who remains the Lord of our being in spite of our enmity can we perceive the Reconciler.³⁵

Regarding the Holy Spirit, Barth says that it is in him that "the one God reveals Himself according to Scripture as the Redeemer, i.e., as the Lord who sets us free. As such He is the Holy Spirit, by whom we become the children of God."³⁶

However, although the Holy Spirit is especially called Redeemer, his activity is not restricted to the work of redemption. By including the Filioque in his trinitarian principles, Barth sees the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of both the Father and the Son to the extent that all three persons of the Trinity share in the work of creation, reconciliation and redemption. In a lecture delivered in Germany in October 1929, Barth demonstrates the centrality of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and speaks of "the Holy Spirit as Creator," "the Holy Spirit as Reconciler," and "the Holy Spirit as Redeemer"³⁷ to show that the Holy Spirit is a symbol of the union of the three members of the Trinity.

Barth, therefore, attempts to do justice to the reality of the distinction within the Godhead but also lays stress on the perichoretic nature of the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although each person is distinct in relation to the others there is a mutual interpenetration of the members of the Trinity, so that they share in the one divine essence and the one divine act. Barth underlines this point when he says:

³⁵CD M1, 412-13.

³⁶CD M1, 448.

³⁷Karl Barth, The Holy Spirit and Christian Life, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993).

In regard to the work of Father, Son and Spirit ad extra . . . they all work in the order and sense appropriate to them. This means that the unity of their work is to be understood as the communion of the three modes of being along the line of the doctrine of "perichoresis" according to which all three, without forfeiture or mutual dissolution of independence, reciprocally interpenetrate each other and inexist in one another.³⁸

In the analogy of the Trinity, Barth also argues for the reality of a perichoresis between the three forms of the parousia. This appears to be a speculative theory in Barth's theology but it does not lack defenders. Walter Kreck,³⁹ for example, who upholds Barth in his doctrine of three-form parousia, emphasizes the importance of his construal of this concept in analogy of the doctrine of the Trinity and argues for the truth of Barth's reference to the perichoretic relation of the three persons to account for the unity of the three forms of the parousia. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are engaged in a unity of being and operation, despite their distinctive characteristics, so also there is an interpenetration of the three stages of the parousia in such a way that the elements of the one are found in the others without overshadowing what is proper to each stage.⁴⁰

³⁸CD I, 396. Regarding the idea of the unity within the Trinity, Barth goes so far as to adopt the doctrine of divine simplicity as he affirms that God is a "subject," an absolute "will." He calls God "the One who reveals Himself as subject and who is subject, and indeed indissolubly subject, in His revelation" (CD I, 382). This idea of one subjectivity within the triune God finds particular expression in Barth's characterization of God as "one and only Willer and Doer" (CD I, 348).

³⁹Walter Kreck, Die Zukunft des Gekommenen (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1961), 83.

⁴⁰Walter Kreck, Die Zukunft des Gekommenen, 86: "Barth stellt das Verhältnis der drei Gestalten des Kommens bzw. Wiederkommens Jesu Christi in Analogie zur Trinitätslehre, und zwar speziell zur Lehre von Perichoresis. Gemeint ist damit bekanntlich das gegenseitige Sichumgreifen der drei Modi der göttlichen Seinsweisen, so dass jeder beiden anders, also das Werk des Vaters das des Sohnes und Heiligen Geistes usw. begleitet bzw. daran beteiligt ist, ohne seine Eigenart einzubüßen. Entsprechend

The perichoretic relation uniting the three stages of the parousia discloses the same revelation running throughout the whole parousia. What is revealed through Christ's resurrection in the first stage is what is also revealed in the second and the third. In the first form of the parousia, Christ is revealed as Lord, King, and Reconciler, as one who reigns in his earthly kingdom, the kingdom which Barth calls "reconciling kingdom" and coincides with what he also calls parousia or what is called millennium in eschatology. He rules through his Word and Spirit. He is disclosed as being "Victor" over his opponents symbolized by sin, death, and the Devil.⁴¹ Exactly the same revelation is brought to the second form of the parousia. But there it takes the form of witness and proclamation. Once again, the same revelation will be repeated in the third form of the parousia. In this last phase, it will attain its consummation and will be seen and confessed by the whole world for its truth.

It needs to be noted that analogy is not here to be taken simply in the sense of parallel, resemblance, or correspondence since there is a real involvement of the three persons of the Trinity in the structure of the parousia. So there is not a mere analogy but a real intimate connection. All the three members of the Trinity contribute to the revelation and reconciliation at the three different levels of the parousia. By virtue of their perichoretic relation, each person functions as Revealer, Creator, Reconciler, and

könne man es sich hier vorstellen, dass jeder der drei Modi des Kommens Jesu Christi die beiden andern, 'antizipierend oder rekapitulierend,' mitenhält, ohne ineinander zu verschwimmen."

Colm O'Grady argues along the same line. See O'Grady, The Church, 339.

⁴¹Cf. CD IV3.1, 179: Barth says that "a war is waged against sin, death and the devil. It is in this war that Jesus is Victor."

Redeemer.

If the unity of the parousia is guaranteed by the unity within the divine Trinity this implies that, although there are three stages within the parousia, there is only a single work of reconciliation going on throughout the whole parousia. We observe that this work of reconciliation which occurs during the parousia characterizes it as the climax of salvation history. Finally, by emphasizing the unity of the parousia and that of the work of reconciliation it includes, Barth is anxious to highlight the completeness and seriousness of God's reconciling activity in which God is transforming this world into his kingdom.

If the parousia as Christ's kingdom is revealed as a unity, this necessarily implies that the reconciliation and redemption which are the goal of the kingdom must also display a unity as they are the "penultimate" and the "ultimate" forms of the same salvation set in motion by Christ's death and resurrection.

3. Revelation of Redemption in its Penultimate and Ultimate Forms

Barth's doctrine of redemption involves the concepts of "already" and "not yet," "promise" and "fulfillment." However, when we look at it from the perspective of revelation, we realize that these concepts do not adequately express what Barth intends to convey in connection with the finished work of reconciliation which is revealed in the first and the second stages of the parousia, and the consummation of the reconciliation which will be revealed as redemption in the third stage of the parousia.

Barth occasionally makes use of the terms "already" and "not yet," but they

apparently are not intrinsic elements of his theology. "Promise" and "fulfillment" are closer to Barth's theological outlook. Barth speaks of "the promise of the Holy Spirit"⁴² and the fulfillment of the promise. But even here we have to be careful about the subtlety in Barth's concept since, in Barth's view, the promise to be fulfilled is only something which awaits its consummation.

As such, the terms "penultimate" and "ultimate," which Barth uses more or less frequently, seem to render more accurately what Barth intends to express when he speaks of the unity of Christ's work of reconciliation which has been revealed on the cross and in his resurrection and then proclaimed by the church, and the consummation of the same work of reconciliation which will be revealed when Christ returns. What is at issue is the tension between Christ's promise and its fulfillment. In Barth's handling of this question, the tension between the "penultimate" and the "ultimate" is not as strong as it is found in the context of the "already" and the "not yet." Barth admits the presence of a tension, but this tension is removed in Christ who is the unity of the "penultimate" and the "ultimate."

We have seen Barth criticizing the two Blumhardts who failed to make the difference between the "penultimate" and "ultimate" in eschatology.⁴³ We notice, however, a development in Barth's thought itself in relation to the idea of "penultimate" and "ultimate." Barth apparently adopted a pessimistic view of the penultimate in his early writings. In The Holy Spirit and Christian Life, for example, Barth calls the present era

⁴²CD IV\3.1, 274-367.

⁴³See above, 138.

"this side of the death line"⁴⁴ and speaks of the "penultimate" as "the next-before-the-final of the many ultimate things."⁴⁵ This suggests the reality of a dialectic of the "penultimate" and the "ultimate" which creates a tension in the understanding of salvation. Barth says that this tension is to be expected because " . . . whatever is palpable, visible, is temporal and subject to the inescapable dialectic of everything that belongs to the temporal order."⁴⁶ Barth finds this dialectic mainly in the psychological conflict arising from the "dialectical paradox of 'always sinner and always righteous.'"⁴⁷ We see in these statements that the tension between the "penultimate" and the "ultimate" remained a dilemma for Barth in his early career as theologian.

Barth apparently could not establish his theory of "penultimate" and "ultimate" until he came to the treatment of the "Doctrine of Reconciliation." There, Barth begins to look at the relationship between the "penultimate" and the "ultimate"⁴⁸ more from a christological perspective and sees Christ as the solution to the tension. Thus Barth now asserts the value of the penultimate saying that

there have been many and varied attempts to fix Christian expectation so exclusively on the ultimate dénouement that a hopeless view is taken of penultimate developments. . . . The attempt is in fact an impossible one at its very root, and not merely in its consistent outworking. No one is able to concentrate so rigidly on the ultimate dénouement or to turn so resolutely from penultimate

⁴⁴Barth, Holy Spirit, 62.

⁴⁵Barth, Holy Spirit, 62.

⁴⁶Barth, Holy Spirit, 63

⁴⁷Barth, Holy Spirit, 65.

⁴⁸See especially CD IV\3.1, 351-55; IV\3.2, 936-41.

developments. The whole enterprise is pious illusion.⁴⁹

Barth now argues that the "penultimate" and the "ultimate" are so organically connected that any attempt to separate them would lead to the risk of losing them altogether.

And if the Christian, even while he has his ultimate hope, does not in relation to it have this penultimate hope as well, then it is highly probable that he has long since forfeited and lost his freedom even for the ultimate.⁵⁰

What Barth means by "penultimate" is Christ's reconciliation of the world with God, and by "ultimate" the final redemption. These two concepts are actually indissolubly joined together by Christ's resurrection. Barth declares:

The last and first hour has really struck in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The future of salvation is really present in it. Not reconciliation alone, but the ensuing redemption and consummation, have really taken place in it and for the world and us in all their reach and depth.⁵¹

We see here a continuity between the "penultimate" and the "ultimate," which is reminiscent of the famous statement of the amillennialist Geerhardus Vos: "The world to come was perceived to bear in its womb another age to come."⁵² It is true that full salvation is not yet applied to this world, but it is already there ready for this world in the person of Christ. Barth says that

The eternal light has already gone out into the world. The new and future redeemed and perfected world is already present. In this commencement, however, the goal is not yet reached except in Him.⁵³

⁴⁹CD IV3.2, 936.

⁵⁰CD IV3.2, 936.

⁵¹CD IV3.1, 317.

⁵²Vos, Pauline Eschatology, 36.

⁵³CD IV3.1, 327.

As a matter of fact, a tension between reconciliation and redemption appears only to be real from a human perspective, not from God's perspective. Barth underlines the fact that

If we could see with God's eyes, we should realise that in spite of appearances everything is already very different, everything being made new and set right. The only thing is that we cannot see in this way. The actual alteration of our existence, of all things, of the whole being of the world, is hidden from us in the sense that it cannot be observed or experienced except in this event, in the living Jesus Christ Himself. The alteration of our situation effected in Him is concealed as it were by a veil which our eyes cannot penetrate. Do we not walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7)?⁵⁴

Barth insists on the reality of a "new creation" now, but we still have to look at it through the eyes of faith as it is revealed to us through God's Word.

Actually what differentiates the "penultimate" from the "ultimate" is only a question of actualization: "the presence of the future of salvation is already actualised in Him [Christ],"⁵⁵ and "although He will certainly actualise it for and in us as the presence of the future of salvation of all creation, He has not yet done so."⁵⁶ Barth is making two points concerning the actualization of redemption. First, it is an on-going process during the period of the parousia. Second, as the actualization has not yet reached its final goal, it still remains a promise.

Christ himself, who constitutes a link between the penultimate and the ultimate dimensions of the parousia, gives it a dynamic and a teleological character. From the first

⁵⁴CD IV\3.1, 317-18.

⁵⁵CD IV\3.1, 327.

⁵⁶CD IV\3.1, 327.

form to the third form of the parousia, Barth sees Jesus Christ, who is himself the Revealer, the Reconciler, and the Redeemer,

... marching from its beginning in the revelation of His life to the end of His not yet accomplished revelation of the life of all men and all creation as enclosed in His life, of their life as the new creation on a new earth and under a new heaven. In His prophetic work He moves from the one Easter Day to the day of all days, to the last day, to the day of His final and conclusive return.⁵⁷

The following implications can be derived from this statement: first, Christ's work of reconciliation is now moving steadily towards its goal, namely, the final redemption; second, Christ is the ground for the unity and continuity of reconciliation, as the penultimate form of redemption, and the final redemption, as the ultimate form of reconciliation; third, the assumption of these functions presupposes the presence of Christ throughout the whole period of the parousia. In a word, the situation at this point is still on the level of promise to be fulfilled. That is, what is still at issue is the fact of the actualization of redemption in us and for the world.

It is in this actualization of redemption that the trinitarian presence becomes conspicuous for this is a work which is undertaken by the triune God. Because of Christ's permanent presence on earth through the Holy Spirit, Barth can speak of Christ who gives assurance of the fulfillment of his promise at his second coming, and at the same time of the same Christ who pledges his presence and assistance for the fulfillment of his promise. Barth says,

Jesus Christ in the power of His life as the Resurrected from the dead, in the glory of His coming again in its first form, gives to men the sure promise of His final appearing, of the conclusion of His revelation, and therefore of the redemption and

⁵⁷CD IV3.1, 327.

perfecting of the world reconciled in Him, of its participation in the life of this new cosmic form, and therefore of its own eternal life. And in so doing He gives the sure promise of His presence and assistance in its temporal being directed to this goal.⁵⁸

Christ will come again for the consummation of his reconciling work; but in the Holy Spirit he is now present fulfilling this task. Barth describes extensively the activity of the Holy Spirit in this area under the heading "The Promise of the Spirit" in the Church Dogmatics.⁵⁹

"The Promise of the Spirit" is a promise of Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit as the link between the promise and fulfillment. The promise is moving towards its fulfillment since "the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, i.e., Jesus Christ acting and speaking in the power of His resurrection, is present and active among and with and in certain men."⁶⁰ Since the Spirit functions as both promise and fulfillment, he is supposed to bring this promise to all people.

The Holy Spirit Himself and as such is here a reality which is still lacking and is still to be expected. He is the content of a promise which is given but not yet fulfilled. What is lacking to these "unspiritual" men, as they lack the Spirit, is obviously His eternal and temporal, ultimate and penultimate, promise, and therefore their own qualification as its recipients.⁶¹

In this respect the Holy Spirit may be regarded, not only as a guarantee of the ultimate fulfillment of the penultimate promise, but also as the hope for all human beings' reception of the promise.

⁵⁸CD IV\3.1, 351.

⁵⁹Cf. CD IV\3.1, 274-367.

⁶⁰CD IV\3.1, 351.

⁶¹CD IV\3.1, 353.

In Barth's view, the fulfillment of the promise is not remote in the future. Rather, the fulfillment is an ongoing process during the parousia, not only for Christ, as we have seen above, but also for his people. Barth argues that through the work of the Holy Spirit human beings "are determined and characterised by the promise . . . [and] move to its fulfillment here and now."⁶² In fact, Barth establishes a very close connection between the "ultimate and penultimate pledge"⁶³ of the Spirit and speaks of the latter as a "second promise which is enclosed in the first. . . ."⁶⁴

The upshot of Barth's argument is that salvation appears to be revealed in two different stages in its penultimate and ultimate forms. But these are one and the same salvation accomplished and revealed in Christ's death and resurrection. It only awaits its consummation at Christ's final return.

B. The Second Form of the Parousia as a Focus on the World's History

The world is God's focal point in the second form of the parousia. It is God turning to history. Here Barth speaks of God's immanence, God's "presence" in the world and his involvement in the life of the world, in history, and in time through the work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. For Barth, "Jesus is before all time, and therefore eternally the Son and the Word of God, God Himself in His turning to the world."⁶⁵ Thus, he can

⁶²CD IV3.1, 352.

⁶³CD IV3.1, 355.

⁶⁴CD IV3.1, 352.

⁶⁵CD IM1, 622.

assert that

. . . the fulfilled union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ is, to be sure, one among others of these various possibilities of divine immanence, but over and beyond that, it must be defined, in its once-for-all and unique aspect, as the possibility of other possibilities. For the Son of God who became flesh in Jesus Christ is, as an eternal mode of divine being, nothing more nor less than the principle and basis of all divine immanence, and therefore the principle of what we have called the secondary absoluteness of God."⁶⁶

Beside God's transcendence, Barth emphatically affirms God's immanence through Christ's incarnation.

We will start with an examination of Christ's parousia, which Barth interprets as God turning to the world for the purpose of transforming this world into his kingdom and making people citizens of his kingdom. This is the goal of Christ's work of reconciliation; therefore, our discussion of the second stage of the parousia will revolve on the question how this reconciling activity relates to the life of the church, to the intermediate state and to the battle against Satan and his kingdom. As will be seen in this section, one thing determines all situations and all circumstances, namely, Christ's victory on the cross and in his resurrection. This will lead us to the conclusion concerning Christ's reconciling work as the fulfillment of the covenant that God has established from all eternity.

One thing we will notice throughout this section is Barth's move from his transcendental principles to a focus on the world and on history. Here we can see the plausibility of Barth's confession that he has become "simultaneously, very much more churchly and very much more worldly"⁶⁷ in his outlook.

⁶⁶CD III, 317.

⁶⁷Barth, How I Changed my Mind, 44.

1. The Parousia as God's Turning to the World

For Barth, Christ's coming is God turning to this world and his presence in this world. This presence, as will be shown further below in this section, is manifested by an encounter between what Barth calls "real history" and "so-called history" in his early theology.

Christ's parousia is crucial to the life of this world, for it creates the history of this world. For Barth, the history of reconciliation which takes place during the second stage of the parousia finds its source in Christ's first coming. At this point we have to note again the centrality of Christ's resurrection and his presence. Barth argues that "In its first and second forms, His parousia, namely, the fact that He has risen and lives, is the decisive presupposition of all that is and occurs in this time of ours."⁶⁸ This means that Barth centers history in Christ, or more precisely in Christ's reconciling work. "The reconciliation of the world to God," Barth maintains, "is in every respect history."⁶⁹

In Christ, God is turning to the world. But he is turning to a fallen world which rebels against him. Barth, particularly in his early theology, sees the "environment," that is, "man in and with the cosmos; man in his creaturely and historical nature," showing hostility towards Christ's work of salvation as it is confronted with Christ's Word of truth. Barth observes that "By this environment, the Son of God and Man, Jesus Christ, is Himself challenged and assaulted as He challenges and assaults it by His existence and

⁶⁸CD IV\3.2, 904.

⁶⁹CD IV\3.1, 211.

with His Word."⁷⁰ Yet, as we have seen in the first stage of the parousia, although this world is revolting against Christ, Barth insists that this is a reaction against the One who is already victorious. This victory is revealed in an inevitable confrontation between God's history and the history of this world. In the first edition of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Barth makes use of two technical terms---"so-called history" (sogenannte Geschichte) and "real history" (eigentliche Geschichte)⁷¹---to designate respectively these two kinds of history. The encounter between these two categories of history results in a dialectical crisis which is overcome by Christ's incarnation, to the effect that in the end there is strictly speaking only one history.

"So-called history" is the one to which scientific, historical, and psychological investigation can have access.⁷² It is directly related to human flesh, to the Fall, and to human beings isolated from God, and as such as a kind of history which has become a curse rather than a blessing.⁷³ Barth also points out that "so-called history" is a reality

⁷⁰CD IV3.1, 166-67.

⁷¹Barth, Der Römerbrief I, (Erste Fassung. 1919) (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), see esp. 46, 76, 80, 82-85, 87.

⁷²Römerbrief I, 64: "Die 'Geschichte,' die die Historie und die Psychologie beschreiben möchten."

⁷³Römerbrief I, 80: "Das Fleisch ist das Prinzip des Fortschritts im Kreis herum, der die Fata Morgana und der Fluch der so-gennante Geschichte ist. Das Fleisch macht das Menschliche, das mit dem Göttlichen eins sein müsste, zum Nur-Menschlichen. Mit einem Wort: die Fleischesnatur, die kosmische Ordnung, unter die der Mensch durch den Abfall gestellt ist, unterbindet zum vornherein die Realisierung de Göttlichen im Menschlichen und reißt das Tun Gottes und das der Menschen mechanisch auseinander."

associated with the law and calls the law the "culmination of so-called history."⁷⁴ Yet, Barth insists on the biblical utterance according to which "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." (Rom. 3:20, NIV). From this, Barth comes to the conclusion that the world's history is nothing more than the judgment of the world. For all human thought, words, and deeds run counter to God's will and decisions.⁷⁵ But the law cannot save humans from their sins since they cannot fulfill the law.

From this impossibility of human salvation through the law, Barth turns to what he calls "real history" which he describes as the place where the law is fulfilled, the "righteousness of God" and the "deeds of the law" are made one,⁷⁶ the relationship between God and human beings---which was characterized by a direct relationship to the "Origin" but lost in the Fall⁷⁷---is restored,⁷⁸ and finally the "co-knowledge" of God and humans is made possible because the "conscience" of God and that of human beings

⁷⁴Römerbrief I, 76: "Das Gesetz den Höhenpunkt der sogenannten Geschichte bedeutet."

⁷⁵Römerbrief I, 48: "Die Weltgeschichte is das Weltgericht. Alles menschliche Denken, Reden und Tun treibt einer Vergeltung, einer Entscheidung, einer göttlichen Reaktion und Antwort entgegen."

⁷⁶Römerbrief I, 80: "Die 'Gerechtigkeit Gottes' und 'das vom Gesetz gemeinte Handeln' sind in der eigentlichen Geschichte keine Gegensätze, sondern eins und dasselbe!"

⁷⁷Römerbrief I, 20: "Eine Abkehr des Menschen von Gott hat ihn seinem Ursprung entfremdet, Gott zu seinem Feind gemacht, die einst in Gott gebundenen und spielenden natürlich und geschichtlichen Weltkräfte herrenlos gemacht, ihn und alle Kreatur unter das Gericht der Verworfenheit und des Todes gebracht."

⁷⁸Römerbrief I, 85 : "Das organische Einheitsverhält zwischen Gott und Mensch und darum zwischen Mensch und Welt ist wieder gefunden."

are united in the sense that the former's conscience transcends that of the latter.⁷⁹ "Real history" is grounded in Christ's resurrection and we owe this restoration of unity to Christ.⁸⁰

Barth presents "real history" as a heavenly phenomenon coming down to earth and being victorious over "so-called history." Barth affirms that "so-called history" could not resist the invasion of "real history."⁸¹ He associates "real history" with

. . . the unlimited power of the merciful God, who alone can act in this world from the absolute beyond of all creaturely being and life, of whom it is characteristic to act from that beyond, who in so doing demonstrates and reveals that He is the merciful and omnipotent God.⁸²

However, despite this strong emphasis on the absolute power of "real history" Barth does not suggest thereby the annihilation of "so-called history." Even at the end-time all that God's eternity does is to set "a limit to the endlessness of the world, of time, of things, of men."⁸³ Now Barth's theory in this respect is that "the history of the end" is at the same time "the history of the beginning."⁸⁴ By this, Barth does not mean a prolongation of "so-called history" throughout eternity but its being transformed and given a new start by "real history." Thus Barth warns against "the temptation to confuse the end of history

⁷⁹Römerbrief I, 85: "Der mystische Gegensatz zwischen dem Bewusstsein Gottes und dem Bewusstsein der Menschheit sich aufgelöst."

⁸⁰Römerbrief I, 80: "In der Auferstehung sind sie eins."

⁸¹Römerbrief I, 85: "Im Strom der sogenannten Geschichte wird das neue, entgegengesetzt strömende Element der Eigentlichen Geschichte sichtbar."

⁸²CD IV2, 295.

⁸³Barth, Resurrection, 105-06.

⁸⁴Barth, Resurrection, 106.

with a termination of history, however impressive it may be."⁸⁵

Barth affirms this point more strongly and explicitly by warning us not "to confuse eternity with great annihilation, and to make the end of history an annihilation of history."⁸⁶ Barth apparently intends to suggest that there is both a continuity and discontinuity in the world's history. But what is clear in his assertion is the fact that "so-called history" is not entirely removed and replaced by "real history." Rather, these two kinds of history, in a sense, coexist and complete one another as "witnesses" of revelation and reconciliation. At this point, Barth attempts to explain the specific role played by "so-called history" by referring to Pilate. "History," Barth says, "means what Pontius Pilate means in the creed."⁸⁷

R. Laird Harris draws attention to the fact that Barth is at pains to define the place occupied by "so-called history" in revelation. He points out that Barth is confronted with a dilemma on this question since "Barth is concerned that God reveal Himself in history, but equally concerned that history cannot reveal God."⁸⁸ There is a grain of truth in Harris's opinion; however, Barth's position is radical on this score: "so-called history" cannot reveal God. All that "so-called history" can do is to witness to revelation. This is the function assumed by Pilate in the creed.

⁸⁵Barth, Resurrection, 106.

⁸⁶Barth, Resurrection, 106.

⁸⁷Barth, "Church and Theology," in Theology and Church, trans. Louise P. Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 292.

⁸⁸R. Laird Harris, "Barth and Eschatology," Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society, no. 4 (September 1963): 117.

When we try to grasp what Barth means by "real history" and "so-called history" in the light of the Church Dogmatics, we understand Barth's rejection of any possibility of the intervention of the world's history into revelation. Revelation is here to be understood in the sense of the equivalence Barth gives to it, that is, reconciliation. And reconciliation is virtually the same as its purpose, namely, the fulfillment of the covenant. Even if the use of the terms "so-called history" and "real history" has been abandoned in the Church Dogmatics, we see that they both refer to the covenant. "So-called history," as the history of the fallen world, is nothing other than the history of the breaking of the covenant. Barth says that

This history of man from the very first . . . consists, not in keeping but breaking the covenant, not in the receiving but the rejecting of the promise, not in the fulfilling but the transgressing of the command, not in the gratitude which corresponds to the grace of God but in a senseless and purposeless rebellion against it.⁸⁹

Obviously the history of the Fall and the human breaking of the covenant cannot be interpreted as the history of revelation and reconciliation.

While "so-called history" is a history of the breaking of the covenant, "real history" is the history of God restoring the broken covenant. This is a history that God has prepared from all eternity and implemented here on earth in the life and death of Jesus Christ. This is the history of reconciliation, a history which is essentially teleological as it moves gradually towards a precise goal, namely, the final redemption of this world. In short, this history is the history of God turning towards this world which needs redemption. Redemption here takes the form of the restoration of the fellowship

⁸⁹CD IV\1, 67.

between God and humans after the Fall. Barth summarizes the content of this history saying that

If we take seriously the starting-point and concept of the subject given by the Word of God as His self-revelation, in its centre and substance we must have the following decisive understanding of the history played out under this lordship. It is the execution of the election of grace resolved and fulfilled by God from all eternity. It is thus the history in which God establishes His fellowship with man, and prepares and accomplishes its completion in His own self-giving to human nature and existence, to conduct it to its manifestation at the expiration of the last time. As the creation of all reality distinct from God took place on the basis of this purposed covenant and with a view of its execution, so the meaning of the continued existence of the creature, and therefore the purpose of its history, is that this covenant will and work of God begun in creation should have its course and reach its goal.⁹⁰

Two elements, which are pivotal in Barth's theology, namely, the eternal election of grace, "in which God establishes His fellowship with man," and Christ's incarnation, which is Christ's "own self-giving to human nature and existence," here constitute the history of the covenant. Barth takes a christocentric approach to the doctrine of election in which Jesus Christ as Logos non-asarkos⁹¹ is introduced as a representative of the human race. From this perspective, Barth argues that election is primarily and uniquely

⁹⁰CD III3, 35-36.

⁹¹According to Barth's concept of Logos non-asarkos, Christ was already both God and human in his pre-existence. Thus Barth rejects the traditional concept of Christ as being Logos asarkos before the incarnation. "According to Col. 1:15," Barth argues, "He is 'the first born of every creature,' and, according to verse 14, 'the One in whom we have ἀπολύτρωσις, i.e., the forgiveness of sins. According to verse 18, He is the first born from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence" (CD III1, 54). For Barth, all these may not be possible unless Christ was fully a human being in heaven; Thus he asks the question, "How could this be said of the Logos asarkos?" (CD III1, 54). In Barth's opinion human history takes its rise from the history of Christ as God and human, as Logos non-asarkos from all eternity. Human history is grounded in Jesus Christ. And it is exclusively against this background that Barth can assert that" . . . The being of man is a history" (CD III2, 157).

the election of Jesus Christ,⁹² before it becomes the election of the community⁹³ and the election of the individual.⁹⁴ In other words, the history of the election or the history of the covenant is purely the history of Jesus Christ. This is a heavenly history which became an earthly history in Christ's incarnation.

The incarnation is God's focus on world history. Here God as the Creator has become creature. This falls under the category of what Barth calls "impossible possibility." But it was real in the world history. Barth says that

If it is the case that the man Jesus is Himself the Creator who has become creature, then He exists in a manner which cannot be exhaustively described by any state, but in Him we are faced by the fulfillment of the strict concept of history.⁹⁵

This is a crucial turning-point in Barth's theology. Barth abandoned the idea of "a God absolutely unique in His relation to man and the world, overpoweringly lofty and distant, strange, yes even wholly other"⁹⁶ and now concentrates on "the humanity of God as His deity."⁹⁷

The humanity of God is the greatest miracle in history. In this we see the importance that God attaches to human beings, to time and history. Barth writes:

The humanity of God! Rightly understood that is bound to mean God's relation

⁹²CD II2, 94-194.

⁹³CD II2, 195-305.

⁹⁴CD II2, 306-506.

⁹⁵CD III2, 159.

⁹⁶Karl Barth, The Humanity of God (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), 37.

⁹⁷Barth, Humanity of God, 37.

to and turning toward man. It signifies the God who speaks with man in promise and command. It represents God's existence, intercession, and activity for man, the intercourse God holds with him, and the free grace in which He wills to be and is nothing other than the God of man.⁹⁸

The humanity of God is the covenant made concrete, for God has come close to humanity and declared human beings his people and himself their God. "He causes the promise and command of the covenant: 'I will be your God and ye shall be my people,' to become historical event in the person of Jesus Christ."⁹⁹

Barth underlines the teleological dimensions of the history of the covenant but refuses to relate it to Federal theology for the purpose of ruling out any form of synergism. Thus Barth insists upon the covenant being fully prepared in heaven before being brought down to the earth. He emphasizes the fact that

He in whom the covenant is fulfilled and revealed in history is also its eternal bliss. He who in Scripture is attested to be very God and very man is also the eternal testamentum, the eternal sponsio, the eternal pactum, between God and man.¹⁰⁰

The emphasis here is on the heavenly aspects of the covenant. But the covenant did not remain a heavenly event. It has become a history set in motion on earth. It is the history of salvation which embraces all other events happening on earth. For Barth,

The secret of everything that takes place in this world is the decision of God which eternally precedes it. All other events culminate in the history of salvation and take place necessarily for the sake of it.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸Barth, Humanity of God, 37.

⁹⁹CD IV1, 67.

¹⁰⁰CD IV1, 66.

¹⁰¹CD II2, 185.

Thus, the humanity of God in Jesus Christ, as the history of the covenant between God and humankind, supersedes all other history, and it is even the only history taking place on earth, for all occurrences are conditioned by and in a sense contribute to the fulfillment of the covenant. Hence we may say that not only is human history completely dominated by Jesus Christ but it is reduced to one history, that is, the history of Jesus Christ, "the history of Jesus Christ [which] is the history of the reconciliation of the world with God."¹⁰² This is a history which springs from the God's concern about the world. "The Creator," Barth asserts, "shows His concern for His creation by Himself becoming a creature."¹⁰³ Christ must achieve his purpose of fulfilling the covenant. Even history is now moving toward this fulfillment, for "the goal of history, all history, is the victory of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁴

2. The Parousia as a Framework for a Gradual Realization of God's Kingdom in the World

Since Barth conceives of the parousia, not as a short apocalyptic event according to the premillennial belief, but as a long period coinciding with the amillennial interpretation of the millennium, he is led to consider the kingdom, which has come down to earth from heaven in Jesus, to some extent, as a reality developing in this world until it reaches its maturity.

Closely related to this on-going establishment of the kingdom of God on earth is

¹⁰²CD IV\1, 644.

¹⁰³CD III\2, 157.

¹⁰⁴Jenson, Alpha and Omega, 33.

Barth's cosmic view of reconciliation and redemption, which exhibits a priority of the world over the individual, even over the church. Barth asserted this priority of the whole universe over the individual as early as in the first edition of the Römerbrief in which he relates directly the redemption of the world to the reconciliation of the world with God. Barth speaks of der Weltlösung auf Grund der Weltversöhnung¹⁰⁵ according to which the salvation of the world is grounded in the reconciliation which already took place in Christ's death and resurrection. Then Barth affirms clearly the precedence of the world over the individual by stressing that there is no redeemed individual without a redeemed world.¹⁰⁶ Hence even Christians look forward to the salvation of the world which will include their own salvation. Barth writes:

The goal to which he [the Christian] looks and moves is this horizon, i.e., the redemption of the created world which will also include his own . . . that which Jesus Christ has accomplished for the salvation of the world and therefore for his salvation.¹⁰⁷

This suggests that God by no means despises the world. On the contrary, God holds the world in high esteem and prepares it to become his everlasting kingdom. Christ's parousia is God's expression of his love for this world as he came down to earth to establish his kingdom here. Barth expresses vividly this idea saying that

It is not that man "goes to heaven," but rather that God's kingdom comes to us in matter and on earth. "The Word became flesh" and not the other way around! The heavenly Father's love and justice come to rule over all things external and

¹⁰⁵Römerbrief I, 200.

¹⁰⁶Römerbrief, I, 228: "Die Welt ist die Welt des Menschen. Der Mensch steht mit ihr und fällt mit ihr. Es gibt keine erlösten Menschen ohne eine erlöste Welt."

¹⁰⁷CD IV\3.2, 934. (Emphasis added).

earthly. His will is to be done "on earth as it is in heaven."¹⁰⁸

Barth identifies the kingdom which has come along with Christ's parousia with God's righteousness. God's kingdom as God's righteousness first began with a "germ cell" planted in history and nature and gradually grows on earth until it attains its consummation in the eternal kingdom.¹⁰⁹ Here Barth does not ground his interpretive method in the natural theology that he repudiates. Rather he simply follows the parable of the mustard seed of Matthew 13: 31, which he finds to be the scriptural warrant for his contention concerning a gradual growth of God's kingdom on earth. Barth speaks of "divine established lordship of the kingdom in the seed form of the Easter event."¹¹⁰ The growth of the kingdom is real as the "the seed growing secretly (Mk. 4:26), the mustard seed and leaven (Mt. 13:31f.) and the drag-net (Mt. 13:47f.)" reveal, although "we have to do with more or less hidden processes."¹¹¹ Yet it is certain that "it moves towards its manifestation, and therefore the manifestation of the kingdom, in the full

¹⁰⁸Barth, "Movement for Social Justice," in Barth and Radical Politics, 27.

¹⁰⁹Römerbrief I, 24: ". . . Durch jene Aufrichtung der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit die Keimzell des Lebens wieder in die Geschichte und in die Natur [ist] gegeben."

McCormack argues in the same vein and depicts Barth's early eschatology in connection with the first edition of Barth's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans as "process eschatology" (see McCormack, Dialectical Theology, 127-83). McCormack could not survey the development of this concept in Barth's "Doctrine of Reconciliation" since the scope of his book is confined to Barth's theology in the period between 1909 and 1936.

In Colm O'Grady's judgment "he [Barth] oscillated between a kingdom of God purely eschatological and one merely present and developing in man and time" (O'Grady, The Church, 7). O'Grady seems not to be very attentive to Barth's attempt to hold transcendence and history in balance despite his tendency to stress the former.

¹¹⁰CD IV3.2, 792.

¹¹¹CD IV3.1, 112.

visibility of the tree (Mt. 13:32) with birds nesting in the branches."¹¹²

That the kingdom is something which grows secretly does not necessarily entail that it develops smoothly on earth. It encounters all kinds of difficulty as it advances through human sinfulness and the world's brokenness. The process of its realization involves a war between the "law and sin," "ideal and life." However, it establishes itself gradually with an assured victory despite the apparent ups and downs in its way towards consummation.¹¹³ The progress in the kingdom's development is made manifest through "the freeing of what is bound, the healing of what is sick and the correction of what is perverted."¹¹⁴ Even the believer's life, which is included in the kingdom, is moving forward under the sway of the kingdom, so that "he marches into the future. He looks and moves towards it."¹¹⁵

Yet a word of caution is very important at this point. Barth does not teach that the world is moving towards a "golden age" from a postmillennial perspective. We have just

¹¹²CD IV\3.2, 792-93.

¹¹³"Eine neue Weltzeit ist angebrochen: das Ende der aller Zeiten. Indem Gott nun sein letztes Wort, das Wort spricht---indem Mass, als es nun gehört, wird die Zeit stillgestellt durch die Ewigkeit. Indem die Zeit in ihrem tiefsten Sinn erfüllt wurde und wird, liegt sie dahinten. Ein neue Schöpfung hat angehoben, in der die Sünde nicht mehr notwendig und möglich und in der das Gesetz gegenstandslos ist. In dieser "neue" Schöpfung erscheint aber nichts Anderes als das Sein, das im Anfang bei Gott war und dessen Entfaltung und Alleinherrschaft das Ende der Wege Gottes ist. Im Lichte des Kampfes zwischen Gesetz und Sünde, Ideal und Leben erscheint uns die Zeit als Zeit, d.h. als Ablauf, Veränderung, Entwicklung, Werden und Vergehen: als Unterbrechung jenes anfänglichen und endlichen Seins in der Herrlichkeit Gottes. Ist jener Kampf beendet, der Anfang und das Ende aus Vergangenheit und Zukunft Gegenwart geworden, so verschwindet die Zeit in ewigen Jetzt" (Römerbrief I, 86-87).

¹¹⁴CD IV\3.2, 934.

¹¹⁵CD IV\3.2, 934.

seen his emphasis on the ups and downs in the realization of God's kingdom. Nor does he suggest that the world is gradually and visibly being transformed into God's kingdom. Indeed there is a sense in which the world is being transformed into God's kingdom, but it seems more accurate to say that the world is being prepared to receive the kingdom of God in its fullness and will be thereby transformed. Barth does not even conceive of a permanent presence of God's kingdom now on earth. It is indeed teleological in character as it is advancing towards its consummation, but it also comes in an actualistic manner as a series of "breakthroughs" into the earth. We also have to notice the subtlety in which Barth presents the establishment of the kingdom in the world. Indeed it takes place as a process, but it is only present in its fullness in Jesus Christ. This situation compelled Barth to assume that theology cannot do without the dialectic of Yes and No, "already" and "not yet." Even Christian life reflects this situation: "our advance is stopped---we are set in motion. We tarry and---hurry."¹¹⁶ And both "waiting and hastening are commanded."¹¹⁷

What is the impact of this reality on the life of the whole world? The world has already entered the eschaton and continues its journey towards full redemption in the final kingdom. That the world is now related to God in Jesus Christ means that it is lifted up to the rank of the eschaton. Barth points out that

Since we have to do with the relation of the creature to God it is also a matter of the creature's own eschaton, its final reality as it is reality present to God, but still future for itself, still to be revealed to it. Reconciliation is real reconciliation

¹¹⁶Romans II, 30.

¹¹⁷Barth, Ethics, 490.

because it makes us men who wait and look and move towards the redemption which has already taken place for us and is ready for us.¹¹⁸

We observe here an important shift in Barth's theological concepts. Barth moved from a static and "timeless eschatology" to a dynamic and teleological view of history, from a low evaluation of the world to its "gradual transformation" into God's kingdom. The world does not simply hope and wait for the eschaton; it is already within the eschaton and is moving towards its final redemption. The world does not simply hope and wait to be transformed; it is being prepared now to accommodate the consummation of the kingdom.

Barth acknowledges the truth of the criticism levelled against him for his previous low evaluation of history and now seeks to avoid "the danger of falling into an abstract negation of the world."¹¹⁹ Barth repents of his previous one-sided view of the presence of the kingdom in the form of a "timeless eschatology" at the expense of the teleological nature of history and the corresponding hope in Christian life, which is clearly taught by Scripture. Barth writes:

That we had only an uncertain grip of the matter became apparent, strangely enough, in those passages of the exposition in which I had to speak positively about the divine future and hope as such. So when I came to expound a passage like Rom. 13: 1f. ("Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand"), in spite of every precaution I interpreted it as if it referred only to the moment which confronts all moments in time as the eternal "transcendental meaning" of all moments in time. The tension between the "then" when we believed and the "now" of disturbing recollection," a new awareness of Christ's parousia, was only a continual tension, having no connexion with the tension of

¹¹⁸CD III, 510.

¹¹⁹Barth, How I Changed my Mind, 44.

two points in time and the time of Church history. The "last" hour, the time of eternity, was an hour which followed time. Rather at every moment in time we stood before the frontier of all time, the frontier of "qualified time." . . . I missed the distinctive feature of the passage, the teleology which it ascribes to time as it moves towards a real end.¹²⁰

Barth's new emphasis is now on the world moving towards its final goal, namely, the kingdom of God.

Barth conceives of the new world of God as a world not completely different from the existing world, although it is not a mere continuation of this world. The new world will be the present world made new, transformed and purged of its sinfulness and corruption by receiving the kingdom of God. In the death and resurrection of Christ the old era had to yield to the new era. This world belongs to God its Creator and must come under his rule as his kingdom.

A gradual growth of the kingdom in the world can be conceived. This growth began with Christ's first coming, not with the kingdom of Israel. The kingdom of Israel is for Barth a "prototype" but also a mere "copy" of Christ's kingdom.

3. The Kingdom of Israel as Both a Prototype and a Copy of Christ's Kingdom

Barth holds that a full grasp of the nature of Christ's kingdom is not possible without a reference to the prophecy and preparation for its coming in the history of Israel. But unlike premillennialists who focus mainly on the Davidic dynasty and see in Christ's millennial kingdom the future fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy concerning the restoration of the kingdom of David with its throne in Jerusalem, Barth first turns to

¹²⁰CD III, 635.

Christ's kingship and the purpose of his kingdom and adopts a christocentric view of the Israelite monarchy rather than a Davidic view of Christ's kingdom.

Barth undertook a survey of the Israelite monarchy¹²¹ and concluded that its significance is to be found only in the fact that "the Israelite monarchy set up on the day of Ramah is the prototype or copy of the kingship of Jesus Christ."¹²² We note here Barth's use of two contradictory terms, "prototype" and "copy" to define the Israelite monarchy. Barth apparently puts these two words side by side so that they may qualify one another. The kingdom of Israel is indeed a "prototype" as it precedes Christ's kingship and is the prophecy of its coming, but it is also a "copy" because it is Christ's history which conditions the history of Israel and never the reverse. The history of Israel is only to announce what will be fulfilled in Christ. Here Augustine and Calvin's view of Israel as "shadow" and Christ as "substance"¹²³ seems to elucidate Barth's idea of "copy" since Barth holds that Christ is the real king destined to reign in Israel as the Messiah.

Barth's argument is mainly anchored in the fact that "a human monarchy in Israel was in itself contrary to the will of God"¹²⁴ and lasted only for a short period. Then the kings who reigned, especially Saul and David, represent God's curse and blessing, his No and Yes, and his rejection and election. All these facts, Barth contends, are shadows of

¹²¹CD II/2, 340-409.

¹²²CD II/2, 389.

¹²³See above, 82-84.

¹²⁴CD II/2, 367.

the destiny awaiting Jesus Christ in his function as king of Israel.

Barth goes back to what first happened in Ramah to describe the situation of the kingdom of Israel. In Ramah the people of Israel compelled Samuel to provide them with a human king, a desire which God and even Samuel viewed as a rejection of God's kingship. Barth remarks that, as a result, "the subsequent election and appointment of Saul carries from that time forward the quality of a divine act of judgment."¹²⁵ The replacement of Saul by David did not put an end to God's wrath and judgment. This, in Barth's opinion, explains the fact that

. . . the whole emphasis of the grace of God vouchsafed to David in 2 Sam. 7 is ultimately the emphasis given him for the future, and not that of a present fulfilment of the true monarchy.¹²⁶

"The content of the promise [is] not related to David, but to his son, as the one to whom God will be a father and who will himself be the son of God in his kingdom."¹²⁷ Barth understands this prophecy as a reference to Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. That the Israelite kingdom was definitely interrupted after 586 B.C. is, for Barth, a further evidence of God's disapproval of this human monarchy. The only true kingdom is Christ's kingdom.

However, one thing is worth noting at this point: Barth is prepared to affirm that

¹²⁵CD II/2, 385.

¹²⁶CD II/2, 385.

¹²⁷CD II/2, 385.

Jesus Christ is not of Davidic descent.¹²⁸ This may be due to Barth's attempt to avoid the conclusion that Christ's kingdom is to be traced back to the Davidic dynasty; but we also remember that Barth argues for the identity of Christ as a Logos non-asarkos and a representative of humanity in heaven from all eternity. Thus, Barth rejects the assumption that the dynasty of David continued in Christ. Barth asks the following questions:

Had not the whole history of the Israelite monarchy been the history of a single mistake? Had not the promise of the everlasting continuance of the house and the monarchy of David (cf. 2 Sam. 7) been proved illusory?¹²⁹

Barth answers these questions by insisting on God's complete rejection of need for the presence of a human king in Israel. "God does not will the Jerusalem monarchy, and wants no earthly king at all in Israel."¹³⁰ Jesus Christ, as "God and man" is the One destined to be the king of Israel. For Barth, "Pilate was right to insist on 'Jesus of

¹²⁸Barth questions the traditional belief that Jesus is of Davidic descent. He begins with an analysis of the genealogies in Matthew 1: 2-16 and Luke 3:23-38 and observes that they end with Joseph not with Mary, but Joseph is not Jesus' biological father. "It is a fact," Barth points out, "that the genealogies Mat. 1:2-16 and Lk 3:23-38 end not with Mary but with Joseph, and so, if Joseph is not the father of Jesus, do not prove what they ought to prove, Jesus' descent from David, so important to Paul" (CD II2, 175). In other words, no real biological link between Jesus and David can be conceived. The filiation may be only understood in connection with the fact that "although Jesus was not the physical or natural, He was still the legitimate and legal son of Joseph and therefore of David, i.e., introduced into the family tree on the ground of adoption" (CD II2, 175). Turning to Romans 1:3 Barth also casts doubt upon the understanding of Paul as referring uniquely to a biological relation. "In the same way, too," Barth argues, "the word γενόμενος ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, Rom. 1:3, need not exclude the thought of another than the purely physical descent from David. Γενόμενος κατὰ σάρκα need not altogether signify biological provenance. In short, Barth is anxious to emphasize the heavenly origin of Jesus Christ, whom he portrays as the "real man" (CD III2, 133-202).

¹²⁹CD II2, 385.

¹³⁰CD II2, 385.

Nazareth, the king of the Jews."¹³¹ Consequently, Barth repeats again and again that the Israelite monarchy is a "prototype" and "copy" of the kingship of Christ.

Then, Barth turns to his idea of revelation and relates it to the kingdom of Israel. Barth maintains that the texts of the Old Testament prophecy must be understood eschatologically as a revelation of Christ's future kingdom, for this is the way the apostles themselves interpreted these texts. Barth argues that

It is only eschatologically and therefore only as prophecy that they can read and understand these texts, if at all, as the texts of revelation which for them they certainly were.¹³²

What is revealed is Christ's kingship. For Barth, Christ is the only true elect king of Israel, while the others are simple witnesses of his kingship. Barth says that

The elect King of the Books of Samuel . . . is, in all his potentialities and in every aspect of his widely divergent appearance, a witness of Jesus Christ. In himself he is never more than His prototype and copy; but in type always He Himself.¹³³

In other words, Jesus Christ is the only true elect king of Israel, the others are merely a prophecy ("prototype"), a "shadow" ("copy"), and witnesses of his kingship.

Although Barth considers all the kings of Israel until the sixth century as forerunners of Christ, he takes Saul and David as the most prominent prophetic figures. Both Saul and David had a very bad reputation for their sins, but Barth, nevertheless, portrays them differently in the sense that "David is the bearer of the divine blessing

¹³¹CD II/2, 391.

¹³²CD II/2, 386.

¹³³CD II/2, 389.

where Saul bears the divine curse."¹³⁴ As such, Barth sees in Saul, and in the other Samarian kings like himself, the rejected kings of Israel. "The king of Israel rejected by God, whether He be called Saul or Jeroboam," Barth says, "is the prototype and copy of Jesus Christ."¹³⁵ Apart from their own sinfulness, those kings also represented that of their people and became subject to God's wrath and judgment. It is in this situation of being victims because of the sin of their people that they foretold Christ who will be condemned for the sin of the world. Barth says:

They prophesy and exhibit the King who, himself innocent, has interposed himself as a Leader and Representative at the head of all sinful men, and between them and God---at the very place where transgressors and therefore the lost stand, where the rebellion breaks out, and therefore the lightning of divine wrath must strike. . . . Who but the Son of God can be the King of men in this terrible function?¹³⁶

Yet, God's rejection must be also followed by his election. Barth now turns to David and sees in him the positive dimensions of the kingship in Israel, as a "prototype and copy" of Christ's kingship. Barth says:

Conversely, the king of Israel elected by God, David himself and David's son and in his own way every king of Jerusalem, is the prototype and copy of Jesus Christ. . . . God was with David in all that He undertook . . . David conquered and rose to rule.¹³⁷

That God was with David was first manifested in "his most significant military achievement, . . . namely, the capture of Jerusalem,"¹³⁸ for "it was only . . . after the

¹³⁴CD II/2, 378.

¹³⁵CD II/2, 390.

¹³⁶CD II/2, 390.

¹³⁷CD II/2, 391.

¹³⁸CD II/2, 376.

conquest and occupation of this mountain lair, Jerusalem---that David perceived that 'the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.'¹³⁹

In David, then, God's wrath, which had to fall on the Israelite monarchy, is also revealed to be God's grace. David is a symbol of "the divine grace of the monarchy,"¹⁴⁰ and "the grace addressed and given to a sinful nation."¹⁴¹ Barth sees a very close relationship between Jesus Christ and David in that David is himself "an anticipation of the Messianic name 'Emmanuel' of Is. 7:14,"¹⁴² because "the Lord is with him."¹⁴³ Barth draws attention to the presence of a parallel between Christ's hiddenness before the revelation of his lordship, kingship, and messiahship on the cross and in his resurrection and "David as the true king of Israel, first secretly and then openly elected."¹⁴⁴

Barth brings together Saul and David as prophetic figures representing Christ and sees in them a reflection of the positive and negative aspects of Christ's work of reconciliation and redemption: Jesus Christ, God himself in his glory and majesty was willing to be involved in the life of a sinful people for their salvation. In this connection, Barth writes:

¹³⁹CD II/2, 376.

¹⁴⁰CD II/2, 377.

¹⁴¹CD II/2, 377.

¹⁴²CD II/2, 374.

¹⁴³CD II/2, 374.

¹⁴⁴CD II/2, 373.

For if the proper and positive character of this picture---as seen from its subject Jesus Christ---unquestionably places before our eyes the meaning and power of the divine election itself, and the glory of God's grace in the person of the king of God's people introduced by Himself, we are reminded by the negative aspect---which, although it is crowded out by the positive, is not denied but is specifically mentioned and can still be seen---who it is that God has chosen, and what kind of a people it is whose King is so great and glorious. We are reminded that it is composed of lost sinners who are justified and saved by Him. We are reminded that for the sake of their justification and salvation He had to accept their nature, had to become like them in all things. We are reminded what it cost Him to be the King of grace at the head of this people, and as such to reign over them. We cannot forget the rejected king in the elect.¹⁴⁵

In his incarnation, Jesus Christ became both King and Redeemer for sinful and rebellious Israel. He became rejected and condemned for the sake of his people, but he was also elected and enthroned in order to reign over them and to achieve a work of salvation for their sake.

Barth sees in this the Old Testament background of Christ's office of king and priest. In other words, the Old Testament is, for Barth, nothing other than a witness of the revelation of Christ's kingdom and his work of reconciliation. Christ's kingdom is a "kingdom of reconciliation"¹⁴⁶ in which Christ was both rejected and elected, sacrificed on the cross and resurrected, humiliated and exalted. In Barth's words, Christ as

. . . the king of the Jews, the man in whom God has entered upon His kingdom as a kingdom of grace for all His people is always the very One whom God has rejected for the sin of His people, whom He has delivered to death in the fire of His righteous wrath against their rebellion. This man is rejected and afflicted by Him as the Representative and Bearer of human sin, of all bull-kingship of man. He is the sacrificial offering required for all the unrighteousness and godlessness of men, for the Saul-like nature which in the long run is surpassed even by David. But as such, and regarded by God as such, He has been placed at the right hand

¹⁴⁵CD II/2, 391-92.

¹⁴⁶CD II/2, 390.

of God. He has been lifted up even to the divine throne. He has been made the King in whose realm, for His own sake and in virtue of the power of His government which He exercises in pure forgiveness of sins, there is none unrighteous and none impure.¹⁴⁷

This is a perfect summary of Christ's work of reconciliation stated in the light of the Old Testament prophecy, the Jewish sacrificial ceremony, and the kingship in Israel.

Barth is deeply convinced that the Israelite monarchy points to Christ's "kingdom of reconciliation." He establishes the following parallel: a distinctive feature of the kingdom of Israel is its "transitoriness and evanescence"¹⁴⁸; this transitory characteristic also marks Christ's kingdom since "in time the kingdom of Jesus Christ, as the kingdom of reconciliation, is . . . concealed in the visible appearance of the Church, which in every age and manifestation can reveal the glory of this kingdom in transitory flashes."¹⁴⁹ Christ's kingdom may be seen as a temporary kingdom since its vocation is reconciliation which will be transformed into redemption. Barth insists on Christ's kingdom as a "kingdom of reconciliation," for this accounts for its limits: "the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of reconciliation, has a limit and a goal like time itself and the present order of creation."¹⁵⁰ Barth's emphasis on the idea of reconciliation suggests that the ultimate purpose of both the kingdom of Israel and that of Christ is not so much power, authority, and dominion as salvation. The history of the kingdom of Israel is a prophecy of the history of salvation, which will be fulfilled in Christ's kingdom, in the parousia, in the

¹⁴⁷CD II/2, 389-90.

¹⁴⁸CD II/2, 390

¹⁴⁹CD II/2, 390

¹⁵⁰CD II/2, 390.

millennium.

Yet, the most important thing which we have discovered in this section is Barth's understanding of the relationship between the Israelite monarchy, and especially the Davidic kingdom, and Christ's kingdom. We have mentioned in the opening paragraph that premillennialists, and mainly dispensational premillennialists, attach great importance to the kingdom of David in Palestine. They conceive of the millennium as Christ's kingdom, as the restoration of the Davidic kingdom and its throne in Jerusalem. However, in his concept of "prototype" (prophecy) and "copy" (shadow) we see that Barth stands firmly in the amillennial tradition. This seems to be the place where Barth is found to be far removed from premillennialism and proves himself to be an amillennial thinker. The kingdom of Christ is taking place now. It is a spiritual kingdom whose purpose is reconciliation and redemption. It is what Barth calls the parousia and what amillennialists call the millennium. It does not have its throne in the earthly Jerusalem but in heaven.

Another assertion that Barth makes concerning the Davidic kingdom brings us to our next section. He argues that the kingdom of David is nothing other than the church: "The kingdom of David is the kingdom of the Lord, not of the triumphant but of the militant and suffering Church. It is not devoid of elements of triumph."¹⁵¹ Barth means that the Davidic kingdom not only points to Christ's kingdom but also to the church. This implies that the church is a form of Christ's kingdom.

¹⁵¹CD II/2, 377.

4. The Church as a Form of the Kingdom

We have seen that Barth conceives of the kingdom of God as something which is to embrace the whole world. The world is not yet converted into God's kingdom. In its present state the reality of the kingdom is only indicated by the presence of the church. But Barth is explicit in the identification of the church with the kingdom. The church is Christ's kingdom during the parousia. Barth declares that

It is not for nothing that it comes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ as its first revelation, and goes towards its final revelation in the return of Jesus Christ. As the kingdom itself is on the way from the first to the last revelation, it is the community.¹⁵²

Barth refers to the first and final revelations as the boundaries of the church, and in virtue of this reference seems to identify it with Christ's kingdom.

In fact, we do not encounter much difficulty in Barth's identification of the church with Christ's kingdom. But the issue arises when by "kingdom," not only do we mean the kingdom of Christ during the parousia but also the kingdom of God as the consummation of the kingdom. Barth is unwilling to make a clear-cut difference between God's kingdom and Christ's kingdom. In Barth's opinion, Christ's work of reconciling God with the world presupposes a continuity between Christ's kingdom and God's kingdom. Barth maintains that

Precisely in his humility as the Son of the Father he has overcome the world and reconciled it to God. Precisely in relation to it, then, there can be no talk of the limitation of his kingdom by God's or the end of his kingdom.¹⁵³

¹⁵²CD IV2, 656.

¹⁵³Barth, Christian Life, 251.

Where does the church fit in if Christ's kingdom is inextricably tied to the final kingdom?

By means of his actualistic principles Barth was able to establish the identification of the kingdom with the church. However, this actualistically conceived identification also presupposes that the church cannot be permanently equated with the kingdom. This means that a case for a perfect identification cannot be made. We need, then, to inquire in which way the church and the kingdom are identical and in which way they are not. Basically, the church is identical with the kingdom because it is the "body" of Christ. However, the church also cannot be equated to the kingdom because of its heavenly nature, which is contrasted with the earthly and historical character of the church. Let us first take a closer look at this second point.

In opposition to the heavenly kingdom, the church is of this world and is part of the historical phenomenon, for, as Barth puts it,

whatever is or can be "historical," is by its very nature (eo ipso) part of this world. For "historical" means "subject to time." And whatever is subject to time is limited, is relative, and is made manifest as world by the "last things" of which we are now cognizant, whether we will or not.¹⁵⁴

Apart from its limitedness and relativity, the church, as a reality in this world, in time and history, includes sinners who have no place in the kingdom. Barth turns to the Scriptures and points out that "The wording of Eph. 5:5 warns us against identifying Christ's kingdom with the Church."¹⁵⁵ According to this biblical utterance "no immoral, impure, or greedy person---such a man is an idolater---has any inheritance in the kingdom of

¹⁵⁴Barth, Theology and Church, 59.

¹⁵⁵Barth, Christian Life, 250.

Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5, NIV). The church cannot represent the kingdom as long as it still contains this form of sinfulness and corruption. And it also follows that

It will never equate itself in its present form with the eschaton which comes to it fresh from God. It will not, therefore, be of the opinion that it can and should actualise this eschaton here and now.¹⁵⁶

Barth removes the kingdom further from the church when he points to the heavenly origin of the God's kingdom. Once again Barth is not tired of warning against the misconception according to which the kingdom is a building erected from below as a human construction. Thus, he refers to the coming kingdom as "The holy city, new Jerusalem [which] does not grow up from the earth to heaven, but 'comes down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.'"¹⁵⁷ At this point it is clear that Barth's primary concern is to avoid any form of human contribution to the building of the kingdom.

We notice that Barth avoids any material identification. This means that only the spiritual identification remains, which implies that the identity is possible through the work of Holy Spirit. This leads us to the identity grounded in the principles of actualism that we have mentioned above. The kingdom of God is actualized in the church, although in a provisional and imperfect way, when it is "grasped" by the Holy Spirit. The "breakthrough" of the kingdom into the church is signalled by an experience of the communion of the saints and by a life of the church community characterized by a perfect

¹⁵⁶CD IV2, 647.

¹⁵⁷CD IV2, 628.

obedience to God's command.¹⁵⁸ Barth puts it this way:

We refer to it in the guise of the new and obedient humanity, as in the historical time which moves towards this end it is provisionally and very imperfectly but genuinely actualised where in virtue of the mighty work of the Holy Ghost there is an awareness of its incursion and therefore the communion of saints.¹⁵⁹

The communion of saints becomes a reality and God's command is perfectly observed when "there is mutual love between the members of the community," which builds up the community.¹⁶⁰ For "edification takes place in love" and "love itself edifies."¹⁶¹ For Barth, the activity of the saints united through mutual love consists in praying together for the coming of the kingdom. "In the form of the community which prays for its coming," Barth believes, "the kingdom is really on earth and in time and history."¹⁶²

A real communion of the saints is the sign of the presence of the kingdom in the church. This all comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. From this also follows the identity of the kingdom with the church. Thus Barth could affirm confidently that

there is a real identity, not present in abstracto, but given by God and enacted in the mighty work of the Spirit, between the Holy One, the kingdom of God as perfectly established in Him, and the communion of saints on earth, which as such

¹⁵⁸Barth's ethical principles are reduced to the obedience to "the command of God" (CD IV2, 509-763).

¹⁵⁹CD IV2, 656.

¹⁶⁰CD IV2, 636.

¹⁶¹CD IV2, 635.

¹⁶²CD IV2, 656.

is also the communion of sinners.¹⁶³

It is, then, through the work of the Holy Spirit and as a perfect communion of saints that the church can be the body of Christ and at the same time the kingdom of God.

Barth, however, goes deeper and attempts to understand the relationship between the church and the kingdom from an ontic and noetic perspective. As Barth identifies God's kingdom with Christ and even with God himself, we can start again here with his idea that God's essence is identical with his act. God's being is to be found in his work of revelation and reconciliation in Christ. This means that the being of the kingdom can only be grasped through the revelation and reconciliation achieved by Christ. It is also in the analogy of God, that is, with reference to "being" and "act," that Barth describes the nature of the church. Barth argues that

To describe its being we must abandon the usual distinction between being and act, status and dynamic, essence and existence. Its act is its being, its status its dynamic, its essence its existence.¹⁶⁴

The "act" of the church refers to its function as a witness to the revelation as it proclaims the reconciliation and redemption achieved by Christ and also the coming of his kingdom. It is in this act of revelation that the "being" of the church can be found. If the church's act of revelation remains on a purely noetic level without reference to its being no identification of the church with the kingdom is possible. From a noetic standpoint Barth asserts categorically that "The Church is not the kingdom of God, but

¹⁶³CD IV\2, 656.

¹⁶⁴CD IV\1, 650.

it has knowledge of it; it hopes for it; it believes in it."¹⁶⁵ Only on the ontic level based on the equality of "being" and "act" can the identity of the Church and the kingdom be established. Barth says:

The community is not the kingdom of God. But---proclaimed and believed in its earthly-historical form of existence by sinners among sinners, as the unholy may become the saints of God in an awareness of its coming---the kingdom of God is the community.¹⁶⁶

It is then on the basis of its act of proclamation that the church can be equated to God's kingdom.

The identity is here clearly affirmed, but we also notice in this statement Barth's rejection of the concept of the identity from the community to the kingdom. The equality must start from the kingdom to the community because the essence of the church depends on the kingdom, not the other way around. Barth asserts emphatically that "The community would be nothing if it did not come from the kingdom and go towards it; if the kingdom were not present in this transitional movement."¹⁶⁷

The same principle applies to the relationship between Christ and the community. Barth asserts explicitly that "the being of Jesus Christ is the being of the Church."¹⁶⁸ He acknowledges that "we cannot avoid the statement that Jesus Christ is the

¹⁶⁵Karl Barth, Community, State, and Church, trans. unnamed (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 170.

¹⁶⁶CD IV2, 656.

¹⁶⁷CD IV2, 656.

¹⁶⁸CD IV2, 655.

community."¹⁶⁹ But he immediately adds some interpretive restrictions in order to avoid any misunderstanding of this statement. Barth insists that

The statement cannot be reversed. . . . The community is not Jesus Christ . . . There can be no thought of the being of Jesus Christ enclosed in that of His community, or exhausted by it, as though it were a kind of predicate of this being. The truth is the very opposite. The being of the community is exhausted and enclosed in His. It is a being which is taken up and hidden in His, and absolutely determined and governed by it.¹⁷⁰

In this contention Barth seems to ward off any attempt to look at the relation of Christ to the church from the perspective of process theology, the theory of evolution, or pantheism. For Barth, Christ's being embraces the church, but he also rises above the church as the Lord of the church. Finally, Barth is in the position to establish the identity between Christ, God's kingdom, and the church. Barth writes:

The kingdom of God is the Lordship of God established in the world in Jesus Christ. It is the rule of God as it takes place in Him. He Himself is the kingdom of God. Thus we cannot avoid a statement which Protestantism has far too hastily and heedlessly contested--that the kingdom of God is the community.¹⁷¹

Barth is not satisfied with a theological argumentation to show the identity of the kingdom and the church. He also adduces some biblical verses to prove that his contention is scripturally warranted.¹⁷² Barth especially takes as his linchpin the parables of growth. But Barth has a special purpose in holding to this kind of analogy. Barth is anxious to highlight the fact that, despite its identity with the kingdom, the church

¹⁶⁹CD IV2, 655.

¹⁷⁰CD IV2, 655.

¹⁷¹CD IV2, 655-56.

¹⁷²See, for example, CD IV2, 657.

remains an earthly and a historical reality. From Mark 4: 26-29 and 30-32 Barth demonstrates that the church "is something that grows, so there can be no doubt that it is a temporal and historical subject."¹⁷³

An important implication of the temporal and historical nature of church is that the kingdom of God itself, even though its reality is only known through its actualistic "breakthroughs," has become a temporal and historical fact by virtue of its identity with the church. Barth is well aware that the parable of the seed refers to the kingdom of God, but he always tries to avoid the idea that the kingdom grows from the earth and sees in the equation of the church with the kingdom the explanation of the relation of the kingdom to this parable. This is what Barth says:

As I see it, not merely the parable of the seed which grows secretly but also that of the sower refers to the community existing in the last age of world history. . . . To what can the parables refer if not to the kingdom of God come in time and proclaimed in time? It is in this form, and only in this form, that the kingdom can be compared to a seed which grows irresistibly larger until it reaches its full stature. As long as it has a history, the kingdom of God has its history in the community which exists in history.¹⁷⁴

The growth of the kingdom is nothing other than its proclamation by the church in time, in history, and in the world. And in this proclamation, the church reflects and represents the kingdom.

What is important in this assertion is Barth's shift from the transcendental aspect of the kingdom which prevailed in the first form of the parousia to its historical aspect

¹⁷³CD IV2, 657. Barth deals particularly with the question of "the growth of the community" in CD IV2, 641-60.

¹⁷⁴CD IV2, 645.

in the second form of the parousia. Barth was at pains to reconcile the church and the kingdom in view of their opposite natures: heavenly and eschatological for the former and earthly and historical for the latter. But in Jesus Christ, whose "being" is both the church and the kingdom, these two entities have become one.

If Christ has a kingdom it must embrace the whole world. As we will see next, it is through the church that Christ reigns over the world.

5. Christ's Cosmic Kingship through the Church

For Barth, Christ's presence is the presence of God's kingdom. Now that Christ is ascended to heaven the church as Christ's body reminds us both of his kingship and of the presence of his kingdom. Christ now reigns as he reigns over the church. And it will be shown here that, in Barth's view, it is through the church that he also exercises his lordship and kingship over the world.

Referring to Christ's office of king, Barth is straightforward in affirming that it is for the purpose of reigning over the church that Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father. Barth argues that

The Church is the special and peculiar sphere of this third office, the munus regium Christi. It is for the sake of the Church, i.e., of His sovereignty over it and in it, because of the power and care He desires to exercise in this assembly that Christ sits at the right hand of the Father.¹⁷⁵

Thus Christ is indeed a king and the church is his kingdom. It is important to note at this point that Christ's kingship is intimately bound with his ascension to heaven. He reigns over the church from his heavenly throne.

¹⁷⁵Barth, Credo, 110.

We may say that the church as a kingdom is ruled by an absent king. However, while he eschews the Lutheran doctrine of Christ's ubiquity, Barth still tries to find a way to argue that Christ is both in heaven and on earth. Barth repudiates the belief that "He [Christ] [is] extended over all points in creaturely space as maintained by the original Ubiquitarianism of the Lutherans."¹⁷⁶ For Barth,

Jesus Christ . . . lives as the Crucified and Risen in a heavenly-historical form of existence (himmlisch-geschichtlicher Existenzform); at the right hand of the Father, before whom He is the advocate and intercessor for all men as the judge who was judged in their place. . . . But . . . He does not live only above human history on earth, addressing Himself to it only from above and from afar and from without. He Himself lives in a special element of this history created and controlled by Him. He therefore lives an earthly-historical form of existence within it. This particular element of human history, this earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ (irdisch-geschichtliche Existenzform Jesu Christi), is the Christian community.¹⁷⁷

Barth's juxtaposition of Christ's "heavenly-historical form of existence" and his "earthly-historical form of existence" with an emphasis on the term "historical"¹⁷⁸ is very significant since it suggests that even if Christ is ascended to heaven his preoccupation is not heaven but the earth and human history. Thus, there is a historical continuity between Christ's heavenly existence and his earthly existence through the church. In other words, Christ's heavenly session is his continuing involvement in history.

In reliance on the concept of Extra Calvinisticum Barth holds that Christ can do this because

¹⁷⁶CD IV\3.1, 357.

¹⁷⁷CD IV\1, 661 = KD IV\1, 738.

¹⁷⁸Barth here uses the adjective geschichtlich instead of historisch, but Cornelius Van Til rightly argues that "Barth frequently uses the term Geschichte as inclusive of Historie" (Van Til, Barthianism, 14).

the Son of God who is wholly this man . . . is also wholly God and therefore omnipotent and omnipresent. . . . He is the Lord who because He becomes a creature and exists in that forma servi does not cease to be the Lord and Creator and therefore to exist in the forma Dei.¹⁷⁹

As a true God, omnipotent and omnipresent, Christ was at the same time in heaven while he became a creature in his incarnation. And he is also at same time on earth while he is now ascended to heaven. On earth the church is a sign of his visible presence.

Not only is the church Christ's presence on earth, it is also through the church that He can be in contact with the world.¹⁸⁰ Barth emphasizes that "The Church is the only form of existence in which He encounters the world historically."¹⁸¹ It is through the church that Jesus is Lord of the world. For Jesus Christ is "Lord of the world as He is

¹⁷⁹CD IV1, 181.

¹⁸⁰In his article "Church and World: A Trinitarian Perspective" (Calvin Theological Journal, vol. 18, no. 1 [April 1983]: 1-31), John Bolt presents three different views regarding the "church-world relation" in connection respectively with three different theologians, namely, Gustaf Wingren, Karl Barth, and Carl Braaten. He observes that these three theologians ground their concepts respectively in the first, the second, and the third articles of the Apostles' Creed. Bolt agrees with Wingren in his criticism of Barth's one-sided focus on the second article and on the doctrine of redemption at the expense of the doctrine of creation. However, Bolt also disagrees with Wingren for his argument anchored to the Lutheran Christology based on the concept of a communicatio idiomatum, which ultimately cannot account adequately for the close connection between creation and redemption (29). Bolt's position is that the relationship between the church and the world is strictly a trinitarian concept. He finds this relationship rooted in the Trinity to be more adequately expressed in the extra Calvinisticum. Thus, Bolt concludes by saying that "Calvin's Trinitarian theology . . . provides with the best conceptual framework for a normative understanding of the church-world relation" (30).

This conclusion is interesting in the sense that, despite his overemphasis on the second article, Barth is very trinitarian in his outlook, and also sees the relation of the church to the world and that of Christ's kingdom to the world from the perspective of the extra Calvinisticum.

¹⁸¹CD IV1, 688.

Lord of the Church."¹⁸² If Christ's lordship and kingship reach out to the world through the church this means that his kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, and its exclusive purpose is salvation. And in this also resides the role played by the church in its mediating function between Christ and the world.

It is against the background of this special function assumed by the church that Barth construes the Head-body relation involving Christ and the Christian community.

The church is

. . . the creation of the body by its Head, of the body with which He co-exists as the Head and which co-exists with Him as its Head, which as the body is the earthly-historical form of existence of the Head.¹⁸³

In this kind of relationship the body reveals the Head to the world as it contains every person who

. . . acknowledges what has been done from God by Him, the Lord has become a servant, not only for them but for all men; . . . they recognise as such the One who is not only their Lord but the Lord of the whole world.¹⁸⁴

In a word, the church represents humanity justified in Christ and proclaims the cosmic lordship of Christ.

Can we understand Barth to teach that the church is now reigning together with Christ, as amillennialists do? How can Barth's view of the function assumed by the church be related to this belief? Barth does allude to this question and as usual approaches it through his dialectical method of Yes and No, in which he usually begins

¹⁸²Barth, Community, 158.

¹⁸³CD IV\1, 661.

¹⁸⁴CD IV\1, 661.

with a denial before he proceeds to an assertion. Barth does not deny that the church as Christ's body is invested with Christ's power through his Word and Spirit, but he also speaks of "church in excess"¹⁸⁵ and denounces the church's abuse of that power. "The church in excess," Barth says, "is the church exceeding the limit within which alone it can be the church of Jesus Christ."¹⁸⁶ It consists in using Christ's name for the purpose of reigning in its own power and authority:

Appealing to its institution and empowering through him, it wants to be the church that reigns in his name. He must act only on and with and through it. As to the world, so also to itself, he must speak only in the form of its own speech and action. It integrates his priestly, kingly, and prophetic office with its own. . . . Exercising authority in the power of its own, it reigns.¹⁸⁷

Here Barth's attack seems to be directed at the ecclesiastical order and authority. Barth likely has in mind Augustine whom he criticizes for his mistake of believing that

. . . the victorious civitas Dei was fused with the suffering, struggling and triumphant Catholic Church, and that as a result the transcendence of God's Word became the justification of and argument for a specific outlook and policy, the supposed superiority of the cause of one human party over that of another.¹⁸⁸

Barth means that Augustine made the mistake of assuming that "the Word of God abides for ever"¹⁸⁹ in the church and that the church's possession of the Word of God was the source of its authority and power. Against this presumption, Barth argues that true lordship and kingship belong exclusively to Jesus Christ.

¹⁸⁵Cf. Barth, Christian Life, 136-42.

¹⁸⁶Barth, Christian Life, 136.

¹⁸⁷Barth, Christian Life, 136-37.

¹⁸⁸CD II2, 678-79.

¹⁸⁹CD II2, 679.

The real civitas Dei, which is invincible, and can therefore be proclaimed with confidence, is not the rule of the Church, but the rule of Him who in this world had to be nailed on the cross.¹⁹⁰

Barth reminds us here that the cross is the real foundation of the church, not human pride or thirst for power. He insists on the true significance of the cross, which, in his view, is both the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ. It is, thus, from this angle that we have to look at Christ's kingdom and kingship. Barth argues that

. . . Christ's kingdom has its basis in a recollection of the basic pillar of the New Testament christology, namely, that the Humbled is the Exalted, the Crucified the Living One, the Servant the Lord.¹⁹¹

As Christ's kingship is grounded in his humility and exaltation Barth questions its understanding in connection with the idea of "royal dominion." Barth does not deny the reality of this kind of power and authority in relation to Christ's royal office, but he also points out that the idea of humiliation and exaltation compels us to speak with qualification of "Christ's 'royal dominion' correct though the concept undoubtedly is."¹⁹² In short, Barth, once again, is trying to bring home the idea that Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. Its unique purpose is the redemption of the fallen world.

This does not imply, however, that Christ's kingdom does not exhibit any form of government. Christ is now involved in the activity of governing the world. Commenting on the meaning of "right hand" and "his sitting" in Christ's ascension

¹⁹⁰CD II2, 679.

¹⁹¹Barth, Christian Life, 251.

¹⁹²Barth, Christian Life, 251.

according to Calvin's catechism (Question 81)¹⁹³ Barth upholds Calvin's view according to which "Christ is constituted head of the Church"(Question 82) and says:

The expression "right hand of God" does not designate a place but a function, that of God's lieutenant, the sovereign's minister. Christ holds in hand the power of God. He governs in God's name . . . There is no divine almightiness without Jesus Christ. To declare that God governs the world amounts to saying that: Jesus Christ governs the world.¹⁹⁴

How then should we interpret the amillennial idea of the church reigning with Christ during the millennium? First of all, for Barth, in his power, sovereignty, and majesty Christ does not need human help as he rules over the world. "Christ reigns alone," Barth says, "and needs no one else to help him."¹⁹⁵ It is, then, exclusively on the basis of God's grace that we may speak of the church reigning together with Christ.

In fact, amillennialists are well aware of Barth's concern. Amillennialists by no means interpret the idea of the church's reign with Christ in the sense of what Barth calls "the supposed superiority of the cause of one human party over that of another." Rather, they understand it in the sense of victory over sin and the Devil, on the one hand, and in the sense of the propagation of Christian faith, on the other. We may illustrate this amillennial concept with Calvin's idea of "freedom of conscience," which is his answer to the question "What does his kingdom confer upon us?" in his catechism (Question 42).¹⁹⁶ Barth sympathizes with Calvin on this point, pointing out that

¹⁹³Karl Barth, The Faith of the Church, trans. Gabriel Vahanian (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1958), 109.

¹⁹⁴Barth, Faith of the Church, 109.

¹⁹⁵Barth, Faith of the Church, 66.

¹⁹⁶Barth, Faith of the Church, 66.

It comes from the fact that he [Christ] alone has all power, because in his Word and in his Spirit we have the sum of all power. Thus it is that his own are accorded freedom of conscience. . . . If he [the Christian] meets with other powers, he does not fear them because he knows in his conscience, because he is conscious that those powers are subordinated to God.¹⁹⁷

Thus the Christians' reign with Christ is by no means a mere ecclesiastical or political authority. It is a dominion and authority over sin and evil through the power of Christ's Word and his Spirit.

Barth emphasizes the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the believers and, like Augustine,¹⁹⁸ goes so far as to assert that they come to be identified with Christ himself and can do the work of Christ. Barth argues that

Since the Christian has also received an unction through his participating in the anointing of Christ this unction will not only consist in receiving but in doing. On this level, if we dare say so, the Christian is a little Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁹

This identity of the believers with Christ is situated not only on the level of kingship in relation to the war Christians wage against sin but also on that of prophecy in connection with the proclamation of Christ's lordship and redemption of the sinful world, and on that of priesthood in view of their willingness to offer themselves to Christ's service. Barth highlights this true nature of the believer by saying that

. . . by confessing the name of Christ, he repeats the office of prophet. By offering himself in sacrifice, he repeats the office of priest. By fighting against sin with a free conscience, he repeats the office of king.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷Barth, Faith of the Church, 66-67.

¹⁹⁸See above, 91.

¹⁹⁹Barth, Faith of the Church, 64-65.

²⁰⁰Barth, Faith of the Church, 64-65.

Here we see Barth affirming explicitly the kingship of the Christians.

Kingship is, for Barth, a reality about believers which still remains concealed, but Christ's reign along with the elect will be disclosed in Christ's final appearing.

"With Jesus Himself," Barth believes, "His community as such, in His service, will come to be revealed in the world in glory."²⁰¹ This elucidates Barth's position with respect to the royal function of the believers. It presents two dimensions which must be made clear: first of all, it is a reality going on now. But in its second aspect, it is a reality which still remains concealed and will be revealed when Christ returns. Barth's dialectic of "hidden" and "not hidden" may summarize this view. "That Church in all dubiousness of its manifestation," Barth says, "is through all ages the road, hidden yet not hidden, on which the revelation comes to nations and races."²⁰²

We have contended above that, according to amillennialists, the kingship of believers does not involve only those who are still alive on earth but also the departed believers in heaven.²⁰³ As we will see next, Barth has nothing to say about the martyrs and the saints ruling with Christ in heaven since he sees Christ's preoccupation as the work of reconciliation on earth during the second stage of the parousia. But this does not mean that Barth has nothing to say concerning the intermediate state.

6. The Intermediate State as Life in Christ

Barth apparently does not exhibit the same deep conviction found in Augustine

²⁰¹CD III/2, 505.

²⁰²Barth, "Church and Theology," in Theology and Church, 293.

²⁰³See above, 65-69.

and Calvin concerning the survival of the soul after death. His view is more or less ambiguous, if not incoherent. However, to some extent, he shares with Calvin and Augustine the belief in the survival of the dead believers in Christ, although he presents a wholly different theory based on the idea of Jesus Christ being the representative of all human beings who has taken our humanity to heaven. In a word, Barth argues along the lines of Augustine and Calvin that there is no intermediate state independent of God.

Berkouwer is probably wrong in his tendency to argue that Barth rejects totally the doctrine of the intermediate state.²⁰⁴ It seems helpful if we begin with getting clear about Barth's anthropology in connection with the destiny of the body and the soul after death. It is our intention that this investigation will elucidate Barth's understanding of Revelation 20:6 concerning the martyrs and the departed saints' participation in Christ's kingship in heaven.

What is incoherent in Barth's idea of death may be plainly stated as follows: he seems to agree with the classical belief that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body. But he also argues that death occurs after the departure of God's Spirit who dwelt in the soul. Barth says that

. . . the Spirit lives His own superior and alien life over against the soul and the human subject. He is not bound to the life of the human subject. He cannot, therefore, be reached by death. When the subject dies, He returns to God who gave Him.²⁰⁵

This seems to suggest that the soul is not spared by death. In his exposition of the

²⁰⁴Cf. Berkouwer, Return of Christ, 59, n. 64.

²⁰⁵CD III2, 364.

Apostle Creed in Credo Barth understands the doctrine of carnis resurrectionem to presuppose the mortality of the flesh but not of the soul, so that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body.²⁰⁶ Barth is quite explicit on this question when he states that

Death as separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body confirms the fact that we still exist in a state of ambiguity as children of Adam and as children of God, as righteous and as sinners, in the time of Pontius Pilate and in the time of grace."²⁰⁷

Barth here seems to put death in the context of the tension between the "already" and the "not-yet," but he does not suggest that the immortal soul belongs to the "already" while the mortal flesh still belongs to the "not yet."

Actually all that Barth affirms is that "this 'not yet' and 'still' constitute together the condition of φθορά, of corruption, of weakness, of dishonour which certainly does not diminish our unity with Christ here and now, but without a doubt conceals it."²⁰⁸ This idea of the continuity of the union with Christ after death is extremely important since this suggests that Barth is not far from the amillennial tradition which emphasizes strongly this concept as the ground for the survival of the soul and the possibility of re-union of the body and the soul at the resurrection.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶Cf. Barth, Credo, 168-70.

²⁰⁷Barth, Credo, 168.

²⁰⁸Barth, Credo, 168.

²⁰⁹See, for example, The Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 63: -"What do you believe concerning the resurrection of the body?" -"I believe that at the last day my body, raised by the power of Christ shall again be united with my redeemed soul from heaven, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ."

Barth teaches that the resurrection is nothing other than the redemption from the separation of body and soul and argues that

Resurrection of the flesh does not mean that the man ceases to be a man in order to become a god or angel, but he may, according to 1 Cor. 15:42f., be a man in incorruption, power and honour, redeemed from that contradiction and so redeemed from the separation of body and soul by which this contradiction is sealed, and so in the totality of his human existence awakened from the dead.²¹⁰

Barth does not sympathize with modern anthropological monism which tends to reject any form of the separation of the soul from the body. Barth may be called a holistic dualist as he does distinguish the soul from the body and even sees in the body the rebellious element in human beings in connection with their relationship with Christ. Barth holds that "We do indeed live with Him and therefore 'in eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness,' but it is in the teeth of the sharpest opposition of the flesh."²¹¹

In fact, Barth locates the principle of human life in the soul, the soul which, in his view, is the abode of the divine Spirit in the human person. It is important to note at this point that Barth adds the Spirit to the soul and body as a third element for the components of an individual person. But Barth makes it clear that, even though the Holy Spirit can dwell in the body, he can never be an integral part of that body. "But while He is in man," Barth argues, "He is not identical with him. . . . This would imply a transformation of man into God."²¹² He, nevertheless, insists on the immanence of the Holy Spirit in the body: "since man has Him, the Spirit is certainly in man---in his soul

²¹⁰Barth, Credo, 169.

²¹¹Barth, Credo, 168.

²¹²CD III2, 364.

and through his soul in his body too."²¹³

This last statement introduces us to Barth's principle according to which the soul is the sphere of operation of the Spirit in the body. For Barth, "it is on and in the soul that the act of God, which is the Spirit, takes place in man; and on and in the body through the soul."²¹⁴ It also follows that it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the human soul which renders possible the reconciliation of human beings with God. Barth teaches that

The soul is a priori the element in which the turning of God to man and the fellowship of man with God in some way takes place. The same is said of the body, but only a posteriori. It is as the principle of the soul that the Spirit is the principle of the whole man.²¹⁵

How does then Barth account for death in connection with the Holy Spirit as the additional element to the soul and the body? The relationship of the Spirit to the human being is to be understood in the sense that

The human subject is man as soul, and it is this which is created and maintained by the Spirit. For this reason the Spirit lives His own superior and alien life over against the soul and the human subject. He is not bound to the life of the human subject. He cannot, therefore, be reached by its death. When the subject dies, He returns to God who gave Him. In distinction from the human subject, He is immortal.²¹⁶

Here the incoherence in Barth's anthropological principles begins to emerge. Earlier, we have seen that Barth referred to the immortality of the soul and the mortality of the body.

²¹³CD III2, 364.

²¹⁴CD III2, 365.

²¹⁵CD III2, 365.

²¹⁶CD III2, 364.

Here the soul is included in the mortal human subject and it is said that only the Spirit is immortal. Thus, death occurs to the human subject since the Spirit left the human body to return to God who gave him. If the Spirit returns to the body life may be possible again. "Whether or not death is the last word concerning man," Barth says, "depends upon whether He is given again and that 'may' is renewed."²¹⁷

But a burning question that Barth does not answer adequately is this: how is the soul that he affirmed earlier to be immortal related to the Spirit which returns to heaven when the individual person dies? Can we just assume that the Spirit knows no more the soul in which he dwelt after his return to heaven and before the resurrection? We would expect Barth to set forth a theory concerning the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the soul after death, but he does not. As will be seen further below, Barth sees again the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the dead believers who are described as seed sown in the ground. In regard to the intermediate state he prefers to shift to God. Barth seems to advocate the possibility of a life which continues in God after death, just in the same way as Augustine and Calvin did, when he argues that

there can be no question of a continuation of the life of man after death in his own strength or according to his own capacities or possibilities. Only the presence of God who is immortal and transcendent can be the future of his this-worldly existence terminable by death.²¹⁸

What Barth repudiates particularly is what he calls a pagan belief in "a tiny soul which, like a butterfly, flutters away above the grave and is still preserved somewhere, in order

²¹⁷CD III2, 364.

²¹⁸CD IV3.1, 311.

to live in immortality."²¹⁹ Yet, neither Augustine and Calvin nor any other amillennialists hold such a view. They all argue that the survival of the believers' soul after death depends exclusively on the living God.

We may assume that Barth adopts agnosticism in regard to the state of believers after death and focuses his attention exclusively on the resurrection for the reason that the doctrine of the intermediate state is not explicitly taught by the Scriptures. However, Barth's dilemma should be otherwise understood. His theory is conditioned by the principle that "the Jesus of the New Testament is supremely true man,"²²⁰ the only "real man," and representative of all human beings from all eternity. Again he represents humanity in heaven after his ascension as he carried human flesh up to heaven after the incarnation. This led Barth to look at human situations seemingly from the perspective of the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" as he says,

the selfsame man who in Christ is already here and now raised high above all angels, still belongs in himself to the old sin-ruined creation which sighs for redemption, and that means concretely, redemption from death.²²¹

Yet, Barth's main focus is on the work of reconciliation and redemption that Christ has already accomplished on the cross, which he considers from the perspective of the penultimate-ultimate relation and interprets in the light of Calvin's idea of our assured

²¹⁹Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, trans. G. T. Thompson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 154.

²²⁰CD III2, 327.

²²¹Barth, Credo, 168.

salvation which still remains hidden in Christ.²²²

In this respect, Barth contrasts what God already sees realized in us in regard to our justification and salvation with what we still see and experience as sinners in this world. What has God already done for us?

Reconciling it [that is, the world] to Himself, God has given it a corresponding future: its redemption from that downward movement and that bitter antithesis; or more positively its redemption as the making eternal of its temporal life (Verewigung ihres zeitlichen) and the transcending of its this-worldly (Verjenseitigung ihres diesseitigen Lebens), the investing of its corruptible with incorruption, the clothing of its humanity in divine glory, the perfecting of its creation by the new creation of its form in peace with God and therefore in and with itself.²²³

And how does God see us now? In Christ,

the life of all creation and all men [is] already made eternal, already taken up into the beyond in all its this-worldliness, already invested with incorruption in all its corruptibility, already lived from and with and for God in all its humanity.²²⁴

This is already true of us but it still remains concealed from human sight. The reason is that

our life is hidden under a veil. This veil is the present time. At the resurrection, this veil will be removed, and . . . will be seen in the light and in its unity with the life of Christ, in the splendor of Christ's mercy, of his grace and of his power.²²⁵

The truth about Christian life, therefore, is not to be judged from what we see outwardly.

²²²Cf. Karl Barth, Resurrection, 167: Referring to Colossians: 3:3, "Our life is hid with Christ in God," Barth observes that "Not in vain is Calvin's exegesis more vigorous at this passage than elsewhere."

²²³CD IV3.1, 315.

²²⁴CD IV3.1, 315.

²²⁵Barth, Faith of the Church, 166.

Barth insists that

Human life, insofar as it is Christian life, may hence be defined from this new standpoint: life lived in expectation of the appearance of this hidden life, of this spiritual life that begins even now.²²⁶

In the last analysis, Barth has a stronger doctrine of intermediate state than he is willing to admit. Barth presents us with a dynamic life for the Christians either before or after death by associating it with the idea of growth and by repudiating the doctrine of "soul-sleep" at death. Side by side with his idea of a gradual growth of the kingdom, Barth also conceives of a gradual growth of Christians towards eternal life, whether they are alive or dead. This takes place through the work of the Holy Spirit. Barth writes:

the Holy Spirit has not only a psychological but also a physical characteristic. Those who believe in the Word of God receive a real seed of a real new life. The Word of God is often called a seed fallen into the earth and beginning to grow. This is not just a parable. There is a beginning of eternal life with this life.²²⁷

The Holy Spirit, then, according to Barth not only controls and empowers human beings but is also responsible for a gradual realization in their bodies of incorruption and eternal existence.²²⁸

This dynamic concept of Christian life is confirmed by Barth's total rejection of the idea of death as sleep. Barth's view is a good response to the Lutheran Paul Althaus, who as we have seen earlier,²²⁹ advocates the idea of "soul-sleep" against the

²²⁶Barth, Faith of the Church, 163.

²²⁷Barth, Faith of the Church, 163.

²²⁸This may be an answer to the question we asked Barth above in regard to the continuing relation of the Spirit to the soul after death. Likely Barth entertains a thought of the Spirit continuing the work of the regeneration of the soul after death.

²²⁹See above, 52-53.

amillennial concept of the intermediate state. At first sight, Barth's view seems to be similar to that of Althaus as his focus is mainly on death and then on resurrection, without much concern about what happens in-between. But Barth, actually, does not view death as a static state but as gradual move towards eternal life.

Barth's rejection of the doctrine of "soul-sleep" is categorical: Barth asserts that

The deduction that the dead are in a state of sleep is an ancient exaggeration. Κοιμᾶσθαι does not mean to be asleep but to fall asleep. . . . The deduction that they are now actually asleep may seem to be logical, but it has no material basis.²³⁰

Barth calls attention to the difference between being asleep and falling asleep. For Barth, falling asleep

relates to the process of dying, or rather to the impression, designated, defined and shaped by faith and love, which the survivors have of what is finally perceptible in the death of a brother or sister. They see him falling asleep. What lies beyond they cannot see.²³¹

Thus, it is only the impression given by the process of dying which allows us to speak of falling asleep. To assume that the dead really sleep is a mere speculation. Additionally, like Geerhardus Vos,²³² Barth maintains that the understanding of the term as a euphemism cannot be excluded. Barth thinks that

The expression is deliberately mild. It may be euphemistic, but it conveys an impression of peace. It is the striking expression of the freedom of New Testament Christians---the freedom of their faith and love.²³³

²³⁰CD III/2, 639.

²³¹CD III/2, 638.

²³²Vos, Pauline Eschatology, 82, 143.

²³³CD III/2, 638-39.

Now, what is most important about Barth's view of the intermediate state is Christ's continuing activity even among the dead believers. Christ is present at the believers' deaths and also after their deaths. Barth believes that

For the Christians of the New Testament Jesus Christ Himself intervenes at once and absolutely on the far side of this event. His death and resurrection avail for those who have now "fallen asleep," as well as for those who survive. The hope in Him is a hope for the former too.²³⁴

It is not very clear what Barth means exactly by Christ's intervention apart from the availability of his death and resurrection, but we may understand him to mean, in relation to those who have fallen asleep, that even though they die the power of Christ's resurrection is not to be awaited in the future since they remain united with the risen Christ.

This seems to be a deep conviction of Barth's as he expresses the same belief in relation to God. Barth speaks of the "death of the righteous,"²³⁵ which is not fortuitous but happens through "an extraordinary intervention of God"²³⁶ and brings God's people to "the perfect and final encounter with God,"²³⁷ to "their eternal confrontation and supremely positive coexistence with Him,"²³⁸ and "a real . . . communion with God."²³⁹ Barth distinguishes this kind of death from what Revelation 20:6 calls the

²³⁴CD III2, 638.

²³⁵CD III2, 637.

²³⁶CD III2, 637, 638.

²³⁷CD III2, 635.

²³⁸CD III2, 635.

²³⁹CD III2, 637.

"second death."²⁴⁰ For Barth, death is "a wholly natural thing for the Christian."²⁴¹ Barth calls the "second death" "unnatural death"²⁴² and the Christians are "freed from the 'second' death by the death of Jesus Christ."²⁴³

Thus, Barth believes that the death of Christians is "a peaceful death"²⁴⁴ which brings them close to God. Commenting on Paul's statement in Philippians 1:23: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (NIV), Barth says that "it is because he hopes for Him, and expects to be with Him when he dies, that he is willing to die 'gladly' like Jacob."²⁴⁵ We may conclude from these statements that Barth by no means understands death as a form of unconsciousness but as real consciousness of being with Christ. Being "with Christ" is here to be taken in the Pauline sense according to Philippians 1:23, that is, to be with him in the heavenly realm.

It is also in this sense that Barth understands the situation of the invisible church, the church triumphant. Barth believes that, even now,

the ecclesia triumphans is "with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). With Him, the Head of the body, it takes part in the glory which is still hidden from the ecclesia militans. . . In the ecclesia triumphans the ecclesia militans has, as it were, its spearhead in the sphere of completion, in which it already exists eschatologically.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰CD III2, 634, 637, 638.

²⁴¹CD III2, 638.

²⁴²CD III2, 638.

²⁴³CD III2, 638.

²⁴⁴CD III2, 637.

²⁴⁵CD III2, 640.

²⁴⁶CD IV1, 669.

From this perspective, Barth apparently assumes that the presence of the departed believers in heaven is not an isolated presence but a presence in the company of the community of the church triumphant.

Does Barth make a case for the saints and the martyrs who reign with Christ in heaven according to Revelation 20:4? According to Revelation 20:6, the saints and martyrs who reign with Christ are "those who have part in the first resurrection" (NIV). Barth, however, never speaks of "first resurrection" but, in conformity with all amillennialists, he insists only on the general resurrection. Granted his emphasis on the believers's being "new creation" and their being justified and sanctified in Christ, it seems more accurate to assume that Barth would understand the "first resurrection" in terms of "regeneration," as amillennialists do. The reason is that Barth relates Revelation 20:4 only to the believers on earth.

Barth almost adopts a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:4: "and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years," arguing that "as the elect of God they are not strangers to Him, but possess a definite affinity with Him and a definite share in His kingship."²⁴⁷ We notice in this statement that his reference is restricted to the living believers, not to the martyrs and the saints in heaven. Barth calls attention to the fact that

. . . as both the Old and New Testament conceive their nature the elect do not stand in a merely external and formal but in an inner and actual relationship to God. As created beings they are completely and utterly other than God, completely and utterly dependent upon Him, and therefore made by Him alone into what they are.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷CD IV2, 344.

²⁴⁸CD IV2, 344.

As such, Barth does not abandon entirely Kierkegaard's doctrine of the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and humans, but he also underscores the union between God and humans through the Holy Spirit and claims that "the elect of God, in fact, gives us a picture of God in the midst of creation."²⁴⁹ As we have just seen above, this picture is one of God's kingship over the world. Thus, in the last analysis, Barth sees the elect as kings in the midst of God's creation.

Why is there no room for the martyrs and the saints in the reign of the ascended Christ? Barth conceives of the heavenly presence of departed Christians in connection with the ascended incarnate Christ who has taken our humanity up to heaven. This began with Christ's resurrection since "in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is involved the exaltation of man."²⁵⁰ As he is already in heaven

Christ is now, as the Bearer of humanity, as our Representative, in the place where God is and in the way in which God is. Our flesh, our human nature, is exalted in Him to God.²⁵¹

This suggests that, for Barth, whether we are living or dead, martyrs or not, we are all already present with Christ in the heavenly realm. But as we are not yet sitting beside Christ but find ourselves in his body, Barth seems to claim that it would be redundant if we say that we reign with him and probably even act independently of him. Thus our presence in heaven is only to be understood in the light of our inclusion in the "body" of the ascended Christ and also against the background of the church triumphant in heaven

²⁴⁹CD II/2, 344.

²⁵⁰Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, 125.

²⁵¹Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, 125.

which is also part of Christ's body.

We remember Barth's insistence on the fact that the only contribution of the believers to Christ's reign consists in fighting against sin, representing provisionally the justification and sanctification resulting from Christ's work of reconciliation, and proclaiming the finished work of reconciliation that Christ achieved through his death and resurrection. Obviously, these are tasks that the departed believers cannot accomplish while they are in heaven. Yet along with all the redeemed after Christ's return, they will be revealed as real "kings" who rule and judge together with Christ.

For the time being, heaven is not yet the locus of Christ's activity, but the earth. Christ is now present in the world through the Holy Spirit bringing his reconciling work to completion.

7. The Holy Spirit as the Presence of Christ the Reconciler

Christ is now present on earth in the Holy Spirit through whom his reconciling work is unfolding.

The Holy Spirit is the particular mode of the coming again and therefore the presence and action of Jesus Christ in the place and time between His resurrection and final appearing.²⁵²

We may, therefore, say that because of his presence through the Holy Spirit there is no time when Christ is absent from the earth as Lord and King. After his ascension the Holy Spirit is Christ's continuing direct involvement in human history.

Barth introduces the Spirit as a transcendental divine being, as "what comes over

²⁵²CD IV3.1, 351.

or down to us from above, from the exalted Lord"²⁵³ for the purpose of carrying out his work of reconciliation. "He is not present in any other guise than the eschatological one. . . . In this eschatological sense he is thus present as the Spirit of God the Creator and Reconciler."²⁵⁴ By connecting the eschatological nature of the Holy Spirit with God's work of creation and reconciliation Barth again brings home the idea of a transcendent God turning to the world, to time and history.

Barth takes a perichoretical approach to God's activity in history and says that

. . . in being present and active in the world in Christ God takes part in its history. . . . Present and active in Christ, He enters into it. Indeed, it is His divine will---naturally without sinning Himself---to accept complete solidarity with sinners, to be one with us.²⁵⁵

God's solidarity with sinners aims at reconciliation and redemption. Although the reconciliation is based on the eternal covenant, Barth insists that "the reconciliation of the world to God is in every aspect history,"²⁵⁶ or more precisely a "salvation history."²⁵⁷

Here the part played by the Holy Spirit is crucial. In his trinitarian principles Barth attributes the role of "Creator" to the Father, "Reconciler" to the Son, and "Redeemer" to the Holy Spirit. But on the basis of the perichoretical unity of the three members of the Trinity, all the three functions of creation, reconciliation, and redemption are combined in the Holy Spirit. But Barth calls special attention to the particular contribution of the

²⁵³CD I1, 452.

²⁵⁴Barth, Holy Spirit, 59.

²⁵⁵CD IV1, 75.

²⁵⁶CD IV3.1, 211.

²⁵⁷CD IV3.1, 211.

Holy Spirit to the work of reconciliation. Barth argues that

He is not just the Redeemer, so surely does redemption stand in indissoluble correlation with reconciliation, so surely does reconciliation reach its consummation in redemption. He is thus the Reconciler too, with the Son, and as the Spirit of the Son.²⁵⁸

Barth pictures the reconciling work undertaken by the Holy Spirit as a real intercourse of the Holy Spirit with the world to the effect that the Holy Spirit comes to be identified with the things of this world, creating a paradox in his nature. Barth points out that

We know Him to be *actus purus*, pure reality and occurrence, unlimited and unconfined, without beginning and end, place and time. We know Him to be no thing among other things, not even a thing at all, not even the supreme thing. Nevertheless the paradox remains: the Spirit becomes a thing in the midst of other things; what is intangible and impossible, unknown and unobservable, becomes concrete and possible, known and observable.²⁵⁹ Such is the paradox of the Spirit.²⁶⁰

This is a way of saying that the work of reconciliation during the parousia is indeed God's presence in history, proving that God is able to co-exist with his covenant-partners in the form of infinite Creator in fellowship with finite creature. God's immanence here finds its highest expression in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Barth usually insisted on the idea of finitum non capax infiniti and was very skeptical about the possibility of a "point of contact" between God and humanity,²⁶¹

²⁵⁸CD I, 471.

²⁵⁹Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief II (Zollikon/Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1954), 256: "Der Geist wird als Geist Etwas neben Andern, das Nicht-Gegebene wird gegeben, das Unmögliche möglich, das Unanschauliche anschaulich, das Unbekannte bekannt."

²⁶⁰Romans II, 274.

²⁶¹CD I, 238.

particularly if it starts from the human side. Now Barth sees this issue settled in the presence of the Holy Spirit. A real union with God is possible through the Holy Spirit, for "he who has encountered the Spirit essentially has encountered his own existential existence in God."²⁶² Barth here echoes Kierkegaard in his existential approach: through the work of the Holy Spirit, human "existence" in God shapes his or her "essence." Otherwise put: the Holy Spirit makes humans fit for fellowship with God.

Yet, Christ's incarnation is the foundation of the fellowship and union between God and human beings. In Christ, ". . . it takes place that the Creator is creature and the creature Creator."²⁶³ The creature becomes Creator since the new "essence" that human beings receive from the Holy Spirit is "the being of the man Jesus."²⁶⁴ In order to ward off any thought of human beings becoming God, Barth specifies that "the fact that as a creature it exists in specific conditions is not its being but only the attribute and modality of its being."²⁶⁵

The possibility of fellowship with God through Jesus Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the fulfillment of the covenant. This is the goal of Christ's work of reconciliation. Barth finds reconciliation to be the most important thing in history. It is the history of Jesus Christ himself. It is the meaning of his person and work. Thus Barth declares that

²⁶²Romans II, 273.

²⁶³CD III2, 159.

²⁶⁴CD III2, 159.

²⁶⁵CD III2, 159.

The history of its establishment and therefore the history of reconciliation is His history. It is the history of His sending and coming, of His life and speech and action, of His death and passion and resurrection, of His ministry and lordship.²⁶⁶

It has also become our history for ". . . our redemptive history---that of all men and every man---has taken place in Him."²⁶⁷ This means that the only history is the history of reconciliation, the history of salvation, which Barth understands as the history of Jesus Christ and also the history of each human person.

That all human beings share in the history of reconciliation in Christ led Barth to reject the doctrine of limited atonement. Barth insists that

The hand of God the Reconciler is over all men. Jesus Christ was born and died and rose again for all. The work of atonement, the conversion of man to God was done for all. . . . To that extent objectively, all are justified, sanctified and called.²⁶⁸

Many scholars charge Barth with universalism on the basis of his doctrine of "the election of Jesus Christ,"²⁶⁹ in which he assumes that Christ is the only Elect and the Reprobate, but that all people are elected in him.²⁷⁰ But Barth denies flatly the accusation, asserting that "nowhere does the New Testament say that the world is saved nor can we say that

²⁶⁶CD IV3.1, 4.

²⁶⁷CD IV1, 631.

²⁶⁸CD IV1, 148.

²⁶⁹Cf. CD II2, 94-194.

²⁷⁰CD II2, 739: "The truth is . . . that as God fulfills this judgment in Jesus Christ, he treats this One who is judged as His Elect and eternally Beloved. The very condemnation and reprobation here executed on man are the decree and work of the love in which He has, from all eternity and here and now in time, loved man and drawn him to Himself."

it is without violence to the New Testament."²⁷¹

At any rate, although Barth speaks of justification of all men and women objectively accomplished in virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit, he also lays stress on the "subjective" side of salvation according to which humans can appropriate justification as a finished work through faith alone.²⁷² This, however, does not rule out the ultimate purpose of reconciliation: "The goal is undoubtedly [a] complete conversion of the world to Him."²⁷³ The reconciliation is not a finished task but an on-going work which spans the whole parousia. Even now, Barth believes, "the on-going of the reconciling work of the living God in the world . . . takes place."²⁷⁴

Reconciliation is rooted in the eternal covenant and the eternal election of grace which is revealed in history. Barth maintains that

. . . there is no other meaning or purpose in history. For there is no other God, and in the will of this God there is no other purpose but the election of grace resolved and fulfilled by Him [Christ] from all eternity.²⁷⁵

In Barth's view, the realization of this divine purpose in history is entrusted to the Holy Spirit. From this standpoint Philip J. Rosato rightly holds that "Barth certainly sets out to understand the Spirit as the unique transition between God's history and man's

²⁷¹CD IV2, 423.

²⁷²See, CD IV2, 763; IV1, 608-42.

²⁷³CD IV1, 74.

²⁷⁴CD IV2, 417.

²⁷⁵CD III3, 36.

history."²⁷⁶

It is true that our final redemption is still a future reality, but Barth holds that believers already have the first fruits of the Holy Spirit which is a pledge for their redemption. To be saved means to be a child of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is a guarantee that this is our identity. Thus Barth answers his own questions:

Who, then, are we? And who am I? Well, I am the man who possesses the first fruits of the Spirit, who knows that the law is spiritual, who is invisibly redeemed by redemption which is in Christ Jesus, who is seized, driven, dedicated by the Truth, a free man, a child of God.²⁷⁷

We can become children of God because, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as Lord, King, and Savior is present in the world and as "the One who lives for us, among us and in us,"²⁷⁸ "as the living One who attests Himself authentically and in His being and action for and among and in us."²⁷⁹

It is through his presence among his people that Christ achieves the work of reconciliation of the world with God. "As the Lord and Saviour present and active among and with and in them . . . [He is] implicitly among and with and in the world, making peace between heaven and earth."²⁸⁰ Through this Augustinian formula²⁸¹ Barth lays

²⁷⁶Rosato, Spirit as Lord, 135.

²⁷⁷Romans II, 311.

²⁷⁸CD IV\3.1, 284.

²⁷⁹CD IV\3.1, 286.

²⁸⁰CD IV\3.1, 289.

²⁸¹Augustine makes use of the formula in nobis, pro nobis, and de nobis to express the intimacy of our relation to Christ (see above, 91). This phrase is appropriated by Barth and also by Adrio König in The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology.

stress on Christ's real involvement in history while he is accomplishing his work of reconciliation. This is a real immanence of God through the Holy Spirit. The world may not know what Christ has done for it, but the church is entrusted with the task of proclaiming this finished work of reconciliation to it.

8. Reconciliation and the Mission of the Church

Revelation and reconciliation were made manifest once and for all in history in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But they continue to be manifested in history through the proclamation of the church.

For Barth, God does not relate himself to the world through the world history itself but through the church. Barth writes:

Through it---certainly not through history in general but through the Church, God acts for the reconciliation of fallen men. Through it, God allows his glory to be proclaimed in the valley of death; God acts.²⁸²

Barth here applies to the church the phrase "God acts" which actually refers to God's action in Jesus Christ. He indicates that the church is a medium of God's action in the sense that it is through the church's proclamation that God speaks to the world. God's "act" in Barth's theology is the revelation of his being and his purpose. What the Church proclaims is God's purpose of reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ.

We have just seen that the church can achieve this task only under the power of the Holy Spirit. The church also can witness and proclaim because God gives it his Word to be proclaimed. Hence the truth is that God only uses the church as an instrument of

²⁸²Barth, "Church and Culture," in Theology and Church, 336.

his revelation in the world. It is entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit, not only in this function of proclamation but even in its being. Barth says that

The Church exists through the Holy Spirit and not otherwise. But the Holy Spirit is a divine person. His instituting is a decisive, divine act. And the institution's truth stands or falls with the continuous renewal and preservation of the foundation.²⁸³

In the Church's witness and proclamation, God's Word is brought to the world. It is in this way that it becomes a medium between God and the world. Barth declares that

No independent, actual relation between God and nature, God and history, and God and human reason, can be asserted except that the Word is spoken and received in the world of sinners.²⁸⁴

In this resides the crucial importance of the church. It proclaims to the world what God already did for it in Jesus Christ through its full acknowledgment of it and its positive response to it. It is on the basis of this function that the nature of the church can be defined. Barth writes:

The Church has its origin in the complete self-declaration of God. As this took place in the world, it not only became true and actual that the world was confronted with it, but there arose within and across the other peoples in the world a people in which it took root, in which it was perceived and accepted. This people is the Church. It is the people whose life is grounded in it. . . . It lives as in it there sounds forth to the world God's Yes to man and also man's Yes to God, both spoken in Jesus Christ. It lives as this Yes is spoken and takes shape. It lives from the very outset in and by the reception of this double Yes of Jesus Christ, in and by hearing his divine Yes and repeating his human Yes. As he lives, he lives within it as its Lord and Head at the right hand of God, and it lives with and by and under him, its only choice is to hear his divine Yes and repeat his human Yes. This is the basis and goal of its existence. This is its function in

²⁸³Barth, "Church and Culture," in Theology and Church, 336-37.

²⁸⁴Barth, "Church and Culture," in Theology and Church, 342.

relationship to the rest of the world.²⁸⁵

We may put this differently in this way: the church's proclamation begins with a witness, that is, with the fact that it has really received the Word of God in which God's reconciliation of himself to the world is affirmed. The church receives it, believes it, responds to it through faith, and it becomes its own life. It is there that the church's testimony begins. After this it can turn to the world to declare that God has said Yes through his reconciling work and that he is expecting a Yes as the world's response.

In the last analysis the task of the church can be reduced to the idea of representation. It represents to the world the reception of God's Word of reconciliation. It represents the belief in it and the necessary response to it. It represents it through its life itself. It represents it through its direct proclamation.

Barth pursues this idea of representation by identifying the church as a representative of justification, a justification which flows from faith in Christ and his work of reconciliation.²⁸⁶ Thus, Barth calls the church "the provisional representation of the justification which has taken place in Jesus Christ."²⁸⁷ As representation, the church is only the "first fruits," for justification is intended for the whole world. "Those who are of faith (of faith in Him)---are the first-fruits and representatives of humanity and the world to which God has addressed Himself in Jesus Christ."²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵Barth, Christian Life, 133.

²⁸⁶See esp. CD IV1, 608-42.

²⁸⁷CD IV1, 750.

²⁸⁸CD IV1, 750.

There are also two other elements of representation which Barth finds to be as important as justification, namely, "sanctification" and "vocation."²⁸⁹ The former is directly connected with the Holy Spirit since

The Holy Spirit is the power by which Jesus Christ fits His community "to give provisional representation of the sanctification of all humanity and human life as it has taken place in Him."²⁹⁰

The latter is the necessary being of a Christian. "If he is in the community," Barth maintains, "he is a κλητόζ. If he is not a κλητόζ, he is not in the community."²⁹¹

Its being justified, sanctified, and called is an important characteristic of the essence of the church. It does not remain a hidden nature but it is conjoined to the church's act of proclamation, just in the same way as "essence" is identical with "act" in Barth's theology. Consequently, what the church proclaims to the world is something already inherent in its essence. For Barth, the church must begin its proclamation with the premise that "virtually, prospectively and de iure all men are His own [that is, Christ's],"²⁹² even though

Actually, effectively and de facto His own are those who believe in Him, who know Him, who serve Him and who are thus the interconnected members of His body, i.e., Christians.²⁹³

²⁸⁹For Barth, "The purpose of a man's vocation is that he should become a Christian, a homo christianus" (CD IV\3.2, 521). Now as the church is a form of the kingdom the calling is also a "calling to the kingdom of God" (CD IV\2, 106).

²⁹⁰CD IV\2, 620.

²⁹¹CD IV\3.2, 525.

²⁹²CD IV\3.1, 278.

²⁹³CD IV\3.1, 278.

As Jesus Christ is the representative of all people it follows, Barth contends that "There is no man whose history is not decided in the history of Jesus Christ, in the sense that . . . in Jesus Christ he, too, is justified, sanctified and called."²⁹⁴ Accordingly, the message of the church consists in reminding the "countless men whose justification, sanctification and vocation in the history of Jesus Christ have not yet taken place in their own history,"²⁹⁵ of the fact that "there is no man who can be neutral in relation to the history of Jesus Christ."²⁹⁶

Barth is well aware of the fact that "perhaps a very large majority of our fellows are more or less decidedly non-Christian, unchristian and even anti-Christian."²⁹⁷ There are many people who may deliberately choose unbelief. But this does not detract from the fact that Christ has already accomplished a work of salvation on their behalf; therefore, they are also the object of Christ's calling. As such, Barth insists that

no matter who or what they are or how they are their vocation is before them no less surely than that Jesus has died and risen again for them. . . . This is something of unconditional significance.²⁹⁸

It is from this perspective that the church discharges its duty towards the non-Christians: "We have always to see and understand them as those who are still to be

²⁹⁴CD IV3.2, 486.

²⁹⁵CD IV3.2, 486.

²⁹⁶CD IV3.2, 486.

²⁹⁷CD IV3.2, 493.

²⁹⁸CD IV3.2, 493.

called."²⁹⁹ Regardless of the possible result Christians must keep reminding the unbelievers of eternal life that God has prepared for them in his kingdom. Barth remarks that

In effect, then, the Christian cannot leave the non-Christian at peace. This means that for all the sincerity of his patience with him he can only be to him in effect a most disturbing fellow-man, effectively reminding him by his existence where he also belongs and what is his own true though not yet grasped and appropriated being as his promised future.³⁰⁰

Granted this quasi-universalistic view of salvation, Barth himself realizes that the church must feel helpless in the face of the magnitude of the task of bringing all people to faith in Jesus Christ. Some people did not have the opportunity to hear the good news about their election before they died, others are mentally impaired. But Barth believes that Christ himself will fulfill this task at his second coming. Barth expresses this idea in a vivid way:

What can a few Christians or a pathetic group like the Christian community really accomplish in the great market, or in the battle-field or in the great prison or mad-house which human life always seems to be? When the day of the coming of the Jesus Christ in consummating revelation does at last dawn it will quite definitely be that day when, not he himself, but the one whom he expects as a Christian, will know how to reach them, so that the quick and the dead, those who came and went both ante and post christum, will hear his voice, whatever its signification for them.³⁰¹

The church's proclamation is not its own work but a service it renders to Christ.

The fruits of the labor must be left in God's care.

There is a sense in which the church is involved in this task jointly with the world

²⁹⁹CD IV3.2, 493.

³⁰⁰CD IV3.2, 495-96.

³⁰¹CD IV3.2, 918.

which is itself the destination of its proclamation. Here the world is represented by the state. Let us now proceed to see briefly the place held by the church and the world together in Christ's kingdom.

9. The Church and the State in Christ's Kingdom

We have seen that the task entrusted to the church consists in proclaiming to the world that Christ has reconciled it to God through his death on the cross and his resurrection. What this means, as we have insisted earlier, is that it is God's purpose to transform the whole world into his kingdom. Indeed, even Christ's kingdom is not restricted to the church but it extends to the entire universe.

Why do we need to consider the state particularly here? First of all, while the church is a provisional representation of all humanity justified and sanctified in Christ, we may say that the state is a representation of the "unredeemed world." Moreover, they are two different institutions which may and often do come into conflict with one another. But Barth attempts to show that they actually work together for the proclamation of the good news of the work of reconciliation and redemption which Christ has performed for the world. This is necessarily so since they are both under Christ's control as they both belong to the sphere of his kingdom.

Barth provides us with a picture of Christ's kingdom which de jure embraces the whole world, but de facto is still confined to the church and awaits the consummation of the kingdom to include the whole creation. In the former form of the kingdom Barth refers to the image of a circle to depict the relationship existing between the elements constituting its structure: Barth puts Christ himself at the very center of the circle, "The

world is the outer circle; the church . . . is the middle circle; and the inner and outer personal life of the Christian is the inner circle."³⁰² Sometimes the picture is simplified to present only three elements, namely, Christ as its "centre," the church as the "inner circle," and the world itself the "wider circle." Barth lays stress on the interrelation and interdependence between the circles and says that "None of these circles is totally separate from the other two. They touch and overlap. They do not simply coincide."³⁰³

Christ's work of reconciliation is a preparation for the latter form of the kingdom, that is, the whole world as de facto the kingdom of God. Here Barth draws attention to the existence of another reality apart from the church which also functions as an instrument for Christ's reconciling work, namely, the state. Identifying the state as a "political angelic power" Barth argues that

the State as such, belongs originally 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.³⁰⁴

In the same vein Barth adopts a Christological approach to the state and even establishes a close connection between the state and the church. Barth contends that

When the New Testament speaks of the State we are, fundamentally, in the christological sphere; we are on a lower level than when we speak about the Church, yet in true accordance with the statements on the Church, we are in the same unique christological sphere.³⁰⁵

³⁰²Barth, Christian Life, 116.

³⁰³Barth, Christian Life, 116.

³⁰⁴Barth, Community, 118.

³⁰⁵Barth, Community, 120.

Barth puts the church and the state almost on the same level. As he is not ignorant of the weaknesses of these two kinds of institution, he again feels the necessity of approaching the question of their relation to Christ and his kingdom through his dialectical principles. Thus Barth first focuses on the negative side before he turns to what is positive, basing the latter on God's ultimate victory in Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Earlier we mentioned that Barth regards the church as an entity characterized by obedience to God's truth. But Barth also acknowledges that the church may be a place for the denial of God. "Atheism," Barth says regretfully, "is . . . a phenomenon that is also found within the Church."³⁰⁶ More often than not, "Jesus Christ is not recognized and respected as the Lord of the Church."³⁰⁷ Sometimes the church's defect arises from its relation to the world. It happens, Barth observes, that

. . . the Church which should be calling the world to God lets itself be called by the world, cleaving to the world instead of God and thus being untrue to the world and on both sides to itself.³⁰⁸

As far as the state is concerned, Barth is not unaware of the existence of some "demonic" states which rebel against God. In Community, State, and Church, Barth subscribes to G. Dehn and H. Schlier's distinction between an "angelic" power and a "demonic" power in connection with the state. Barth agrees that the Pauline "concept of ἄρχοντες (1 Corinthians 2:8) is certainly intended to designate the state---and an angelic

³⁰⁶Barth, Christian Life, 140.

³⁰⁷Barth, Christian Life, 137.

³⁰⁸Barth, Christian Life, 141.

power."³⁰⁹ But then, he points out that

. . . the State, from being the defender of the law,³¹⁰ established by God's will and ordinance, could become "the beast out of the abyss" of Revelation 13:19³¹¹ dominated by the Dragon, demanding the worship of Caesar, making war on the Saints, blaspheming God, conquering the entire world.³¹²

So Barth's conclusion is that

. . . an angelic power may indeed become wild, degenerate, perverted, and so become a "demonic" power. That is, clearly had happened with the State as represented by Pilate which crucified Jesus.³¹³

Barth does not indicate the factor which gives rise to the transformation of an "angelic" power into a "demonic" power, but he seems to detect it particularly in the state's ignorance of God's Word and Spirit. "No appeal can be made to the Word or Spirit of God," Barth remarks, "in the running of its affairs."³¹⁴ "The civil community as such is spiritually blind and ignorant."³¹⁵ The result is that "It has neither faith nor love nor hope. It has no creed and no gospel."³¹⁶ In Barth's judgment the consequence of this lack of spirituality is very serious: "the political order," has become a "graceless

³⁰⁹Barth, Community, 115.

³¹⁰Here Barth indicates that he follows G. Dehn, "Engel und Obrigkeit," Theologische Aufsätze, 1936), 108.

³¹¹Here Barth indicates that he follows H. Schlier, "Vom Antichrist," Theologische Aufsätze, 1936), 110f.

³¹²Barth, Community, 115.

³¹³Barth, Community, 115.

³¹⁴Barth, Community, 151.

³¹⁵Barth, Community, 151.

³¹⁶Barth, Community, 151.

order," "the rule of the law, which is established and protected by threats and the use of physical force."³¹⁷ Barth seems to suggest that when the state is not guided and empowered by God's Spirit, when it does not obey God's command, it becomes a blind force which is prone to violence and even rebellion against God.

When the world is under the influence of a defective church and a demonic state, it becomes a demonic kingdom which is opposed to God's kingdom. Against this opposition, Barth refers to two different responses from God's side, which both highlight God's absolute power and sovereignty: first, God is absolutely independent and does not need his creature's help. Second, in Christ God's victory over any other powers has been displayed. This victory is manifested in God's use of these powers to the service of his kingdom.

Barth points out that his creature needs God's help but God does not need any help from his creature:

The Lord does not reason or discuss or debate with either demons or the men to whose help he hastens in doing what he does here. He does not ask for their opinion or advice. . . . He does not link with their own achievements. . . . He simply goes his own way, the way of his own honor and our salvation.³¹⁸

God is only dealing with defeated powers. After Christ's victory God's preoccupation is only to help his creature that desperately needs his salvation.

After Christ's resurrection, Barth points out, the rebellious angelic powers have been subdued and are compelled to serve Christ's kingdom during the parousia. In Barth's

³¹⁷CD II/2, 722.

³¹⁸Barth, Christian Life, 235.

view this means that their destiny is determined by Christ's resurrection and his parousia.

The destiny of the rebellious angelic powers which is made clear in Christ's resurrection and parousia is not that they will be annihilated, but that they will be forced into the service and the glorification of Christ, and through Him, of God.³¹⁹

Barth, then, now sees both the church and the state engaged in a service that they must render to God's kingdom. Barth observes that "they work in different ways, but together, and the result is the same."³²⁰ In Barth's picture of the kingdom as a circle, the state finds itself in the wider circle, but this does not prevent it from cooperating with the church which, Barth maintains, "must remain the inner circle of the kingdom of Christ"³²¹ as it is "the salt and the light of the wider circle of which Christ is the centre."³²²

Although the state is located in the "outer circle" of Christ's kingdom, it certainly belongs to his kingdom and takes part in the establishment of Christ's righteousness. Barth acknowledges that the state's righteousness is naturally an utterly imperfect righteousness as "an external, relative, and provisional order of law, defended by superior authority and force,"³²³ and is "based on the most imperfect and clouded knowledge of

³¹⁹Barth, Community, 116-17.

³²⁰John D. Godsey, Karl Barth's Table Talk, Scottish Theological Journal Occasional Papers, no. 10 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 70.

³²¹Barth, Community, 156.

³²²Barth, Community, 163.

³²³Barth, Community, 154.

Jesus Christ or in no such knowledge at all."³²⁴ Nevertheless, Barth argues that the state is a type of God's kingdom, for "the original and final pattern of this order is the eternal kingdom of God in this external form."³²⁵

Strictly speaking, the task of the state cannot be identified with the proclamation undertaken by the church itself, but it consists in protecting the church while it fulfills its function of proclamation. "It serves to protect man from the invasion of chaos and therefore to give him time: time for the preaching of the gospel; time for repentance; time for faith."³²⁶ Protecting the church in its work of proclamation, protecting human beings against the "invasion of chaos," these are tasks entrusted to the state.

In this second function attributed to the state, Barth introduces us to the real demonic power which is the real enemy of Christ's kingdom. This is the Devil, who in Barth's demonology, is called "nothingness." Barth is explicit here that he does not identify the state with "chaos" and "nothingness," even when it happens to be an angelic power turned into a demonic power. Barth insists that the state is not "the soulless, despotic and cannibalistic beast of the abyss."³²⁷ Additionally, Barth repudiates the prejudice which consists in associating the state with sin. On the contrary, "the State is not a product of sin but one of the constants of the divine Providence and government of

³²⁴Barth, Community, 154.

³²⁵Barth, Community, 154.

³²⁶Barth, Community, 156.

³²⁷CD III4, 465.

the world in its action against human sin: it is therefore an instrument of divine grace."³²⁸

If the state is not "chaos" or "nothingness," we now need to continue our investigation to determine the nature of this satanic power called "nothingness."

10. The Devil as Nothingness

"Nothingness" is Barth's theory of the Devil. It is also a term which he associates with "sin" and "death." In German, Barth is using the term das Nichtige,³²⁹ which G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Erlich rendered "nothingness" in the Church Dogmatics.³³⁰ In his translation of Otto Weber's Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics Arthur C. Cochrane coined the term "the Nihil," pointing out that the term is preferable for the reason that it denotes the idea of "that which has been destroyed through God's act of creation."³³¹ Yet the term "nothingness" is preferred in this work for the reason that "the Nihil" may be associated with annihilation. The thesis that this study defends is that Satan is bound during the millennium or the parousia but not destroyed. His destruction awaits Christ's final return.

Obviously, the term das Nichtige itself does not appear in the Bible, but Barth's

³²⁸Barth, Community, 156.

³²⁹Cf. translator's note number 1 in Otto Weber, Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, An Introductory Report on Vol. I:1 to III:4, trans. A. C. Cochrane (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), 187: Arthur C. Cochrane explains that Barth's term Nichtige was coined from the German adjective Nichtig.

³³⁰See, CD III:3.

³³¹Weber, Barth's Church Dogmatics, 187.

concept can, nevertheless, be traced back to his exegesis of the term tohu wa-bohu in Genesis 1:2. Barth rejects any suggestion of the existence of a primal matter before creation itself, whether it may be created or not. Thus, he disagrees with the different interpretations of tohu wa-bohu as, in Barth's words, "the material, especially of things terrestrial and corporeal, as created by God but so far without form, order or light," or "the formless material created by God from which the higher heaven as well as the earth and the physical heaven were later made," or "the formless matter which was there already prior to the creation of the lower universe."³³²

However, Barth admits that there was a "chaos,"³³³ which is expressed by the Hebrew tohu wa-bohu, and which, in his view, should be understood in the light of the Greek term ἄβυσσος, meaning "that which is absolutely without basis or future, utter darkness."³³⁴ But the question arises: what then is this reality that Barth describes as being without basis, without future, but utter darkness. Barth's answer is that it refers to "a primal rudimentary state." But Barth argues that "the only primal and rudimentary state which calls for consideration is that of evil, of sin, of the fall, and all its consequences."³³⁵ Thus, what is described in Genesis 1 verse 2, as chaos or tohu wa-bohu is nothing other than evil, sin, and fall, that is, something "in supreme

³³²Cf. CD III1, 102.

³³³CD III1, 104.

³³⁴CD III1, 104.

³³⁵CD III1, 108.

antithesis"³³⁶ to verse 1 which refers to the created heaven and earth. Barth's contention is that tohu wa-bohu has nothing to do with the origin of creation. Rather it refers to something which stands in opposition to creation.

Barth argues that we can confirm this evil nature of "chaos" in the light of God's reaction against it, which is an attitude of judgment, rejection, and condemnation. Barth maintains that this is what "chaos" implies according to the usage of tohu wa-bohu in Jeremiah 4:23, which conveys the idea of "horrors of the approaching final judgment."³³⁷ Barth finds this to be conclusive for the understanding of Genesis 1:2 and states that

the condition of the earth depicted in v.2 is identical with the whole horror of the final judgment. If in face of this horror there is deliverance on the one hand and creation on the other--in both cases as God's act in contradiction to the threats of tohu wa-bohu---there can never be any question of a positive qualification of this utterly abhorrent thing as such. The earth as tohu wa-bohu is the earth which is nothing as such, which mocks its Creator and which can only be an offence to the heaven above it threatening it with the same nothingness.³³⁸

This statement is crucial for the subsequent understanding of Barth's doctrine of "nothingness." "Nothingness" has no real ground for its existence, but it is "evil," which constitutes a threat to God's creation and is judged and rejected by God as his adversary. God's work of reconciliation and redemption is ultimately a deliverance and a preservation of his creature from the threat of nothingness.

It is on the basis of the concept of tohu wa-bohu of Genesis 1:2, which he

³³⁶CD III, 1, 104.

³³⁷CD III, 1, 104.

³³⁸CD III, 1, 105.

understands to mean "chaos" and "nothingness," that Barth construes his doctrine of Satan and the Devil. Thus, "nothingness" stands for Satan or the Devil and the demons. It is identified with "sin" and "death" as their origin. "Nothingness," Barth warns us, "is not nothing. . . . Nothingness is not to be equated with what is not."³³⁹ Nothingness means that

There is real evil and real death as well as real sin. In another connexion it will fall to be indicated that there is also a real devil with his legions, and a real hell.³⁴⁰

Barth admits that his position may not be directly supported by Scripture, but he contends that the identification is correct since Satan's nature is exclusively characterized by confusion, wickedness, and adversity. Barth says:

What has been defined and described in the present context as the resisting element in man is naturally identical with the being which is not systematically or consistently taught in Holy Scripture, but in the New Testament especially is frequently mentioned as the "devil," the principium or princeps of darkness, Satan (the adversary), the διαβολος (who throws everything into confusion), the evil or wicked one κατ' ἐξοχήν. The devil certainly exists and is at work. We have to reckon with him.³⁴¹

Barth warns against the illusion that calling Satan nothingness means that he does not exist. "When I speak of nothingness," Barth observes, "I cannot mean that evil is nothing, that it does not exist or that it has no reality."³⁴² The designation "nothingness" can be only applied to Satan in virtue of his relation to God and God's creature.

³³⁹CD III/3, 349.

³⁴⁰CD III/3, 310.

³⁴¹CD IV/3.1, 260.

³⁴²CD IV/3.1, 178.

Nothingness is not created by God nor counted as his creature.

It exists only in the negativity proper to it in its relationship to God and decisively in God's relationship of repudiation to it. It does not exist as God does, nor as His creature, among which it is not to be numbered.³⁴³

From the perspective of the relationship with God and God's act of creation it has no existence. Its existence coincides only with its evil nature.

It has no basis for its being . . . The nature underlying its existence and activity is perversion. Its right to be and express itself is simply that of wrong. In this sense it is nothingness.³⁴⁴

The only way Barth can describe the being of nothingness is through a dialectic of possibility and impossibility. It is impossible for nothingness to exist, but it does exist. From this thesis and antithesis Barth came to the synthesis according to which nothingness is an "impossible possibility" or an "ontological impossibility." Note that Barth does not mean exactly the same thing with these two phrases. In connection with the former, Barth's focus is on the existence and power of nothingness, which are impossible but real. With respect to the latter, Barth's focus is on the existence and nature of nothingness, which are negated and rejected by God, but are still real.

In his attempt to define "impossible possibility" Barth says: "Since evil has and is reality in its fatal manner, we have to reckon with its possibility, with its power to be real."³⁴⁵ Thus, the stress is particularly on nothingness as a real power. "Impossible possibility" means the impossibility of nothingness' possessing existence and power, but

³⁴³CD IV3.1, 178.

³⁴⁴CD IV3.1, 178.

³⁴⁵CD IV3.1, 178.

it does exist and it does have power. It is thereby "an antithesis not only of God's whole creation but to the Creator Himself,"³⁴⁶ for it "challenged Him and provoked His wrath, . . . made Him come forth as the Judge, . . . made Him yield to [it] in order to overcome it."³⁴⁷

The same dialectic occurs in connection with the concept of "ontological impossibility. According to Barth

What it means is that the nature of evil as the negation negated by God disqualifies its being, and therefore its undeniable existence, as impossible, meaningless, illegitimate, valueless and without foundation.³⁴⁸

God does not recognize it but judges, negates, and rejects its "being"; therefore its existence and being should be unreal, but they are real. Barth asserts that "It has no substance. How can it have," he asks, "when God did not will to give it substance or to create it? It has only its own emptiness."³⁴⁹ If God did not create it, it may have its own being which may be only described as "nothingness." Barth writes:

It is nothingness, and has as such its own being, albeit malignant and perverse. A real dimension is disclosed, and existence and form are given to a reality sui generis, in the fact that God is wholly and utterly not the creator in this respect.³⁵⁰

Although it has its own nature, "the nature underlying its existence and activity is perversion. Its right to be and to express itself is simply that of wrong. In this sense it is

³⁴⁶CD III3, 304.

³⁴⁷CD III3, 304.

³⁴⁸CD IV3.1, 178.

³⁴⁹CD III3, 361.

³⁵⁰CD III3, 352.

nothingness."³⁵¹ We gather from Barth's concept of "impossible possibility" and "ontological impossibility" that even though the existence, power, and perverse nature of nothingness are supposed to be impossible because they are not a creature, they are real. Barth adduces two different kinds of evidence of their reality, namely, human sin and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Human sin is an evidence of the power of nothingness: nothingness caused human beings to sin, to rebel against God, and to fall. Here Barth introduces nothingness as Satan disguised as the serpent in Genesis 3. Barth applies directly his concept of nothingness to this story and declares that

In Genesis 3 the failure of the creature consisted in the fact that, succumbing to the insinuations of nothingness, it desired to be like God, judging between good and evil, itself effecting that separation, unwilling to live by the grace of God and on the basis of the judgment already accomplished by Him, or to persist in the covenant with God which is its only safeguard against nothingness.³⁵²

Nothingness appears to be unreal, it appears to be nothing, but it is real and is something.

"The sin of man . . . confirms the real existence of nothingness."³⁵³ The human Fall is an evidence of its reality and power.

Therefore, Barth concludes that from an empirical perspective, human sin is an evidence of the accuracy of his description of Satan as nothingness and as an "impossible possibility" and an "ontological impossibility." For Barth,

The sin of man as depicted in Gen. 3 confirms the accuracy of our definition. It is purely and simply what God did not, does not and cannot will. It has the

³⁵¹CD IV\3.1, 178.

³⁵²CD, III\3, 356.

³⁵³CD III\3, 352.

essence of only non-essence, and only as such can it exist.³⁵⁴

Nothingness is an impossible possibility and an ontological impossibility, for neither did God create sin, nor did he create nothingness to cause human beings to sin. But sin does exist, thus nothingness must also exist, even though its existence is impossible.

However, the greatest evidence for the existence and for the determination of the nature of nothingness is Jesus Christ himself. Barth emphasizes the fact that we can only catch sight of the danger that nothingness presents and the seriousness of its effect on human life without reference to Christ's incarnation, his life, and his death. Barth asserts that "The true nothingness is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross."³⁵⁵ This discloses the truth about its power and danger. Barth argues that

Only from the standpoint of Jesus Christ, His birth, death and resurrection do we see it in reality and truth, without the temptation to treat it as something inclusive or relative, or to conceive it dialectically and thus render it innocuous.³⁵⁶

It is also in the work of Jesus Christ that we discover the truth about the human Fall. When humans have fallen, the Devil as nothingness has become "the resisting element in man. . . . Man is tempted, deceived, controlled and possessed by the devil."³⁵⁷ Barth maintains that

In the light of Jesus Christ it is impossible to escape the truth that we ourselves as sinners have become the victims and servants of nothingness, sharing its nature

³⁵⁴CD III\3, 352.

³⁵⁵CD III\3, 305-06.

³⁵⁶CD III\3, 305.

³⁵⁷CD IV\3.1, 270.

and producing and extending it.³⁵⁸

Amazingly, for the seriousness of the threat that nothingness presents, for the fierceness of the battle Christ fought against it, for the disaster, doom, and lostness it causes to human existence, Barth denies that nothingness can be a "person." Obviously, this denial of a personality to nothingness is to be traced back to its origin in the tohu wa-bohu, which Barth refuses to identify even with a "formless material created by God," so that it totally lacks "substance"; hence his theory of "impossible possibility" and "ontological impossibility." But from there Barth found it possible to conclude that tohu wa-bohu represents "evil," "sin," and "Fall."³⁵⁹

Barth attempts to produce evidence of the lack of personality in nothingness. Nothingness as mere falsehood is among the most important argument he sets forth in this respect. He associates nothingness with falsehood from beginning to end. Therefore, if nothingness can be regarded as a "person," Barth argues, he is thereby only the personification of falsehood.

It must not be betrayed into regarding him otherwise than as the hypostatized falsehood which can only stand in a negative relationship both to God and man, and can therefore exist only negatively.³⁶⁰

Barth may confer personality upon the angels, but he refuses to assimilate nothingness to fallen angels whose existence he flatly denies. He affirms categorically his

³⁵⁸CD III3, 305-06.

³⁵⁹For a criticism of Barth on this view, see, N.H. Ridderbos, Is There a Conflict Between Genesis I and Natural Science (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), esp. 51-53.

³⁶⁰CD IV3.1, 261.

position on this question: "There is no fall of angels!"³⁶¹ In Barth's view, "bad" angels are not real angels. They are only an image which refers to the "essence" of nothingness. "They are hypostases of das Nichtige."³⁶² Nothingness cannot be fallen angels since "God did not create demons." "Sin and demons are 'impossible possibilities'! They exist in a reality without possibility."³⁶³ "Satan and his forces are other kinds of beings in contrast with God and His angels."³⁶⁴

Barth, however, admits that some biblical assertions concerning the personality of the Devil present him with insuperable difficulties. When John D. Godsey asked him why "In Job, Satan is called 'son of God,'" Barth's answer is only the admission of his confusion; and all he could do was to take Satan's falsehood as his linchpin:

I have some trouble, I will admit. Even in the New Testament these powers are "above" in heaven. But even their "heaven" must be a lie! The notion of the fall of angels in Jude and II Peter--I do not like this!³⁶⁵

Like Augustine Barth relates existence only to two things: The triune God on the one hand and created beings on the other.³⁶⁶ But Barth is at pains to explain the existence and essence of nothingness since, unlike Augustine, he refuses to identify the Devil and demons with fallen angels, who are included among the creatures.

³⁶¹Godsey, Table Talk, 72.

³⁶²Godsey, Table Talk, 72.

³⁶³Godsey, Table Talk, 72.

³⁶⁴Godsey, Table Talk, 72.

³⁶⁵Godsey, Table Talk, 72.

³⁶⁶Augustine, On the Trinity, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. P. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 21.

Despite his strange theory of nothingness grounded in the Old Testament concept of tohu wa-bohu, and his denial of personality to the Devil, we may say that Barth is to some extent faithful to Scripture in his account of the nature of the Devil. This can be seen further in his theory of the defeat of nothingness and the limitation of its power which presents a counterpart of the concept of "the binding of Satan." To this let us now turn.

11. The Limitation of Nothingness as the Binding of Satan

The binding of Satan is a very prominent feature of millennial doctrine, but it is also the locus of the greatest controversy especially between amillennialism and premillennialism. Premillennialists insist on the absoluteness of the biblical statement concerning the treatment that Satan will receive, as the terms like "great chain," "Abyss" being "locked and sealed," and "to keep him from deceiving the nations any more" (Rev. 20: 1-3) suggest. Barth does not do a direct exegesis of these verses, as Augustine does,³⁶⁷ but he clearly alludes to them in his account of the war Christ waged against nothingness.

In his chapter on "Jesus is Victor"³⁶⁸ in the Church Dogmatics Barth describes the conflict between Jesus Christ and the Devil as follows:

The devil certainly exists and is at work. We have to reckon with him. We cannot possibly recount the history of the prophecy of Jesus Christ without thinking of him, for in his self-defence against it, having nothing more to oppose to the

³⁶⁷See esp., City of God, XX, 7 and 8.

³⁶⁸CD IV3.1, 165-274.

completed work of reconciliation, he finds his final sphere of operation. The ancient foe, or however we might describe him, cannot alter the justification and sanctification of man actualized in Jesus Christ. But he still has space to resist the Word of reconciliation, to hinder its understanding, acceptance and appropriation on the part of man. It is the story of his opposition in this sphere that we now refer.³⁶⁹

This is a summary of the battle in which Jesus Christ engages the Devil. Barth indicates that the Devil takes Christ's work of reconciliation to be his target. This means that the Devil's purpose consists in thwarting Christ's redemptive work and the establishment of his kingdom on earth. Barth, however, points out that the reconciliation is a fait accompli, proving the certainty of Christ's victory. The Devil is already completely defeated, yet his final destiny will be revealed at the glorious return of Christ. Using the limited power which is left in him, he expects to continue the battle, considering Christ's work of reconciliation to be his battlefield.

Barth indicates that the Devil tries to locate his "base of operations" in what he calls "the Word of reconciliation." In other words, the Devil's strategy consists in attempting to prevent people's hearing of the good news of Christ's reconciling and redemptive work in order that they may remain in ignorance and cannot believe and receive Christ as their Savior. We note in this respect that Barth's interpretation of the work of the Devil is perfectly consistent with the amillennial view of his activity during the church era.

In fact, the attack of nothingness is launched not only upon God's people and the church but upon God himself. If he can deceive God's people, God's honor itself is at

³⁶⁹CD IV3.1, 260.

stake. Barth refers to different kinds of maneuver involved in the strategy of the Devil, including falsehood, disguise, and appearances. In short, it is all devised to give the appearance that nothingness contributes to Christ's work of reconciliation and redemption.

Thus, Barth says that

It lies by proclaiming that it can intervene between the grace of God and salvation of the creature, rendering the grace of God weak and ineffective and hampering and retarding the salvation of the creature.³⁷⁰

This is an attack directed not only to God's sovereignty, majesty, and honor, but also to his trinitarian nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and accordingly as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. By intervening in God's work of redemption, nothingness seems to claim that he is a fourth person within the Godhead.

Nothingness' challenge is extended to God's heavenly kingdom when "it lies by opposing its own messengers, the demons, to the angels of God, attempting to give them the same names and appearance and activity."³⁷¹ In this kind of deception, Barth says, nothingness mimics God's kingdom by claiming to possess a whole host of heavenly beings and to be able to settle on earth to form its own kingdom here. In this connection, Barth sees nothingness reaching the climax of its falsehood

. . . when it pretends that it, too, comes down from heaven to earth as a superior power or as whole host of superior powers, that it, too, has something to institute on earth, that its will is to be done on earth in opposition to the will of God.³⁷²

Barth acknowledges that nothingness' evil action is indeed crowned with success,

³⁷⁰CD III/3, 525.

³⁷¹CD III/3, 525.

³⁷²CD III/3, 525.

not as a triumph on God's side but one on the human side. That many people are seduced and led astray by its mere appearances shows that "one form of the triumph which nothingness can achieve is to represent itself as a mere appearance with no genuine reality."³⁷³ Those who could be deceived by the Devil receive him as their father. The Devil thereby is successful in his ultimate purpose which consists in putting an end to their access to God's Word. Barth asserts emphatically that

Those who have him as their "father," who are his children, who are dominated, tempted and led astray, cannot and will not hear the Word of Jesus as the Word of truth, but only resist it as did the Jews. . . .³⁷⁴

We have seen Barth's attempt to expose the seriousness of the perverted nature of nothingness, but he also makes it clear that the gravity of its evil-doing can only be grasped when we look at God's wrath, judgment and condemnation of it, which finds its full expression in Jesus Christ. "Evil is characterized, judged and condemned in the self-disclosure of the living person of Jesus Christ."³⁷⁵ For Barth, the defeat of nothingness is not decided only after its assault upon human beings causing their fall. From a supralapsarian standpoint, Barth argues that the overcoming of nothingness had been decreed from all eternity: "As opposition to God, it is that which is simply opposed to His will, and from all eternity, in time and to all eternity negated, rejected, condemned and excluded by His will."³⁷⁶

³⁷³ CD III\3, 525.

³⁷⁴ CD IV\3.1, 261.

³⁷⁵ CD IV\3.1, 177.

³⁷⁶ CD IV\3.1, 177.

At this point, Barth declares that the incarnation has for its goal Christ's direct confrontation with nothingness. Barth lays great emphasis on this point, saying that nothingness is

That which rendered necessary the birth of His Son in the stable of Bethlehem and His death upon the cross of Calvary, that which by His birth and death He smote, defeated and destroyed, that which primarily opposes and resists God Himself, and therefore all creation.³⁷⁷

God himself found the necessity of becoming creature because of the challenge of nothingness.

Nothingness is the "reality" on whose account (i.e., against which) God Himself willed to become a creature in the creaturely world, yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it.³⁷⁸

In Christ's death on the cross and in his resurrection "a war is waged against sin, death and the devil. It is in this war that Jesus is Victor."³⁷⁹

In Barth's theory, even though Christ's victory over nothingness is decisive and final, the reality about this victory is part of the revelation which will be disclosed in Christ's final appearing. Thus, during the parousia or the millennial period a limited power is bestowed upon nothingness since it is under Christ's control and must serve him in his kingdom. Barth argues that the limitation of the Devil's power and the "demonic" forces is not accidental, for even this limitation had been decreed from all eternity and was fulfilled by Christ in his incarnation. But Barth also makes it clear that

even within the limits that are set for them by the counsel of God and its

³⁷⁷CD III3, 304.

³⁷⁸CD III3, 305.

³⁷⁹CD IV3.1, 179.

fulfilment, by Jesus Christ who has come already and is present and will come again, these forces do still live and have their evil being, constantly persuading, assailing, and influencing Christians as they do all men.³⁸⁰

The question arises: why does God allow nothingness to harass human beings? For Barth, the answer is to be found in the penultimate and the ultimate forms of the kingdom. Strictly speaking the kingdom of God still remains concealed during the first and the second stages of the parousia until its consummation in the third stage of the parousia. It is real and revealed only in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the same way, the destruction of nothingness is real and revealed only in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In Barth's judgment, this means that God

permits His kingdom not to be seen by us, and to that extent He still permits us to be prey to nothingness. Until the hour strikes when its destruction in the victory of Jesus Christ will be finally revealed, He thus permits nothingness to retain its semblance of significance and still to manifest its fragmentary significance. In this already innocuous form, as this echo and shadow, it is an instrument of His will and action.³⁸¹

Barth here states clearly the purpose of God's allowing Satan to hold a limited power. God in his power and sovereignty is using Satan in the service of his kingdom. In this connection, Barth does not hesitate to call Satan God's servant in view of the service he must render to Christ. Barth declares that "The defeated, captured and mastered enemy of God has as such become His servant."³⁸²

Regarding the service to be rendered by nothingness, Barth says that

In this form still left to it nothingness exists and functions under the control of

³⁸⁰Barth, Christian Life, 218.

³⁸¹CD III3, 367.

³⁸²CD III3, 367.

God, we must say that even though it does not will to do so it is forced to serve Him, to serve His Word and work, the honour of His Son, the proclamation of the Gospel, the faith of the community, and therefore the way which He Himself wills to go within and with His creation until its day is done.³⁸³

Three different kinds of fate facing nothingness emerge from this statement. First, nothingness is limited in its power and in its activity. This is what Barth means by "form still left to it." Second, nothingness still has to serve Christ in its limitedness. Barth asserts that it is compelled to do this despite its refusal to do so. Barth seems to exaggerate when he claims that nothingness itself has to take part in the proclamation of the Gospel, but this may be understood in the light of the service rendered by a "demonized" state, as we have seen earlier. And finally Satan will be destroyed in the consummation of the kingdom. Although Barth does not refer directly to the binding of Satan according to Revelation 20: 1-3, his account of Satan's doom comports with the amillennial exegesis of these verses.

Barth adduces another form of the limitation of nothingness: as it is in this world, nothingness must be part of God's possession, that is, something which must submit to God's power and majesty. "It is not a second God," Barth says, "nor self-created. It has no power save that which it is allowed by God. It, too, belongs to God."³⁸⁴ It follows that the fear of the Devil is not justified. We have already been delivered from his destructive power. Thus, Barth contends that "it is no longer legitimate to think of it as if real deliverance and release from it were still an event of the future."³⁸⁵

³⁸³ CD III3, 367.

³⁸⁴ CD III3, 351.

³⁸⁵ CD III3, 364.

At this point let us pause and draw a brief parallel between the amillennial concept of the binding of Satan and Barth's idea of the limitation of Satan's power. For amillennialists, even though Christ has won complete victory over the Devil, his complete destruction is postponed until the full revelation of God's kingdom in its consummation. Satan is now bound and it is in this binding that he continues to assail the church and the world. Yet, his power is considerably limited in such a way that "he cannot lead the Church astray," as Augustine puts it, which amounts to saying that Satan cannot hamper the spreading of the good news of Christ's finished work of reconciliation and redemption all over the world. A retrospect upon Barth's idea of the limitation of Satan's power would show that Barth's view is consistent with that of amillennialism.

Amillennialists are criticized by premillennialists for missing the radical dimensions of the binding of Satan. Is this charge true of Barth? A close examination of Barth's view shows that he could combine the radicality of God's treatment of Satan and the partial freedom given to him, which are both suggested by the term "binding." Barth could do this by insisting upon God's eternal decision to put an end to the dominion of nothingness and to allow it to have certain power which the latter must use to serve him, even to harass God's people. This is a point in which Barth comes close to Calvin, and in which he goes far beyond premillennialists, and even some amillennialists: Satan's destiny is determined from eternity, his power is not only limited so that he may not thwart the proclamation of God's Word, but he himself is compelled to use the small power left to him to serve God in the preaching of the gospel.

Barth does not understand the binding of Satan as a mere punishment, as is the

tendency among premillennialists. In the same way as in amillennialism, Barth views it within the context of salvation history. The real significance of the binding of Satan is a salvation from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light. Barth sees the result of the reversal in the work of the Devil as the end of darkness and ignorance and the triumph of light and knowledge in the individual person.

In his very knowledge he is hindered and hampered by his ignorance. . . . Darkness still threatens his light. But with a far more serious threat, the light now threatens his darkness. . . . The movement is quite definitely from ignorance to knowledge.³⁸⁶

Barth may sound Gnostic, but his concept is different from Gnosticism since he relates this knowledge to Christ's revelation and does not understand it as a saving knowledge.

But the question arises: how the kingdom of evil can be seen in the light of the doctrine of the binding of Satan and the instrumental doctrine of Satan?

12. Two Kingdoms

If Satan is at the same time bound and still active, can his kingdom still survive during the church age? Like all amillennialists, Barth answers this question positively.

The concept of two kingdoms, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the Devil co-existing in the world is a question confronting amillennialists who argue for the millennium as a reality which coincides with the history of the church. They approach this question from different angles. Augustine is well-known for his famous notion of civitas Dei and civitas terrena, as two realities that exist side by side in the world, a theory that he propounds as the key to understanding history. Most amillennialists ground their

³⁸⁶CD IV\3.1, 197.

argument for the existence of two kingdoms in the parable of the Tares and Wheat in the New Testament. As far as Barth is concerned, he holds to his idea of Satan as nothingness and speaks of "the kingdom of nothingness" which is opposed to Christ's kingdom.

The co-existence of Christ's kingdom and that of nothingness is a prominent feature of Barth's eschatology. As will be seen in Barth's treatment of this question, he again goes far beyond premillennialism which tends to see only the presence of the kingdom of Satan in the world today. Along with amillennialists Barth rejects the dualistic vision of the presence of two kingdoms, but he also supersedes other amillennialists in his contention that, although Satan's kingdom is still real on earth, its defeat and destruction had been decided from all eternity and was fulfilled on the cross, and that Satan's kingdom is now forced into the service of Christ's kingdom.

Barth speaks of the presence of two opposed kingdoms in these terms:

Where God says Yes and No, where he is affirmed and denied, where He is affirmed and blasphemed, where He is served and hampered, where His will is done and sabotaged, for all the similarity there is no relationship or homogeneity.³⁸⁷

Barth is here referring to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Devil which are both present on earth. There is nothing positive as to the relation of latter to the former. It is only a relation of conflict and hostility. These are two kingdoms that exclude one another.

That Satan's kingdom is the kingdom of "nothingness" does not mean that it is a fictitious kingdom. Barth presents it as a well-organized kingdom in all dimensions:

³⁸⁷CD III3, 524.

structure, power, and activity. Comparing it to God's kingdom, Barth observes that

It, too, is an invisible and incomprehensible kingdom. It, too, is undoubtedly superior to man and the whole earthly creation. It, too, has in its midst a kind of throne and ruler. It, too, has an enterprise and movement aimed at earth and man. It, too, has powerful messengers who attest and proclaim a kind of mystery, who do this with a kind of humility and objectivity, and who obviously stand in its service.³⁸⁸

What is important in this description is the fact that the kingdom of the Devil forms a counterpart to the kingdom of God. At this point, Barth again calls attention to Satan's usual strategy which consists in deceiving by imitating God. Again Barth asserts this point emphatically saying that "there is no other word for it--it is all a mimicry."³⁸⁹

We have seen Barth's rejection of the identification of Satan and the demons with fallen angels, but he admits that they do resemble God's angels with the effect that Satan's kingdom looks like God's kingdom. Barth asserts that

Its kingdom is indeed very similar to the kingdom of heaven with its angels. And this imitation of the kingdom of heaven and its angels, the uncanny resemblance to this very different sphere in which it dares to present itself, is the crown of its existence as falsehood.³⁹⁰

Barth attempts to demonstrate the falsity of the traditional identification of the Devil and demons as fallen angels and the attribution of personality to their nature by emphasizing strongly this idea of falsehood. For Barth, this belief is only a sign that Satan is successful in his deception. Barth says that

We see at once the similarity of this sphere with that of angels, with the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. We can see the reason for the misunderstanding

³⁸⁸CD III/3, 527.

³⁸⁹CD III/3, 527.

³⁹⁰CD III/3, 527.

in which it could be thought necessary not merely to contrast but to co-ordinate the two kingdoms, regarding demons not merely as opponents but as relatives and colleagues of the angels.³⁹¹

Barth indeed sees humankind under the domination of Satan and his demons and unable to discern God's kingdom from the that of the Devil. "Is not our earthly sphere," Barth wonders, "visited in this case, too, by an alien and mysterious dominion? Is not man placed in both cases under a real mystery?"³⁹² Barth seems to see humanity being totally under the sway of Satan to the points of losing its spirit of discernment.

A close examination of Barth's argument reveals his preoccupation with the conflicting ideas of falsehood and Satan's non-possession of personality, on the one hand, and the reality of Satan's power and his evil-doing, on the other. He finds Satan's power reducible to falsehood, but even though it is falsehood, it is a real power which seems to presuppose real personality and intelligence. Barth warns us against the power of the Devil and his demons as they use falsehood as their weapon.

As falsehood they are really powerful. Indeed, because they are so thorough, because they imitate no less than God and His kingdom and angels, because nothingness always masquerades as the highest and deepest, the first and the last, they are always much more powerful than we expect or concede.³⁹³

In this deceptive disguise it is "a real kingdom, a nexus of form and power and movement and activity, of real menace and danger within its appointed limits."³⁹⁴ "It is a kingdom

³⁹¹CD III3, 524.

³⁹²CD III3, 524.

³⁹³CD III3, 528.

³⁹⁴CD III3, 524.

on the march and engaged in invasion and assault."³⁹⁵

From this full acknowledgment of the power of Satan and his kingdom Barth proceeds again to his usual last recourse which consists in opposing the power of Satan and his kingdom to God's absolute sovereignty, almightiness, and lordship. "God is the Lord of the demonic sphere, and it derives from Him, just as in a wholly different way He is the Lord of the angelic sphere and it too derives from Him."³⁹⁶ God's absolute power is revealed in the victory that Christ has already won over Satan and his kingdom. This is not a "temporal" victory since "the overcoming of evil is resolved and even accomplished in the eternal will of God."³⁹⁷ Jesus' victory is a complete victory, Barth says, so "We speak of Jesus as Victor, of the God active and revealed in Him, and of evil as known in confrontation with the God active and revealed in Him."³⁹⁸

Thus Barth again comes to the conclusion concerning Satan's kingdom, that after Christ's victory on the cross and in his resurrection, it is

. . . not a kingdom which has to be feared; a kingdom of that which is improper; a kingdom which by the very fact that God confronts it is characterised from the very outset as weak and futile.³⁹⁹

Naturally, it would not stand against Jesus' attack since "Jesus Christ is Warrior and . .

³⁹⁵CD III3, 524.

³⁹⁶CD III3, 520-21.

³⁹⁷CD IV3.1, 179.

³⁹⁸CD IV3.1, 179.

³⁹⁹CD III3, 524.

. as such He is Victor."⁴⁰⁰ In connection with Satan's kingdom we see here that Barth adopts the same conclusion as the one related to Satan himself, namely, the limitation of his kingdom. The limitation of Satan's kingdom is indirectly expressed through the removal of all fear in the face of his evil deeds and the affirmation of the futility of his kingdom. But it is also directly asserted when Barth refers to the activities of Satan and his demons and declares: "Their power is limited in relation to man as well as God."⁴⁰¹ There is a guarantee for this limitation since "the one who limits it is called Jesus Christ."⁴⁰² And finally, once again, this limitation finds its expression in Barth's idea of Satan's limited kingdom which must serve Christ's kingdom before its definitive eradication. Barth declares this solemnly in these words:

Here on this earth and in time, and therefore in the immediate context of all human kingdoms both small and great, and in the sphere of Satan who rules and torments fallen man, God has irrevocably and indissolubly set up the kingdom of His grace, the throne of His glory, the kingdom which as such is superior to all other powers, to which, in spite of their resistance, they belong, and which they cannot help but serve.⁴⁰³

Barth speaks of Satan and his kingdom being totally under God's control. But he also speaks at the same time of the "resistance" of this kingdom and the "torments" that it inflicts upon God's people. Is this the explanation of the persecution that the church endures?

⁴⁰⁰CD IV3.1, 212.

⁴⁰¹Barth, Christian Life, 217.

⁴⁰²Barth, Christian Life, 217.

⁴⁰³CD II2, 688.

13. The Persecution of the Church

While premillennialists conceive of the Antichrist and the persecution of the church as signs of the end and the nearness of Christ's second coming, Barth, like Augustine and Calvin, refuses to associate the persecution of the church with an apocalyptic end of history. In Barth's opinion, persecution is a phenomenon which runs through the history of the church, that is, during the period he calls parousia. This approach is fraught with significant consequences. It changes the usual perspective on the church's suffering, on the identity of the Antichrist, and on the meaning of martyrdom.

On the whole, Barth sees the danger which threatens the church, not as a future reality but as something which already happened and will continue to happen. The danger may not come from afar but from the society in which the church community finds itself. Barth, then thinks that "The communion of saints needs defence, protection and preservation because it is in danger. It was always in danger. For it is a human society among men."⁴⁰⁴ Barth views this danger primarily as the "pressure from the world around which seeks either to do away with it altogether or at least to reduce it to a more innocuous form."⁴⁰⁵

In fact, the situation in which the church finds itself is that of the incompatible co-existence of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Devil. Although the church is

⁴⁰⁴CD IV2, 661.

⁴⁰⁵CD IV2, 663.

a community set apart for God, belonging to what Augustine calls the civitas Dei,⁴⁰⁶ "It [also] belongs to the creaturely world, which is the world of flesh, the world of the perishing man who is assailed by nothingness and all its demons, the world of death,"⁴⁰⁷ or, again in Augustine's words, by the civitas terrena. From there, Barth goes into more detail in his description of the difficulties and hardships that the church is experiencing, pointing out that

. . . the conflict of the community is not just with flesh and blood, and definitely not just with the corruption of man both without and within, but with principalities and powers, . . . with the spirits of evil which seem to strive against it even from heaven itself.⁴⁰⁸

Barth here considers the different kinds of pain inflicted upon the church and distinguishes three categories under which they fall. These are: first, the use of force and violence, which Barth calls "flesh and blood"; second, "corruption"; and third, the influence of the so-called "principalities and powers" upon human beings. Barth lays stress on the last item, as it is also the ultimate cause of the first and the second.

How does Barth see the first form of oppression, that is, the one occasioned by flesh and blood? Despite the difficulties he experienced with Hitler⁴⁰⁹ when he was a

⁴⁰⁶Barth espouses "Augustine's general equation of the civitas Dei with the Church" and warns "against a general and indiscriminate rejection of Augustine's identification," arguing that "apart from the absolute, christological and eschatological meaning of the term there is also an applied and relative and historical, and in this case the kingdom is in fact the Church" (CD IV2, 657).

⁴⁰⁷CD IV2, 672.

⁴⁰⁸CD IV2, 671.

⁴⁰⁹Barth was dismissed from the University of Bonn in 1935 for refusing to open every lecture with the so-called Hitler Salute and to give the oath of loyalty to the Führer. Barth's position, which hinges on the confession of Jesus Christ as the only Lord of the

university professor in Germany, Barth is not convinced that real persecution comes from "figures like Nero and Diocletian and Louis XIV and Hitler and other modern dictators with their 'anti-god' movements and new state-religions."⁴¹⁰ Barth looks realistically at this type of persecution and observes that it is in fact more beneficial than harmful to the church. Barth observes that

Experience old and new shows that more brutal or refined persecution may well have the opposite effect from that intended. The community is strengthened under pressure.⁴¹¹

Additionally, "the separation of the chaff from the wheat means new and stronger growth."⁴¹² Barth means that persecution enables the church to distinguish itself from the world, to become more aware of its true identity, its purpose, and its goal.

In Barth's judgment, the real issue resides in this last point, that is, in the church's awareness of its real nature and destiny. From this standpoint, Barth sees the suffering of the church as something incumbent on Christians. To put it plainly, the church suffers more from backsliding and heresy than from persecution. This means that the root of the evil is to be sought, not so much outside as inside the church, in what Barth designates under the head "corruption." While Barth mitigates the charge against the world, he increases it on the side of the Christians themselves who are themselves among those who are in the world and take part in the sin of the world. Barth says concerning the church

church, is reflected in the Barmen Declaration which was actually written by Barth himself (cf. Busch, Karl Barth, 242, 245-47, 255-58).

⁴¹⁰CD IV2, 664.

⁴¹¹CD IV2, 664.

⁴¹²CD IV2, 664.

community:

The world, therefore is not just around it but---in all its members---within it. But the world is the flesh of sin, the old man in all the variations of his pride and sloth, with all his possibilities and works. There is no simple form of sin, of the rejection of God's grace, which cannot entice the communio sanctorum, and which in history has not in fact enticed and overcome it. The enticement may come from without, caused by the pressure exerted or simply by the impression made upon it by the world around. But the men outside are no different from those inside---within the community.⁴¹³

If the church suffers from corruption, this does not originate from the outside world but from church members who are themselves part of the outside world and follow the world in its corruption and evil practices. Barth inveighs strongly against Christians stating that "the saints are not, as it were, artless children unfortunately led astray by wicked rascals. They themselves are wicked rascals."⁴¹⁴ From this perspective, Barth gives his definition of what is called Antichrist. He affirms insistently that the Antichrist is not to be found outside the church. The Antichrist managed to secure a place in the church and creates a double image of the church, being at the same time a true church and a false church. Barth finds this to be incredible but real as he says:

The inconceivable thing is that even in the Church Antichrist is at work as well as Christ, that it is at once and the same time both the true Church and the false, that in the Church too there is an ambivalent knowledge of God that constantly threatens to turn into ignorance of God.⁴¹⁵

Thus the real Antichrist is, for Barth, among the Christians, and the Christians are themselves the cause of the corruption in the church.

⁴¹³CD IV2, 666.

⁴¹⁴CD IV2, 666.

⁴¹⁵Barth, Christian Life, 136.

Barth sees "secularization" to be a token of this "corruption" cropping up in the church. Barth is deeply concerned about the introduction into the church of what he calls "the great and generally accepted propositions which rule the world in the continuing darkness of this age."⁴¹⁶ He analyses the result of the secularization of the church and states his conclusion as follows:

Secularization is the process at the end of which it will be only a part of the world among so much else of the world. . . . Secularization is the process by which the salt loses its savour. It is not in any sense strange that the world is secular. This is simply to say that the world is the world. It was always secular. . . . But when the Church becomes secular, it is the greatest conceivable misfortune both for the Church and the world. . . . It loses its specific importance and meaning; the justification for its existence. But its secularisation---the entry on the steep slope which leads to the abyss in which it is only the world---is its alienation.⁴¹⁷

This means that, for Barth, what is alarming about the church's life is not its being persecuted by the world but its identifying itself with the world, not its being a church as the kingdom of God under the pressure of the kingdom of the evil but its being a church as the kingdom of God identifying itself with the kingdom of evil.

How does, then, Barth see "nothingness" or "the principalities and powers" which are generally understood as the cause of the church's tribulation? Barth recognizes the real threat occasioned by these evil powers, but he maintains that whatever happens to the church happens within the framework of the certainty of Christ's victory over nothingness. Therefore its life is secure. And most importantly, the church is not an independent reality, but it is Christ's body. Any attack launched upon the church is

⁴¹⁶CD IV2, 671.

⁴¹⁷CD IV2, 668.

directed to the victorious Christ: but

the outward and inward threat which overhangs the community, the whole onslaught of the chaos which He [Christ] has mortally wounded, is no match at all for Him. It cannot defeat Him, nor can it separate Him as the Head from the community as His body.⁴¹⁸

The church will be able to stand the attack of nothingness as long as it remains a part of "the totality of His being,"⁴¹⁹ for "He, as the totus Christus, cannot die. That is why the community of His harassed and anxious saints also cannot die."⁴²⁰

Barth sets forth two factors which give rise to the persecution of the Christian: first, "the world must cause him this affliction as the witness of Christ"⁴²¹; second, "the world cannot accept the demand and challenge, and the less so the more clearly it realises what is at issue."⁴²² This, for Barth, inevitably entails the tribulation endured by the Christians. Barth, then, takes it as a fundamental principle that "none can be a Christian without falling into affliction. . . . Real Christians are always men who are oppressed by the surrounding world."⁴²³

This leads Barth to reflect upon the true meaning of martyrdom. He begins by identifying the cross of Christ as the ultimate explanation of Christian suffering. Like

⁴¹⁸CD IV2, 675.

⁴¹⁹CD IV2, 193.

⁴²⁰CD IV2, 675.

⁴²¹CD IV3.2, 619.

⁴²²CD IV3.2, 621.

⁴²³CD IV3.2, 618.

Calvin,⁴²⁴ Barth holds that the affliction from which the Christians suffer is presupposed by the cross. "They cannot deny Jesus," Barth asserts, "and so they cannot be spared and cannot refuse to be 'partakers of Christ's suffering.' They exist in the direct shadow of the cross."⁴²⁵ And it is from this perspective that Barth formulates his definition of martyrdom. Here Barth's focus is not so much on death as on suffering. Death is, of course, an intrinsic element of the notion of martyrdom, but due to his emphasis on witnessing Barth sees the resulting suffering to be more praiseworthy. But this is not to suffer for the sake of suffering. Rather, it is a suffering for the sake of Christ and his kingdom. For Barth, two important elements are involved in martyrdom, namely, doing and suffering. Barth says that the "the blessedness of both doers and sufferers comes together,"⁴²⁶ and observes in this connection that

what is praised is the situation of those who suffer martyrdom because they may be martyrs, i.e., witnesses of the kingdom, of Jesus Himself, and may prove themselves and genuinely act as such.⁴²⁷

Thus, what is important for Barth in his concept of martyrdom is not necessarily death but what the Christians "do" and "suffer." Those who receive a reward, Barth argues, are those who do and suffer for the sake of Christ and for the sake of God's kingdom. And

. . . the reward which He promises those who do and suffer, simply because they are in fact, directly or indirectly, His witnesses in their action or suffering, is

⁴²⁴See above, 99.

⁴²⁵CD IV2, 191.

⁴²⁶CD IV2, 191.

⁴²⁷CD IV2, 191.

nothing less than the kingdom of God as such, nothing less than himself.⁴²⁸

In fact, Barth speaks of martyrdom as analogous to Christ's passion. What befalls the Christian martyrs is ultimately a shadow of the cross. Thus, referring to the affliction caused by martyrdom Barth says that "It can plunge Christians into a darkness which, if it is certainly not that of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is quite unmistakably that of the shadow of His cross."⁴²⁹ Barth does not hesitate to speak of a little Gethsemane and Golgotha for each Christian. Barth claims that

It would be sheer exaggeration to speak of a Gethsemane and Golgotha to be borne by Christians. Nevertheless---and this is the result of their enterprise---the world can remind them, and in their persons their Lord, of that great affliction in sharp and painful reflections and analogies.⁴³⁰

At least Christians become aware of the significance of Christ's cross in their suffering, but the truth is that Christians suffer as a real imitation of Christ:

It is for His sake, for the sake of His name, in fellowship or union with Him, as Christ lives in the Christian and the Christian in Him, as the Christian bears the stamp of the crucified, in His reflection and image, in analogy of His great passion, that the Christian suffers.⁴³¹

The imitation of Christ entails a transfer of all significance of Christ's passion to the suffering Christians. Most importantly it reflects Christ's humiliation and exaltation.

The Christians' witness to Christ is a service that they render to the world in humiliation, but this is also their honor. Barth argues that

⁴²⁸CD IV2, 192.

⁴²⁹CD IV3.2, 636.

⁴³⁰CD IV3.2, 636.

⁴³¹CD IV3.2, 641.

When the New Testament speaks of suffering or tribulation or taking up and carrying the cross in most contexts we are to remember more or less concretely that Christians must experience abasement, contempt and persecution in the obedience of their service in relation to the world, and yet that this is in truth their honour.⁴³²

By "abasement" and "honour" Barth obviously means respectively "humiliation" and "exaltation."⁴³³

That Christians still live a life under tribulation means that the parousia or the millennium is still the time of reconciliation but not yet the time of redemption. But Christian suffering is a sharing of Christ's passion, a sign of their union with Christ. For it is only through their union with Christ that Christians can also have a fellowship with God as his covenant-partners.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Barth presents a view totally different from that of premillennialists in regard to the concept of the church's tribulation and Christian suffering. By rejecting the apocalyptic concept of tribulation and by associating it with the history of the church, Barth is very Augustinian and Calvinistic in his outlook and betrays his amillennialist orientation.

Barth conceives of the return of Christ in terms of pure reward for believers and dreadful judgment for the world. Let us now turn to this last stage of the parousia.

⁴³²CD III4, 675.

⁴³³This is the theme of chapter XIV, "Jesus Christ, The Lord as Servant," esp. CD IV1, 157-357, and that of chapter XV, "Jesus Christ, the Servant as Lord," esp. CD IV2, 3-377.

C. The Third Stage of The Parousia as the Unity of Transcendence and History

There is a sense in which, according to Barth's eschatology, the return of Christ, which will usher in the final kingdom, will be a revelation of the union of God with his people and the unity of transcendence and history, eternity and time. We have seen in the first and second stages of the parousia that eternity came down to join history and time. The result of this "act of reconciliation" is, in a sense, the unity of eternity and time and transcendence and history, which was first revealed in and made possible through Christ's incarnation. But the significance of the third stage of the parousia is that it is the locus of the consummation of this unity, which is to be understood as the union of Christ and his redeemed people, the union of God and the citizens of his kingdom. Barth believes that this union is already a reality now, but it is still "under a veil." "The veil is the present time."⁴³⁴ But it will be fully disclosed when Christ returns.

First of all, in order to avoid any misunderstanding of Barth's idea of union of God and his people, it seems helpful to see in what way he differs from Hegel's idea of Aufhebung.

1. Barth and Hegel on the union of God and Humanity

Barth's idea of unity of transcendence and history must be distinguished from Hegel's concept of Aufhebung of the finite into the infinite. For Hegel, human final destiny consists in God and human beings ultimately becoming one, as they are reconciled through the development of human consciousness in history and God's attainment of self-

⁴³⁴Barth, Faith of the Church, 166.

consciousness in humanity. Hegel begins with the premise that God and humanity are both Spirit with respect to their essence and thereby posits their identity. Their only difference resides in the former being infinite and the latter being finite.

Hegel looks at the relationship between God and humankind from a panentheistic perspective. He first speaks of God as the Absolute, as the Geist in sich, as the Abstract Truth. But God himself, although he is "true" is not "real" before he manifests himself in the world. God becomes real only through his self-consciousness in humanity. "God is God only in so far as He knows Himself. His self-knowledge is His self-consciousness in man, is the knowledge man has of God, which advances to man's self-knowledge in God."⁴³⁵ Against this background the reconciliation of God with human beings occurs through a progressive consciousness of God, which Hegel relates to his dialectic of the Absolute Spirit being "in itself," "for itself," and "in and for itself."

The influence of Hegel on Barth cannot be denied, but Barth, however, is strongly opposed to Hegel's idea of the Aufhebung of religion into philosophy which actually ends up in panentheism. Yet, the real difference between Barth and Hegel lies in the fact that although Hegel sees God as a transcendent being, as an "Absolute Spirit" his principles run counter to Barth's view of God as a transcendent God, with his kingdom breaking into history from above. Hegel presents God as an immanent God who does not transcend historical events but depends on human self-consciousness for his self-realization and existence. For Hegel, God is only real in the thought of those who believe in him.

⁴³⁵Encyclopédie, par. 565, cited by Hugh R. Mackintosh in Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet, 1937), 103.

Hegel's Christology reveals that Jesus Christ has no particular significance for God's work of reconciliation except that "the identity of God and man could not have occurred explicitly in one man [that is, in Jesus Christ] had it not been implicitly in all."⁴³⁶ Additionally, the fulfillment of reconciliation and redemption is achieved in Christ as he embodies the eternal truth which humans must attain through self-consciousness in order to exist as Spirit and become united with God. Hegel says that

. . . in Christ man is redeemed and reconciled: for in him the Concept of eternal Truth is recognized, that the essence of man is Spirit, and that only by stripping himself of his finiteness and surrendering to pure self-consciousness does he attain the Truth. Christ---man as man---in whom the unity of God and man has appeared, has himself, in his death and his history generally, presented the eternal history of Spirit---a history which every man has to accomplish in himself in order to exist as Spirit or to become a child of God, a citizen of His kingdom."⁴³⁷

From this statement emerges the fundamental difference between Barth and Hegel. Even though Barth also holds that the believers are children of God and citizens of his kingdom, they never become Spirit, angels, or any other spiritual beings. For Barth, the union between God and humans become real in the consummation of the kingdom, but God remains God and humans remain human.

To Hegel's finite-infinite dialectic corresponds Barth's time-eternity and history-transcendence dialectic, but they end up in two different kinds of synthesis.⁴³⁸ In Hegel's speculative rationalism, the synthesis is attained through God's immanence in

⁴³⁶Stephen D. Crites, "The Gospel according to Hegel," Journal of Religion (April 1966): 255.

⁴³⁷Hegel, Philosophie der Geschichte, III, 741 (trans. Sibree, 328). Cited by Crites in "the Gospel of Hegel," 259.

⁴³⁸McCormack rightly argues that "Barth did not have quite the same aversion to 'syntheses' that Kierkegaard had" (Dialectical Theology, 238).

humanity in which he reaches a higher state of consciousness, while human beings, at the same time, come to a full consciousness of their real destiny. Barth repudiates any suggestion of God's dependence on human beings for his attainment of self-consciousness. For Barth, God is One who reveals himself, that is, a God who has a complete knowledge of himself but not a God who advances to a higher self-consciousness. Barth insists strongly on God's act of freedom, on God as a living Person being totally independent of his creatures. As such, the union between God and humans arises exclusively from the decision and act of God's freedom, not from his need for his own creation.

For Barth, Jesus Christ as both real God and real human is the solution to the dialectic of eternity and time, transcendence and history. This can be considered against the background of Barth's idea of analogia fidei, which in our contention is part of Barth's dialectical method, as it functions as a dialectical synthesis. Actually, the analogy of faith concerns primarily God's revelation, which, in Barth's view, is made possible by God's "sanctification" of human words and concepts so that they may correspond to God's knowledge of himself. But the analogy of faith also sheds light on the possibility of the union between God and the people of his kingdom. The otherness of God remains despite his humanity in Christ; therefore, any hint of any form of analogia entis is ruled out; but a real union between God and humanity is conceivable through the analogy of faith in which God is "adopting us, . . . pardoning, saving, protecting and making good."⁴³⁹ In order to preclude any form of human initiative, Barth is anxious to add that

⁴³⁹CD II/1, 223.

"We do not create this success. Nor do our means create it. But the grace of God's revelation creates it."⁴⁴⁰ God's union with his people is, then, to be conceived entirely as the prevenience of God's grace. Only God's grace prevails, not human capacity. What is expected from humans is faith, which is itself a gift from God.

After this brief observation, let us see in greater detail the way Barth articulates the union of God and the redeemed in God's eternal kingdom.

2. The Final Revelation of Jesus Christ as the Revelation of the Unity of Transcendence and History

The unity of transcendence and history, eternity and time began with the coming of God's kingdom to earth in the person and work of Christ and was revealed in its penultimate form during the first and second stages of the parousia. But it will be fully and ultimately manifested in the third form of the parousia in Christ's return.

In the light of Christ's incarnation, Barth does not hesitate to affirm that God's nature itself reflects the unity of transcendence and history, eternity and time. Barth begins by identifying God with eternity itself. "Eternity," he argues, "is His essence. He, the living God, is eternity."⁴⁴¹ Barth even goes so far as to say that "Eternity is thus the principle of the divine unity, uniqueness and simplicity."⁴⁴² Now eternity, as God's identity, became time. Barth points out that

From this standpoint . . . we cannot understand God's eternity as pure

⁴⁴⁰CD III, 223.

⁴⁴¹CD III, 639.

⁴⁴²CD III, 609.

timelessness. Since it became time, and God Himself without ceasing to be the eternal God, took time and made it His own.⁴⁴³

Thus we may say that eternity and time are combined in God's nature.

Actually, Barth adopts a christocentric approach to God's temporality. It is by virtue of Christ's incarnation that we can speak of God's "complete temporality."⁴⁴⁴ Barth refers the possibility of God's becoming temporal to his omnipotence and sovereignty. In his absolute power "we have to confess that He was able to do this. He was not only able to have and to give time as the Creator, but in Jesus Christ He was able Himself to be temporal."⁴⁴⁵ Barth is far removed from the neo-classical theism which makes time absolute, so that God himself is subject to time.⁴⁴⁶ Rather, Barth presents us with a God who is in full control of time, so that "time has no power over Him. And as One who endures He has all power over time."⁴⁴⁷

We observe here a reversal of the traditional view of time as a preparation for eternity. Rather it is eternity which is a preparation for time. Barth speaks of "a readiness of eternity for time."⁴⁴⁸ This is a confirmation of our thesis concerning the second stage

⁴⁴³CD II/1, 617.

⁴⁴⁴CD II/1, 620.

⁴⁴⁵CD II/1, 617.

⁴⁴⁶Cf. Colin E. Gunton, Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 178: Gunton describes Barth's view saying that "To make time absolute, so that even God is subject to it, as happens in neo-classical theism, is from this point of view idolatry."

⁴⁴⁷CD II/1, 609.

⁴⁴⁸CD II/1, 618.

of the parousia: eternity's readiness for time means God's turning to history. The transcendent God would never be submitted to history in its relativities and contingency, eternity would never be changed into time in its finiteness and limitedness, but transcendence and history, eternity and time can be united in God.

The consummation of the kingdom does not cause God to lose his temporal nature. Barth speaks of "God Himself in His post-temporality."⁴⁴⁹ Post-temporality still includes the elements of time and eternity. "God," Barth says, "is post-temporal. This statement completes the conception of eternity as that which embraces time."⁴⁵⁰ Barth defines God's post-temporality as "God in His Sabbath rest after the completion of all His works, the execution of all His will ad extra, the attainment of the goal of all His purposes . . .

..⁴⁵¹

The unity of time and eternity is purely the result of God's act. Nevertheless, it cannot be described as a unilateral movement of eternity towards time, for Barth assumes that it is not only the eternal God who became temporal in Jesus Christ but time also is lifted up to become eternity in him. Barth asserts that

In Jesus Christ it came about that God takes time to Himself, the eternal One becomes temporal . . . not only embracing time and ruling it, but submitting Himself to it, and permitting created time to become and be the form of eternity.⁴⁵²

The elevation of time to a union with eternity, Barth states, springs from God's

⁴⁴⁹CD II/1, 629.

⁴⁵⁰CD II/1, 629.

⁴⁵¹CD II/1, 630.

⁴⁵²CD II/1, 616.

love for his creature which he wants to share in his eternal existence. Barth indicates that it is "in the act of His love [that] God exalts something else to share in His eternity."⁴⁵³ Barth here obviously refers to the fulfillment of the covenant of grace in which God establishes a fellowship between himself and humankind.

What Barth understands about time and its relation to eternity is made more concrete if we look at it from the perspective of history. The union of time with eternity cannot be taken for granted. A case for reservation is to be made when time is seen in its close relation to history. To put it plainly, God would first judge history if it could be taken into his eternity. It may be illuminating to observe that, according to Barth, during the parousia or the millennium, history was already submitted to God's eternity and transcendence. Barth says that "Eternity . . . is the eternity of God, that is to say, the rule, the kingdom of God, His absolute transcendence as Creator, Redeemer, and King of things, of history."⁴⁵⁴

When Barth published the second edition of his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans in 1922, he was just at the beginning of his battle against liberal historicism, so that in a spirit of skepticism he approached history through a dialectic of thesis and antithesis. As such, Barth began by laying the stress on the consummation of God's kingdom as the judgment and even the end of human history. Barth declared that

The judgment of God is the end of history, not the beginning of a new, a second, epoch. By it history is not prolonged, but done away with. The difference between that which lies on this side of it is not relative but absolute: the two are separated

⁴⁵³CD IV1, 609.

⁴⁵⁴Barth, Resurrection, 105.

absolutely.⁴⁵⁵

However, it was revealed very soon that this negative view was not final as to Barth's concept of history. Barth does affirm that God in his sovereignty uses history by including it in his plan of salvation and even foreordained it in this way from eternity. It is also in this context that God will judge history. Barth argues that

There is no history in time that can end except with Him, i.e., under the judgment which He holds over it, and the results which He gives it. There is no part of time that with all its specific contexts must not be revealed as a part of the complete divine plan.⁴⁵⁶

The value of history will be, then, determined in relation to God's use of it and its corresponding contribution to God's redemptive plan. Barth says that

God will exist after all things and everything. He will look back, He will in reality decide what it has been and how far it has really been, just as He had already decided when it did not yet exist.⁴⁵⁷

Thus, it will be at the end of history that God will decide whether it will be taken into God's eternity or not.

However, Barth also makes it clear that God's judgment is not so much for the destruction of history as for its "transformation," and from this stems the possibility of the unity of eternity and time, transcendence and history. Barth maintains that

By His speech and by His Judgment a transformation is effected so radical that time and eternity, here and there, the righteousness of men and the righteousness of God, are indissolubly linked together.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵Romans II, 77.

⁴⁵⁶CD III, 630.

⁴⁵⁷CD III, 630.

⁴⁵⁸Romans II, 77.

We see that Barth holds fast to this position when he declares:

Time as such is finite by virtue of its limitation by eternity. But as the word that first establishes and the history of the beginning it must be understood, as the word and history of the origin of all time, of the whole of time. For if eternity limits and sets an end to time as such, it marks it indeed as finite, but it marks it. Whoever clearly grasps this is removed from the temptation to confuse the end-of-history with a termination of history. . . . But he will also be removed from the other temptation, to confuse eternity with great annihilation, and to make the end-of-history an annihilation of history. That would, in fact, not be real eternity, not even the eternity of God, which dissolves time into infinity, instead of marking it (marking it) as infinite.⁴⁵⁹

This is Barth's way of saying that eternity cannot be time infinitely prolonged. This is impossible since, as Barth is not tired of emphasizing, God himself is eternity. "He is God in His eternity. But this duration is exclusively His being."⁴⁶⁰ Thus, eternity is actually the origin of time as well as history and it also marks their limits at the endtime. But eternity does not thereby annihilate time and history but receives them in its eternity.

Barth illustrates the unity of transcendence and history with the relationship between eternity and human life in the consummation of God's kingdom. It will be an eternal life in this very world. Barth begins with an appeal to the Creed which, in Barth's view, does not depict human life in eternity as a life of a different category. "When eternity of our life is spoken of in the Christian Creed," Barth observes, "it does not mean a life of any super-temporal kind, or timelessness or infinite time."⁴⁶¹ Barth is opposed to the assumption that eternal life will be an annihilation of this life and its replacement with a different life in another world. This may be unexpected given Barth's strong

⁴⁵⁹Barth, Resurrection, 106.

⁴⁶⁰CD II/1, 609.

⁴⁶¹Barth, Credo, 170.

emphasis on transcendence, but this is a view which is also perfectly consistent with Barth's great interest in the earth, that is, in creation, which Barth calls "the external basis of the covenant."⁴⁶² This means that eternal life, although it will not be a mere prolongation of the present human life, will be an earthly life. But it will also be a life which shares in God's eternity. Barth is clear about this world being the future realm of eternal life. For Barth, neither will this world be destroyed, "nor does eternity of our life mean that this life of ours is annihilated and its place taken by some other life in some other world, even if it be an eternal world."⁴⁶³

What then is Barth's understanding of "eternal" life? He describes it as follows:

Eternal life in the sense of the Holy Scripture is this life that is ours now in this world that now is, this life, still as it has always been, distinguished from the life of God, since it is created, but now, as a life that has become new in an earth that has become new under a heaven that has become new,---life that has become new in its relation to God its Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer.⁴⁶⁴

Barth here insists upon the fact that eternal life will be this earthly life, but this life made new. The sphere of eternal life will be the same heaven and earth, but the heaven and the earth made new.

It is in the consummation of the kingdom of God, in the beginning of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth that the unity of transcendence and history, eternity and time, divine life and human life will be made most evident. Barth underlines the fact that Christ's life and the life of the redeemed are made one in eternity as a result of Christ's

⁴⁶²CD III3, 94-228.

⁴⁶³Barth, Credo, 170.

⁴⁶⁴Barth, Credo, 170.

reconciling work. Barth states this idea expressly in this way:

Become new in this respect, that it is now no more a life differing within itself, as on the one hand, our life in Christ and, on the other, as our own life, but now . . . at once as eternal life and as our own life, a life which is reconciled with God and therefore righteous and holy.⁴⁶⁵

We see here the true meaning of the unity of transcendence and history, eternity and time. It means the consummation of the union of Christ with his people. In the first and the second stages of the parousia Barth usually spoke of reconciliation and redemption, and the resulting union of Christ with the believers to be true ultimately in Christ alone. In the third stage of the parousia this union is revealed to be true not only on Christ's side but also on his people's side.

This union will be made manifest not only in the relation between Christ and the redeemed but also in the union between God and his people, the citizens of his kingdom, as the fulfillment of his covenant. Referring to the church, Barth speaks of a

. . . new form of the community (identical with the *πολίτευμα* of Phil. 3:20 and the heavenly Jerusalem of Rev. 21: 2), which here and now is future and transcendent, but which is perfect and comes down from heaven, from God, upon it, and only then the specific incorruptible *οἰκητήριον*, the eternal tabernacle (Lk. 16:9), of the individual Christian which is included in it.⁴⁶⁶

We note here Barth's inclusion of Christians in "the new Jerusalem," in the "eternal tabernacle." But then Barth speaks of the same "new Jerusalem" and of the "tabernacle of God with men"⁴⁶⁷ as "the habitation of God to which the community is built up [and

⁴⁶⁵Barth, Credo, 170.

⁴⁶⁶CD IV2, 629.

⁴⁶⁷CD IV3.2, 612.

which] is to be thought in terms of the city of Rev. 21:3."⁴⁶⁸ Barth presents us here with a picture of God and the people of his kingdom being united in the "new Jerusalem." Barth apparently conceives of the new Jerusalem as a symbol of the union of God and the citizens of his kingdom.

The consummation of reconciliation as redemption, therefore, is to be understood in terms of the union of Christ and his redeemed people, the union of God and the citizens of his kingdom. This is the theme of the final revelation in Christ's final return. Let us now take a closer look at the way Barth conceives of the process of this final revelation.

3. The Unfolding of the Final Revelation

We have described the final revelation in general terms as the unity of transcendence and history, eternity and time, which we identified as the consummation of the union of Christ and his redeemed people, and the union of God and the citizens of his kingdom. Now we need to examine in more detail the development of this final revelation.

One thing is pivotal even for the third stage of the parousia in Barth's construal of the final revelation, namely, the death and resurrection of Christ. Barth teaches that the second coming of Christ will be a repetition and the consummation of the Easter-event. In his opinion,

We cannot look back upon this event . . . without having still to look forward to the event in which it will be repeated and renewed and consummated in another

⁴⁶⁸CD IV2, 629.

form, namely, in the coming of Jesus Christ in evident lordship over the creatures of all times and places and for the evident judgment of the quick and the dead and their evident subjection by His judgment.⁴⁶⁹

Christ's final advent, then, is only the end of what is provisional and penultimate and the revelation of what is final and ultimate. But the interpretive principle remains the same for the former as well as for the latter. It is to be done against the background of Christ's resurrection.

How would the process of the final revelation begin? Premillennialists, who stress the importance of what is known as "signs of the times," would argue that it begins with dramatic events preceding Christ's final return. Amillennialists also make a case for the "signs of the times" but they claim that these are disastrous events which happen not just before Christ's return, but occurrences which signal the presence of the eschaton since Christ's first coming. In conformity with amillennialists, Barth holds that, the "signs of the times" are events that occur throughout the millennium, that is, during the period between Christ's first coming and his final advent, and that these are events intimately connected with Christ's death and his resurrection.

Barth seems to be unwilling to use this term "signs of the times" for fear it would lead to an interpretive confusion. He is convinced that it would be a mistake to give these "signs" a merely apocalyptic meaning, that is, that they would only be understood as catastrophic events announcing the nearness of Christ's return. Barth does not deny that Christ's return will be immediately preceded by signs, but he refers to them as

⁴⁶⁹CD IV3.1, 319.

"immediate prelude,"⁴⁷⁰ probably for the purpose of avoiding any suggestion of final destruction. For Barth, all the "signs" are located in Christ's death and resurrection and they are repeated and confirmed in Christ's final appearing.

In connection with the signs of the end of this age narrated in Mark 13 and Matthew 24, for example, Barth sees all the terrifying happenings not as events which take place for the first time at the end of the world history, but as a repetition and consummation of what occurred during Christ's crucifixion. Barth advances a few examples to illustrate his point. He distinguishes two different locations for the events recorded in Mark 13, which he groups into three categories, namely, the "world-wide disaster," "the tribulation of the Church," "and as a climax, the fall of Jerusalem, which the surviving elect must escape by headlong flight."⁴⁷¹ The two locations of these "signs" are, first, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Barth calls them "the three prophecies of the passion and resurrection of Jesus elevated to a cosmic scale,"⁴⁷² which are "the shadow of the cross falling on the cosmos."⁴⁷³ These are, then, events which originate in Christ's death and resurrection before they echo through the period of the parousia and fill the whole cosmos.

The second location is the time immediately before the return of Christ, as "the

⁴⁷⁰CD III2, 500.

⁴⁷¹CD III2, 500.

⁴⁷²CD III2, 501.

⁴⁷³CD III2, 501.

immediate prelude to the coming of the Son of Man."⁴⁷⁴ Here Barth, like all amillennialists, does not reject totally the premillennialist emphasis on terrifying happenings accompanying Christ's return. But, unlike premillennialists, Barth connects them with Christ's death and resurrection and understands them not only in terms of judgment but mainly in terms of salvation.

Barth applies the same concept in relation to the case of the heavenly bodies. He interprets the signs like the sun becoming dark and the moon ceasing to give light, which, according to Mark 13:24 and Matthew 24:20, will precede the end-time and Christ's second coming, in the light of Luke 23:45 according to which "the sun was darkened" at the death of Jesus. Luke does not deny that these are signs of the end of the age and Christ's return, as we see in Luke 21, but he also brings them back to their proper context, that is, the death of Christ. Thus Barth first relates these signs to Christ's death and holds that "in this event he [Luke] sees a central and typical fulfilment of prophecy" and that "the other Evangelists held the same view of the darkness although they did not express it."⁴⁷⁵

As he focuses his attention first on Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection Barth concludes that

As all promising beginnings point to the beginning of the coming new age which took place typically in the resurrection of Jesus; and all the judgments point to the divine judgment and the end of the age which took place in His death on the cross, so the darkness, i.e., the darkening of all created lights in the hour of His death, is the darkness of all darkness to which we must refer even the recurrent

⁴⁷⁴CD III2, 500.

⁴⁷⁵CD III1, 167.

repetitions of the Old Testament prophecies in different parts of the Apocalypse (6:12, 8:10, 9:1).⁴⁷⁶

Barth means that this cosmic cataclysm in the form of "darkness" is an eschatological event foretold in the Old Testament prophecy. It constitutes the "terrors of the end"⁴⁷⁷ which are the reflection of God's judgment, but it is in the first instance tied up to Christ's death and resurrection as sign of salvation, as the term "promising beginnings" suggests.

This event, then, arises from Christ's death and resurrection, but it will be repeated again at the return of Christ and in the final judgment. Barth sees in what happens to the heavenly bodies the similarity between the death and resurrection of Christ in the first stage of the parousia and his return and the judgment in the third stage of the parousia: they are both characterized by the same events because they also both represent the end of time, and as such they are also the goal of human history. Thus, speaking of the heavenly bodies Barth says:

As the death of Jesus is the goal of that history, it is also the end of time. As all prophecies point to Him, they necessarily speak of the last time this side of his resurrection and return, of the end of time this side of the dawn of the new creation. And they do so by uttering their terrifying warnings but also their friendly promises, not about the end and dissolution of the constellations, but about the end and dissolution of their shining and therefore of their ministry. This ministry reaches its boundary with the personal entry of God on behalf of His creation, with His own shining as the eternal light, with the resurrection and return of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷⁸

Thus the dissolution of the constellations represents both the endtime anticipated in

⁴⁷⁶CD III1, 167.

⁴⁷⁷CD II2, 597.

⁴⁷⁸CD III1, 168.

Christ's death and resurrection and the endtime fulfilled in Christ's final return.

Here is a good illustration of Barth's rejection of the apocalyptic interpretation which focuses on a tragic end and destruction. In regard to what happens to the constellations, the "end . . . of their shining," Barth argues, is "the end . . . of their ministry." The same darkness already happened when Christ died on the cross. But the same darkness will happen again at the beginning of the new era marked by the return of Christ since the light of the heavenly bodies must yield the place to God's light (Rev. 22:5).

Therefore, all these signs, including the "world-wide disaster," "the persecution of the Church," and fall of the heavenly bodies all belong to the three forms of the parousia. They all happen during the whole parousia. In the third stage they function as revelation of the consummation of what happened during the two first stages.

For a better understanding of Barth, it is important to note that he indeed makes a clear-cut distinction between what we may call "the last days" and "the last day,"⁴⁷⁹ but he also finds a real continuity between them as a continuity between transcendence and history, eternity and time. It is on the basis of this kind of relationship that Barth can contend that "the end of history" is also "the history of the beginning."⁴⁸⁰ We have just seen Barth's rejection of the idea of annihilation of history by eternity. Barth sees time and history first encompassed by eternity, and then, at the end-time, to be united to

⁴⁷⁹A. Hoekema rightly defines "the last days" as our present age after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; whereas "the last day" refers to "the age to come, usually to the day of judgment or the day of the resurrection" (cf. The Bible and the Future, 19).

⁴⁸⁰Barth, Resurrection, 106.

eternity. This is apparently what Barth means when he says that "we have to do here with the doctrine of the 'End,' which is at the same time the beginning, of the last things, which are, at the same time, the first."⁴⁸¹ In short, the end implies a continuity, not an apocalyptic destruction or interruption. Barth takes 1 Corinthians 15: 50-57 to be an example of this idea of the "End" as continuity. Barth points out that "verses 50-57 [are] characteristically one of those end-of-histories which are no end-of-histories at all, but only the unparalleled continuations of history."⁴⁸²

After the "prelude" of Christ's return will take place the actual final revelation, which will begin with the revelation of Christ himself. Barth specifies this final form of revelation again as the revelation of the effective presence of Jesus Christ, which the whole world will witness in its fullness and finality. Barth declares that

If the parousia is an eschatological event in its third and final stage as well, this means specifically that in it we have to do with the manifestation and effective presence of Jesus Christ in their definitive form, with His revelation at the goal of the last time.⁴⁸³

The "definitive form" of the revelation of Christ's presence will consist in the fact that Christ will be widely known as truly a Redeemer, a Lord, a King, and a Judge. This will be the climax of his exaltation because he will be revealed as "Victor."

We have seen that Barth understands Christ's victory as victory over nothingness

⁴⁸¹Barth, Resurrection, 107.

⁴⁸²Barth, Resurrection, 110.

H. W. Boer seems to overlook this idea of end as continuity in Barth when he criticizes him for refusing to see apocalypticism in 1 Corinthians 15 (cf. H.W. Boer, "Apocalyptic Eschatology," Interpretation, 21 (January 1967): esp. 52-56.

⁴⁸³CD IV3.1, 295.

and the demons, which did not only begin in his final return. The battle is already won in Christ's death on the cross and in his resurrection. Barth insists that "He has triumphed over them at every point where they seemed to triumph over him, namely, in his crucifixion."⁴⁸⁴ This will be the time for the revelation of the true meaning of Jesus' victory. In this it will be revealed that the overcoming of the Devil and his kingdom is resolved and even accomplished in the eternal will of God.⁴⁸⁵

Barth distinguishes the defeat of Satan and the demons from their final destruction. Before they meet their end at Christ's return a limited power was left in them since they still had to serve Christ in his kingdom. But Barth now announces their final annihilation:

Their merited end will be their destruction in the consummation of his parousia, when even their pseudo-reality, the appearance of autonomy in which they now live and their being, will be abolished.⁴⁸⁶

No more battles will take place. Christ's final appearing will be only a revelation of the end of these evil beings and the revelation of Christ's victory.

We note in this connection that premillennialists understand the final eradication of evil in the light of the destruction of Gog and Magog at the end of the millennium, according to Revelation 20:8-10. Barth does not deny the annihilation of the Devil and the demons before the beginning of God's final kingdom but he approaches this reality from the perspective of the battle against sin, death, and the devil Christ fought on the cross and the victory he won in his resurrection, and also from the perspective of the

⁴⁸⁴Barth, Christian Life, 218.

⁴⁸⁵CD IV3.1, 179.

⁴⁸⁶Barth, Christian Life, 218.

significance of that victory in his final and glorious appearing. In a word, Barth sees Christ as victorious not so much in his return, as premillennialists believe, as in his first coming, his death and resurrection, as amillennialists argue. Barth affirms that it is at Christ's final return that "nothingness is routed and extirpated,"⁴⁸⁷ without suggesting that this happened after a final battle. In fact, Christ's final advent is only a complete disclosure of his victory.

The unveiling of Christ's hidden victory will also occur through the resurrection of his people. Barth describes the return of Christ as "the arrival, nay, the presence, of the hidden Christ and His Victory, with which the resurrection even of His own is occurrence."⁴⁸⁸ In this will be revealed the meaning of Christ's resurrection, which is ultimately the deliverance of his people from the bondage of death. In the resurrection of Christ's people will be disclosed the true meaning of redemption, which still remains provisional in the form of reconciliation.

Barth summarizes the content of the second coming of Christ, by stating that it will be a

... comprehensive context of the final redeeming act of God in full manifestation of the reconciliation of the world accomplished in Jesus Christ, of the conclusion of peace between the Creator and the creature established in Him, of the alteration of the whole of human and cosmic reality effected in Him.⁴⁸⁹

The fulfillment of the covenant is in a word, what Christ's final return brings. This is what the church proclaimed, but now it is proved to be true.

⁴⁸⁷CD III3, 363.

⁴⁸⁸Barth, Resurrection, 167.

⁴⁸⁹CD IV3.2, 931.

Additionally, a vindication of the church, in view of its belief in Christ and the service it rendered to him will be also part of this final revelation. In this respect, the most important thing which will be revealed will be the church's sharing in the Christ's kingship. We have seen that the reign of the martyrs and the saints was difficult to establish during the intermediate state. But Barth can confirm it in Christ's final appearance. He puts it this way:

With Jesus Christ Himself, His community as such, in His service, will come and be revealed in the world in glory, and will even assist its Lord in the judgment of Israel, in the judgment of the world and angels, and in His kingly rule, so that it can be called a "royal priesthood."⁴⁹⁰

The final revelation can be rounded off as the revelation of Jesus Christ and that of the kingdom of God. For Barth, "The revelation of the kingdom is linked with the consummation of the life of Jesus in His death. It is its revelation."⁴⁹¹ This revelation is not only intended for those who are alive but for all human beings who existed on earth. They will be raised to witness it, for it will be used as the basis of their judgment and will determine their inheritance of God's kingdom or their condemnation. This general resurrection is the theme of our next section.

4. The Resurrection of the Dead

In Barth's opinion, Christ's victory over death includes all other victories such the defeat of sin and the Devil. God's kingdom cannot be established without death being stamped out. Thus the destruction of death is the primary purpose of Christ's kingdom:

⁴⁹⁰CD III2, 505.

⁴⁹¹CD III2, 499.

The aim of the movement, which is the meaning of the kingdom of Christ, is the abolition of death. Death is the peak of all that is contrary to God in the world, the last enemy.⁴⁹²

Consequently, Barth holds that true Christianity is one which looks forward to the consummation of Christ's kingdom, which is characterized by the elimination of death. For Barth, "A Christianity which has not this meaning of the kingdom of Christ, i.e., the abolition of death---such Christianity is nonsense."⁴⁹³ Barth here echoes Paul in his statement that "If there is no resurrection of the dead . . . our preaching is useless, so is your faith" (1 Cor. 15:14, NIV). This, for Barth, indicates how crucial the resurrection of the dead is for the fulfillment of our salvation.

Barth apparently assumes that if there is no resurrection of the dead there would be no citizens of the kingdom, and without the people of the kingdom the kingdom cannot be a kingdom. Therefore, he goes so far as to contend that the kingdom of God and the resurrection of the dead are identical. "The kingdom of God or fulfilment," Barth argues, "is not, as may so easily be thought, a higher continuation of this life, but just the resurrection of the dead."⁴⁹⁴ In the same vein, Barth associates the Pauline idea of God "all in all" with the resurrection of the dead, saying that "this 'God all in all,' and hence the general resurrection of the dead, is the meaning . . . of the resurrection of Christ, the meaning of the Christian faith."⁴⁹⁵ We note Barth's insistence on the idea of a "general

⁴⁹²Barth, Resurrection, 169.

⁴⁹³Barth, Resurrection, 172.

⁴⁹⁴Barth, Resurrection, 172.

⁴⁹⁵Barth, Resurrection, 165.

resurrection" instead of a series of resurrections as premillennialists and dispensationalists teach. When Barth speaks of the third form of the parousia as the time for the final and "complete revelation,"⁴⁹⁶ he refers to it as the time when Christ will appear as "the Author of the general resurrection of the dead and the Fulfiller of universal judgment."⁴⁹⁷ "General resurrection" implies that there will be a single resurrection of the dead set in motion by Christ's second coming.

This leads us to the controversy raised by the interpretation of verse 4 of Revelation 20, "they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (NIV). What is at issue is whether there will be two resurrections or just one. Premillennialists understand "they came to life" as reference to a physical resurrection, that is, as the resurrection of the believers for a millennial reign with Christ, which implies that there will be another resurrection, namely, that of the unbelievers at the end of the millennium.⁴⁹⁸

Actually, Barth does not get involved in this kind of debate, and even avoids any reference to Revelation 20:4, but he takes the opportunity to state his position in his exposition of Paul's teaching concerning the resurrection of the dead. In his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15: 23-24, Barth rejects the assumption that Paul teaches two kinds of

⁴⁹⁶CD IV\3.2, 904.

⁴⁹⁷CD IV\3.2, 293.

⁴⁹⁸Dispensationalists teach that there will be at least three resurrections. Associating the resurrection with judgment the great exponent of dispensationalism, Walvoord, speaks of "the resurrection and judgment of tribulation saints," "the resurrection and judgment of Old Testament saints," and the resurrection of the wicked for judgment at the end of the millennium (cf. Walvoord, Millennial Kingdom, 278, 279, 332).

resurrections. What is disputed is the meaning "the end" in verse 24, which some exegetes understand in the sense of "the remainder," that is, the non-Christians who will rise subsequently. Barth rejects this view, which, in his time, he identifies as that of Leitzmann, on the ground that "if 'the end' be translated 'the remainder,' we are faced with the fact that in what follows no further mention is made of the resurrection of this remainder."⁴⁹⁹

The issue seems to be rendered complicated by the fact that Paul seems not to be interested in the resurrection of the unbelievers and mentions only the resurrection of the Christians in his epistles. But Barth attempts to settle this question through a comparison of the human situation as it is reflected in the person of Adam and as it is reflected in that of Christ. "In Adam all die," Barth points out, "is the account of every human life ruled off; 'in Christ shall all be made alive.'"⁵⁰⁰ Barth draws attention particularly to the term "all" both in connection with Adam and Christ. Barth argues that the latter "all" in relation to Christ determines the meaning of "those who belong to Christ" (v. 23, NIV), in such a way that it is "to be understood, not as exclusive, but as representative. The resurrection, like death, concerns all."⁵⁰¹ Thus, by laying the stress on the term "all" Barth is convinced that Paul conceives of the resurrection of the dead in terms of general resurrection.

Barth, therefore, repudiates any suggestion that Paul teaches that Christ's

⁴⁹⁹Barth, Resurrection, 163.

⁵⁰⁰Barth, Resurrection, 166.

⁵⁰¹Barth, Resurrection, 166.

resurrection will be first followed by the resurrection of the believers and subsequently by that of the unbelievers, which would confirm the premillennial belief according to which the resurrection of the believers will occur at the beginning of the millennium, whereas that of the unbelievers will not take place until the end of the millennium. Barth's position is consistent with that of amillennialism according to which there is only one return⁵⁰² of Christ which will be accompanied by one resurrection of the dead.

The resurrection of the believers is made possible by Christ's victory over death through his own death and his resurrection. In Barth's theology, the relationship between Christ's death and resurrection and the resurrection of his people is fraught with meaning. Let us consider here one important significance of this relationship, namely, the exaltation of humanity. In this we will also discover Barth's understanding of the rapture,⁵⁰³ which is an important element of the millennium.

First of all, for Barth, the exaltation of the believers is already achieved in Christ's humiliation on the cross, although it still remained hidden in the exalted Christ. Barth says that "In the New Testament order the exaltation of the one man Jesus Christ, in which the exaltation of his own is already latently accomplished, is followed by one

⁵⁰²Dispensational premillennialists teach that there will be two returns of Christ. The first will take place for the rapture, the second will occur seven years later for the destruction of all his enemies at the Battle of Armageddon and the binding of Satan (cf. A. A. Hoekema, The Christian and the Millennium [Grand Rapids: CRC Publication, 1986], 13, 29).

⁵⁰³Barth makes use of the dispensational term "rapture" but he seems to understand it in the sense of "change" and the assumption of the community. Barth, for example says: "Whether we describe it as rapture or change, a direct transition to participation in the glory which comes to the creaturely world in and with the coming of Jesus Christ can be the end of the Christian instead of dying" (CD IV3.2, 925).

assumption."⁵⁰⁴ By "one assumption" Barth means the "rapture" of the Church in which its glory will be revealed to the whole world. That the exaltation of the believers took place on the cross means that it is intimately bound with Christ's reconciling work and the covenant. Barth contends that

The reconstitution and renewal of the covenant between God and man consists in this exchange---the exaninatio, the abasement of God, and the exaltatio, the exaltation of man. It was God who went into the far country, and it is man who returns home.⁵⁰⁵

Human beings could become God's covenant-partners because they were exalted through Christ's self-abasement, through "His self-humiliation, His way into the far country, fulfilled in His death on the cross."⁵⁰⁶

This exaltation of human beings will be first revealed in their resurrection, which "is vouchsafed in the death, the resurrection and the second coming of the man Jesus,"⁵⁰⁷ When Christ returns "there will be raised up in incorruption, glory and power . . . that which was sown in corruption, dishonour and weakness."⁵⁰⁸ Barth describes the exaltation and glorification related to the resurrection as a revelation of a new status of human beings according to which "man will be in himself what he already is in Christ, new creation; . . . the garment of unrighteousness drops away from him and the garment

⁵⁰⁴CD III\2, 638.

⁵⁰⁵CD IV\2, 21.

⁵⁰⁶CD IV\1, 177.

⁵⁰⁷CD III\2, 625.

⁵⁰⁸CD III\2, 624.

of righteousness which he has for long been wearing secretly becomes visible."⁵⁰⁹

After the resurrection, the exaltation will be more concretely and openly manifested in the assumption of the church. Barth does not forget to mention that "in this assumption the dead will share no less than the living."⁵¹⁰ At this point, it is worth noting that, in Barth's eschatology, the "rapture," even though it is included in the believers's salvation, is not intended to rescue the church from a seven-year tribulation at the beginning of the millennium, as dispensational premillennialists teach.⁵¹¹ Indeed, the church will meet the Lord in the air, but it is only intended for the revelation of the church being exalted and glorified. Barth describes the "rapture" as

the assumption of the community to meet its Lord when He comes again at the final revelation in which the exaltation which has already occurred in Jesus Christ will be made manifest.⁵¹²

As the purpose of the "assumption of the community" is revelation, Barth looks forward to "the day when He [Christ] and it [the church] will be the subject of His revelation to all eyes and ears and hearts."⁵¹³

For Barth, the resurrection, the reception of a "spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15: 44), and the "assumption of the community" are all the meaning of redemption. He asserts that the Old Testament could not speak of this kind of salvation because it is something intimately

⁵⁰⁹Barth, Credo, 169.

⁵¹⁰CD III2, 638.

⁵¹¹See, for example, Hermann A. Hoyt, The End of Times (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 57-58.

⁵¹²CD III2, 638.

⁵¹³CD IV1, 149.

bound up with Christ.

It [the Old Testament] never says anything about resurrection, about that transition and transformation, about that manifestation of this life of ours in the glory of God. The New Testament speaks of this as and because it speaks of the saving event whose subject is the man Jesus.⁵¹⁴

Yet, not only the redemption of humankind but also the lordship and kingship of God are revealed in the general resurrection at the return of Christ. As far as he understands the apostle Paul, Barth argues that "Without any doubt at all the words 'resurrection of the dead' are, for him, nothing else than a paraphrase of the word 'God.'"⁵¹⁵ "What else could the Easter gospel be," Barth asks, "except the gospel become perfectly concrete that God is the Lord?"⁵¹⁶

Thus, the resurrection of the dead reveals God's nature: God is Lord and King. He is Creator and Redeemer. He is a God who establishes a fellowship and a communion with his people.⁵¹⁷ He is a loving, gracious, and glorious God, but he is also a holy and righteous God, that is, he is a God who judges.⁵¹⁸ Revelation 20 ends its description of

⁵¹⁴CD III/2, 624

⁵¹⁵Barth, Resurrection, 192.

⁵¹⁶Barth, Resurrection, 192.

⁵¹⁷Berkouwer calls attention to the originality of Barth's idea of "eternalizing" of human life for a full communion with God after the resurrection: "The life that has been, life in all its limitation and finiteness, finds 'room' in communion with God. This is the resurrection of the dead. Barth's conception of the 'eternalizing' of our ending life has, so far as I know, no antecedents in the history of Christian doctrine" (G. C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, trans. H. R. Boer [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956], 158).

⁵¹⁸For Barth's full exposition of what he calls God's "perfections," see CD II/1, 322-677.

the millennium with a portrayal of God as a Judge. But let us say already that, for Barth, God's judgment is still for the purpose of restoration and salvation.

5. Judgment as Restoration and Salvation

In the same way as the general resurrection, judgment is also included in the final revelation of the third stage of the parousia. Therefore, it is also directly linked to Christ's death and resurrection in the first stage of the parousia. Again, it is part of what Barth calls "the shadow of the cross falling on the cosmos"⁵¹⁹ By "shadow of the cross" Barth does not only mean the judgment reflected by Christ's death on the cross and the repetition of this judgment at his second coming, but he also conceives of judgment as something going on throughout the whole parousia as it is reflected in "all disasters of world history, all the persecutions and trials of the community, and above, all the judgment on Israel which culminates in the destruction of Jerusalem."⁵²⁰

However, Barth maintains that in all these forms in which the judgment is manifested is

. . . the participation in the divine judgment, effected in the death of Jesus, to which even the cosmos is subject, though this judgment is to its salvation, to the salvation of Israel, the salvation of the community, the salvation of all men, and indeed of the whole cosmos.⁵²¹

Barth asserts emphatically that the ultimate purpose of judgment is redemption but, as a matter of course, judgment also involves condemnation.

⁵¹⁹See above, 292-94.

⁵²⁰CD III2, 501.

⁵²¹CD III2, 501.

Barth portrays Christ in "His coming again in the final form of His parousia as Judge of the quick and the dead."⁵²² Like all amillennialists, Barth is faithful to the Apostles' Creed which teaches that there will be only one judgment for the living and the dead, for the believers and the unbelievers.⁵²³ But he highlights the seriousness of the judgment, declaring that "He will judge, and against His judgment there is no appeal. It is final. Corresponding to this judgment, all that has been will be before Him what it must be, accepted or rejected, acquitted or condemned, destined for eternal life or eternal death."⁵²⁴ The world will be judged by virtue of the "Word of reconciliation" proclaimed to it and the confession of the lordship and kingship of Christ which should have resulted from this proclamation.

This leads Barth to turn immediately to the case of the church community. The church community acknowledged and confessed "‘already before all others’ what has been done for all, and what, as it has been done for all."⁵²⁵ It also "will be seen and acknowledged and confessed by all when He appears as Judge of the quick and the dead."⁵²⁶ Here we are back to Barth's idea of the glorification and exaltation of the church. The judgment day will not be for the condemnation of the church. Rather, it will

⁵²²CD IV\3.2, 925.

⁵²³Cf. Karl Barth, Credo, 117-26. Dispensationalists teach that there will be three different judgments: the judgment of the believers which will take place by the time of the rapture, that of the Gentiles and Israel at the beginning of the millennium, and that of the wicked at the end of the millennium (cf. New Scofield Bible, 1375, n. 1).

⁵²⁴CD IV\1, 630.

⁵²⁵CD IV\1, 662.

⁵²⁶CD IV\1, 662.

be the time when the glory of the church will mostly be made manifest. The vindication of Christ in his resurrection and glorious return will also be the vindication of the church in its assumption and in its judgment.

The judgment will only be to the advantage of the church in the sense that it will be based on the ignorance of the proclamation of the church and on the persecution of the church. "If He comes at all," Barth says, "it will be to judge the world for persecuting and oppressing the poor Church in time, for resisting and ignoring it."⁵²⁷ Instead of believing in the proclamation of the church, the world moved in the direction of causing tribulation to it. But this will be the reason for its condemnation. Barth does not suggest that the time of judgment will be still an occasion for repentance since the time when Christ comes as Judge is located after the time that God, in his patience, gave people for repentance. "He is coming," Barth says, "because the time which by the patience of God is allowed as room for repentance to the old man and so also to the church is in its nature a time that is passed away."⁵²⁸

Barth is anxious to add that while those who rejected the Word of God and persecuted the church are judged and condemned, "the Church itself will stand triumphant at His right hand, self-evidently before the judgments have even begun."⁵²⁹ Barth means to say that the church will not go through judgment at all. "The truth is rather that as God fulfills this judgment in Jesus Christ, He treats this One who is judged as His Elect and

⁵²⁷CD III2, 511.

⁵²⁸Barth, Credo, 120.

⁵²⁹CD III2, 511.

eternally Beloved."⁵³⁰ As such, believers are acquitted from all eternity since Christ was the One judged in their place. We will face Christ's judgment-seat but our destiny has already been decided in eternity. "Jesus Christ Himself," Barth declares, "is the divine pre-decision, made in God's eternal decree and at the heart of time, from which we already come when we approach God's judgment."⁵³¹ Barth concludes by going so far as to say that "the only way in which we can approach God's judgment is with real joy in Him."⁵³²

Obviously, the joy associated with judgment springs from the assurance of salvation. But it is also worth noting that, just like Calvin who refuses to see in judgment punishment or destruction but rather conceives of it in terms of reformation and renewal of the world,⁵³³ Barth also argues that "judgment is not annihilation; by it all things are established. Cleansing is not a process of emptying; it is an act of fulfillment. God has not forsaken men; but God is---true."⁵³⁴ For Barth, judgment would contradict the work of reconciliation during the parousia if it had to occasion destruction.

God remains faithful to his promise on which his people set their hope during the church era, during the millennium. As the millennium comes to its end, it is also high time God fulfilled his promise. And the end of the millennium will be indeed a revelation

⁵³⁰CD II/2, 738.

⁵³¹CD II/2, 737.

⁵³²CD II/2, 737.

⁵³³See above, 98.

⁵³⁴Romans II, 79.

of God's faithfulness, for it will be characterized exclusively by redemption and restoration. Barth puts it this way: "The end is also the goal; the Redeemer is also the Creator; He that judgeth is also He that restoreth all things."⁵³⁵

⁵³⁵Romans II, 77.

CHAPTER V
EVALUATION

A. Barth as an Amillennial Theologian

Almost all the features characterizing the amillennial tradition emerge in Barth's eschatology. The following points deserve particular attention:

1. With all amillennialists Barth locates the millennium in the period between Christ's first coming and his final return. Barth adopts a christocentric approach to this period and identifies Jesus Christ himself with the millennium: first, the "being" of Christ is identical with the kingdom which came in his person and with his "act" of reconciliation, in such a way that Christ himself is identical with his "kingdom of reconciliation"; second, in the same token, Christ is identified with the covenant, with the church, and with Israel; fourth, we have seen that, for Barth, the millennium is the "ethical goal of history," but Christ himself represents and fulfills this goal¹; fifth, the parousia is nothing other than Christ's "coming" and "presence" in three different forms as Lord and King of the universe. These are all amenable to the conclusion that, in Barth's view, Jesus Christ himself is the millennium.

2. Like all amillennialists, Barth distinguishes only two ages: the present age and the age to come, without a period in-between which premillennialists call the

¹See above, 140-141.

"millennium." For Barth, the millennium is included in the present age as the church era and coincides with Christ's "kingdom of reconciliation," which is the penultimate form of the final kingdom or the age to come.

3. Barth, along with amillennialists, attempts to hold a balance between transcendence and history and eternity and time. Barth's mature theology even displays a view of God being united with his people, a union which still remains hidden but will be revealed in the consummation of the kingdom.

4. Christ is a victorious Lord and King since his death and resurrection, not only after his second advent as premillennialists teach. The "binding of Satan," which is a sign of this victory, is interpreted as a limitation of Satan's power and God's control of his activity, so that Satan is even compelled to serve God's kingdom.

5. Christ now reigns through the church in the power of the Holy Spirit while he is sitting on his heavenly throne at the right hand of the Father. The Israelite monarchy is a mere "prototype" (prophecy) and "copy" (shadow) of Christ's present "kingdom of reconciliation" in such a way that the premillennial belief in a future earthly and materialistic throne in Jerusalem is foreign to Barth's eschatology.

6. With all amillennialists, Barth speaks of a "general resurrection" which will be followed by a judgment and by God being "all in all."

This all indicates that Barth is an amillennial theologian and that the amillennial tradition is a vehicle to clarify his eschatology. Placing Barth into the amillennial school of thought illumines the tension between transcendence and history, eternity and time, and the divine and the human in his eschatological concept.

The strength of Barth's amillennial eschatology may be assessed through its ability to refute the other millennial orientations' charges against amillennialism. They are primarily centered on "spiritualizing." It is interesting to see what Barth's response to these accusations might be.

B. Barth Facing the Premillennialists' Charges of Spiritualizing

"Spiritualizing" is a hermeneutic issue. The charge against amillennialism of spiritualizing originates primarily from dispensational premillennialists. As an alternative to what they call "spiritualizing," dispensationalists such as Walvoord argue for a "'grammatical-historical' literal interpretation"² of the biblical prophecies concerning the restoration of the nation of Israel and that of the Davidic kingdom in Jerusalem.

In the light of his understanding of the kingdom of God, the covenant, the binding of Satan, and the resurrection of the dead, let us see how Barth might respond to this challenge.

1. Does Barth Spiritualize the Kingdom of God?

To the dispensational literalism Barth opposes his interpretation of the Old Testament prophecy in relation to the Israelite monarchy as a "prototype" of Christ's kingdom. But at the same time he sees the kingdom of Israel as a "copy" or a "shadow" of the kingdom of Christ. Barth has reversed the premillennial interpretive method: instead of Christ's kingdom pointing to the Davidic kingdom, it is the Davidic kingdom

²See above, 49.

which points to Christ's kingdom. In Barth's theory, there is no real identity between the kingdom of David and that of Christ. The former is only a "witness" of the latter.

The principle underlying Barth's hermeneutic is the fact that Jesus himself is Israel. Jesus Christ is "Himself the Israelite elected and called to the covenant and to be the mediator of the covenant."³ As a result of election, Israel as a church is part of Christ's body in the same way as the church that Christ himself built. "What is elected in Jesus Christ (His 'body')," Barth observes, "is the community which has the twofold form of Israel and the Church."⁴ According to this statement Barth sees an intrinsic unity between the church and Israel, or more exactly between the church of the New Testament and the Jewish synagogue. In a word, Israel is included in Christ's kingdom as it is identified with the church.

Barth, however, does not confine Christ's kingdom to Israel and the church but extends it to the whole world. He argues that Christ now reigns over and works in the world by reconciling it to God, by directing its history, and by preparing it to become God's kingdom. Barth insists that as Christ rules now in this world the real history in this world is the history of Jesus Christ.⁵

Barth defines the scope of Christ's being, power, and authority as something which embraces the whole world by presenting him as

the servant of God who stands before God as the representative of all nations and stands among nations as the representative of God, bearing the judgments of God

³CD IV\1, 35.

⁴CD II\2, 199.

⁵CD IV\3.1, 183.

and, living and testifying by the grace of God.⁶

This seems to be a climax of the description of Christ's power, authority, lordship, kingship, and rulership in and over this world. John Webster correctly stresses Barth's insistence on "the absoluteness of Jesus Christ as the God-man who embraces both sides of the covenant relation."⁷ This results in the fact that we cannot resist Christ's authority. Webster accordingly interprets "Jesus' history" as the history of "our being drawn into his sphere, which is in truth the sphere in which alone we may properly be said to exist."⁸ Webster means that Christ's kingdom is the only place in which human life and existence are possible even now. Christ's kingdom now includes all people as Barth's picture of the kingdom with Christ at the center, the church as the inner circle, and the world as the wider or outer circle indicates.

This authoritative rulership and all-encompassing kingship suggests that Christ's kingdom is more than a simple spiritual kingdom.

2. Does Barth Spiritualize the Covenant?

The dispensationalist attack on the covenant theology of amillennialism centers on the accusation that amillennialists ignore the contrast between law and grace and give more prominence to the covenant of grace.⁹ If dispensationalists consider this to be a sign

⁶CD IV\1, 35.

⁷John Webster, Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 93.

⁸Webster, Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation, 93.

⁹See above, 50-51.

of amillennial spiritualizing, this would identify Barth as the greatest amillennialist since Barth establishes a closer connection between law and grace than Calvin or anyone else in the Reformed tradition does. In his study of Calvin's view of the law, I. J. Hesselink acknowledges that "Barth, in fact, goes beyond Calvin in this respect."¹⁰ Calvin emphasizes the unity of the law and the gospel, but he also does not deny that the law precedes the gospel as a "preparation for seeking Christ."¹¹ The law convicts us of our sins and guilt and makes us ready for the message of grace of the gospel.

In point of fact, Barth follows Calvin in stressing the unity of the Old and the New Testaments, the two covenants, the law and the gospel.¹² Yet, while Calvin attempts to establish a well-balanced concept of the unity of law and gospel, Barth appears to be more direct in uniting law and grace. He rejects any form of separation of the "divine law, holiness and wrath" from the "revelation of the divine grace."¹³ The reason, Barth says, is that

. . . in Scripture we do not find the Law alongside the Gospel but in the Gospel, and therefore the holiness of God is not side by side with but in His grace, and His wrath is not separated from His love.¹⁴

Barth attempts to clarify this kind of relation and says that "the Gospel is the fulfillment

¹⁰Hesselink, Calvin's Concept of the Law, 156.

¹¹Institutes, II, 7, 2.

¹²In Calvin's Concept of the Law, Hesselink describes Calvin's view of the relation of law and gospel in terms of "unity of substance" (158-170), "distinction in the form or mode of administration" (170-188), and antithesis of letter and Spirit (188-202).

¹³CD III, 363.

¹⁴CD III, 363.

of the Law, while the Law is the form of the Gospel."¹⁵ But the unity of law and gospel reflected in the third use of the law in Calvin, that is, the law as it functions as norm of life, is a counterpoint of Barth's idea of the law as "the form of the gospel." This similarity in the intimate relation that Calvin and Barth establish between law and grace results in the fact that they both argue for the existence of a single covenant of grace. For Barth, in particular, God's holiness and his grace are combined in the covenant. Holiness is associated with God's law and judgment but when we speak of God's holiness, Barth argues, "we are not . . . making any crucial change of theme . . . We are merely continuing to speak of grace."¹⁶ As a result, God's holiness and grace are combined in his judgment. Therefore, Barth maintains that "the holiness of God consists in the unity of His judgment with grace."¹⁷

It is against the background of the unity of judgment and grace that God's giving of himself by entering into fellowship with humanity must be understood. The God who receives human beings as his covenant-partners is the One who judges them but at the same time bestows his grace upon them. But just as "the law is the form of the gospel," so also judgment is the form of grace. It is in this blend of judgment and grace that God can be described as One who loves in freedom¹⁸ and establishes his covenant by seeking

¹⁵CD III, 460.

¹⁶CD III, 359.

¹⁷CD III, 363.

¹⁸CD III, 354.

and creating fellowship with human beings.¹⁹ Other covenants²⁰ apart from this covenant of grace are foreign to Barth's theology. In this respect, Barth is far removed from dispensational premillennialism and stands in the rank of the amillennialists.

Satan is the greatest enemy who attempts to thwart the realization of the covenant. How can Barth's attitude toward Satan be described?

3. Does Barth Spiritualize the Binding of Satan?

The covenant cannot be established without the defeat of Satan who also claims human allegiance to him. What does this mean if Satan's binding is spiritualized?

Earlier we discussed the incoherence in the premillennialist contention in regard to the radicality of the binding of Satan: while Satan is completely immobilized he seems to continue to tempt people during the millennium, for some of them still rebel against Christ and the salvation of the children of the redeemed is still uncertain.²¹ We have seen that Barth does not understand the binding of Satan in the sense of complete immobilization. Rather, he insists on the idea of limitation of nothingness.²² Transcendental theology highlights God's sovereignty, God's unlimited power and authority, and God's victory. In relation to God's sovereignty Satan is indeed "nothing" or, in Barth's word, "nothingness," not only in regard to his being but also his power and

¹⁹CD III, 359.

²⁰Dispensationalists speak of several kinds of covenantal dispensations including what they call "covenant of redemption," "covenant of nature" (cf. Feinberg, Millennialism, respectively, 195, 196).

²¹See above, 95.

²²See above, 273-86.

his work. Barth's radical understanding of Christ's victory over Satan on the cross and in his resurrection, a victory which was God's will from eternity, implies the reality of God's full control over Satan. To say that Satan is not bound now would contradict this truth. This "demonized" world is under God's authority and victory in Christ. The assumption that Satan is not bound but reigns now in a total freedom robs Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection of its significance. In premillennialism and dispensationalism the significance of Christ's victory is removed from his cross and his resurrection and is transferred to his future return. But this misses totally the message of the Bible. The merit of Barth's eschatology and amillennialism is his insistence on the crucial importance of Christ's death and resurrection as the locus of Christ's victory over his enemies, but not on a fierce battle at his return. Christ's triumph is complete but, once again, Barth speaks of it in its penultimate and ultimate forms.

Christ's victory is revealed in his resurrection, but it will be revealed again in the resurrection of the dead at his return. The question at contention here concerns the amillennial "spiritualizing" of the idea of "first resurrection" in Revelation 20: 5-6.

4. Does Barth Spiritualize the First Resurrection?

We observed in the previous chapter²³ that Barth nowhere refers to Revelation 20: 5-6 concerning the "first resurrection." But in view of his strong emphasis on the church as a provisional representative of justification and sanctification we may assume that he would probably interpret the idea of "first resurrection" as "regeneration" in

²³Cf. above, 317-25.

relation to the church.

As has been shown earlier, Barth differs markedly from the premillennialists and the dispensationalists on the concept of the resurrection of the dead. Barth argues for a single general resurrection, while dispensationalists teach that there will be even more than two resurrections. But what is very important to note is that Barth and the premillennialists have two different focal points in regard to question of the resurrection of the dead. While Barth sees in it God's nature, his sovereignty, his love, and his grace, premillennialists tend to relate it only to God's vengeance and punishment. For Barth, the general resurrection means "God." He equates it with God being "all in all." It is then in the resurrection of the dead that God will be revealed for what he really is. His nature as Creator, Source of life, and Redeemer, his sovereignty, his majesty, his holiness, his love and grace, and his lordship and kingship over the universe will be fully revealed and fully grasped by all human beings.

Barth is consistent here with his thesis of God's essence being identical with his "act." God's being is not known through a triumphalist return of Christ in clouds but through his act of raising the dead. This focus on the resurrection means that, in Barth's view, the second coming of Christ does not so much mean condemnation as redemption. Yet, Barth does not view redemption in a universalistic sense since he also holds that there will be a judgment in which God's people will be separated from the wicked. On the other hand, premillennialists and dispensationalists introduce a different picture by portraying God as One who is preoccupied with a series of resurrection, judgment, and retribution. The predominant image is that of God venting his wrath on some group of

resurrected people, judging and condemning them. For Barth as well as all amillennialists, there will be resurrection and judgment, but it will be just one resurrection of the dead and one judgment in which each individual will be assigned either to eternal life in God's kingdom or to eternal perdition.

The deep root of the premillennialists' error is easy to detect: some pivotal elements, namely, the significance of Christ's first coming, and especially Christ's death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as signs of the presence of the triune God on earth as Savior, Lord, and King, do not receive their due emphasis. The emphasis is more on Christ's final return. But Barth is right in arguing that this event will be simply a final revelation of the redemption resulting from these foregoing events.

If a clear-cut distinction can be made between Barth's eschatology and premillennialism, is this true of Barth's view of the parousia and the other millennial school of thought called postmillennialism?

C. Barth's Concept of the Parousia and Postmillennialism

There is no point in identifying Barth as a postmillennialist. Our survey of his doctrine of the parousia gave no evidence that Barth entertained a thought of church history which moves gradually toward a "golden age." But there is a postmillennial understanding of the millennium which divides history into three periods, comparable to Barth's concept of the three-stage parousia and, as such, deserves to be considered. This is the teaching of Joachim of Fiore, a theologian of the Middle Ages.

Joachim's millennial position is ambiguous,²⁴ but theologians like Bloesch hold that Joachim was definitely a postmillennialist.²⁵ Joachim of Fiore²⁶ was a Cisterian mystic well-known for his attempt to divide human history into three epochs according to the three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Shirley Jackson Case describes this division in this way:

First, there was the age of the law, or the age of the Father, when the supreme demand upon men was obedience. The appearance of John the Baptist marked the transition to the second age, which is that of the gospel, or of the Son. This is the age to which the present earthly church belongs, when men are striving toward the attainment of mystical knowledge. The third age, which is that of the Spirit and of the truly spiritual church, has not yet dawned.²⁷

What is interesting about Joachim's concept is that it displays a scheme similar to that of Barth in many ways. First of all, the millennium being divided according to the three members of the Trinity is reminiscent of the three forms of the parousia although the concept is not exactly the same. Then Joachim attempted to establish a close connection between the Trinity and history. McGinn speaks of "Joachim's obsession with the ordering of the patterns of history."²⁸ But he also observes that "for Joachim the inner

²⁴ For this, see R. K. Emmerson, "The Advent Hope in the Middle Ages" in The Advent Hope in Scripture and History, ed. Norskov Olsen (Washington: Review and Herald, 1987), 111.

²⁵ Cf. Bloesch, Evangelical Theology, 192.

²⁶ For a biography and a brief exposition of the theology of Joachim of Fiore, see Bernard McGinn, Visions of the End (New York: Columbia Press University, 1979), 126-41.

²⁷ Shirley Jackson Case, The Millennial Hope (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918), 185.

²⁸ McGinn, Visions, 128.

meaning of the historical process could not be understood apart from the mystery of the Trinity."²⁹

This relationship between the trinitarian God and history seems to coincide with the relationship between transcendence and history in Barth's theology. Yet, we also have to highlight the great difference between Joachim and Barth. Barth does not present the three stages of the parousia as three different dispensations as we see in Joachim's scheme. As has been shown above, Barth indeed distinguishes three stages within the parousia but he also conceives of the parousia as an organic whole. To the perichoretic relation between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit corresponds a perichoretic relation between the three forms of the parousia. And finally, by grounding the unity of the parousia in the Trinity and in Christ's resurrection, Barth is obviously far removed from the divided and incongruous form of the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the millennium as found in Joachim of Fiore.

We do not consider Joachim's view to be representative of postmillennialism but the outward similarity between the structure of his thought and that of Barth made it necessary to show in what way they differ. This comparison is also important for it enables us to appreciate Barth's view and to see that he by no means is far from orthodoxy in his theory of three-stage parousia and God's presence on earth as Lord and king.

Finally, it is noteworthy that not only does Barth differ from Joachim's postmillennialism, but his eschatology is also diametrically opposed to what Richard

²⁹McGinn, Visions, 127.

Muller calls "the liberal postmillennial hope for the establishment of the ethical kingdom of God on earth."³⁰ We have seen that the liberal theologians' view of the kingdom of God is characterized by a focus on history, in such a way that the kingdom seems to begin from the earth instead of coming from heaven. We have argued that Barth does not ultimately demote history. Rather, his theory is that the transcendent kingdom of God and historical reality are united in Jesus Christ who is both God and human.

D. Barth's Concept of the Parousia and the Amillennial Tradition

1. The Affiliation of Barth's Eschatology with the Teaching of Augustine and Calvin

It is interesting to see briefly Barth's indebtedness to the fathers of amillennialism, namely, Augustine and Calvin for the construal of his eschatological concept, mainly in so far as the question of the kingdom of God, the church, the doctrine of reconciliation, and demonology is concerned.

First of all, it is noteworthy that Barth has remained true to the Augustinian and Calvinistic principle of the sovereignty of God, which accounts for his theology being transcendental in nature. Barth turns time and again to Augustine and Calvin, who, he claims, support his major views. However, although Barth takes Augustine and Calvin as his ideal mentors, a permanent attempt to go beyond these theologians is also remarkable in his attitude.

³⁰Richard A. Muller, "Karl Barth and the Path of Theology into the Twentieth Century: Historical Observations," Western Theological Journal, no 51 (Spring 1989): 30-31.

Barth defends Augustine's equation of the church with the kingdom, and this view has become central to his own concept of Christ's kingdom.³¹ But Barth also goes beyond Augustine: while Augustine tends to confine the civitas Dei to the church,³² Barth extends it to the whole world. Barth, for example, says that

The real civitas Dei on earth, which is invincible and can therefore be proclaimed with confidence, is not the rule of the Church, but the rule of Him who in this world had to be nailed to the cross.³³

We see in this statement a tendency to relate both the civitas Dei and Christ's rule to the world. Barth believes that Calvin lends support to his view of Christ's kingdom which covers the whole world now.³⁴ Barth starts from his concept of "creation as the external basis of the covenant."³⁵ But then he continues:

In this connection we may recall the first creation story, in which creation is described almost as the building of a house or temple, man being finally introduced as the true inhabitant. It is also to be noted that the distinctive relationship between the work of the sixth day and the seventh as the day of God's rest points at once to the fact that the relationship of man with God and God with man, which is the basis of the covenant in the midst of creation, is the goal for which the whole building is constructed, and it is for the history of this covenant that time, space and opportunity are created with creation as such. Calvin perhaps had this in view when he described the totality of the cosmos and cosmic occurrence as the theatrum gloriae Dei.³⁶

³¹Cf. CD IV2, 657.

³²City of God, XX, 9.

³³CD I2, 679.

³⁴For Calvin's tendency to see the whole world even now as God's kingdom, see above, 71-74.

³⁵Cf. CD III1, 94-228.

³⁶CD III3, 47.

We see here the Old Testament concept of shekinah, which refers to the temple as the presence of God and his glory. But in Barth's view it is the whole creation, that is, the whole world, which is God's temple. This suggests that the whole world is the realm of God's lordship and kingship. And Barth sees Calvin to be the pioneer of the concept.

Yet, Barth is not satisfied with only following Calvin but he is at the same time critical of the latter. Barth faults Calvin for a quasi-postmillennial view of the kingdom of God. In Barth's judgment, Calvin thinks that the kingdom comes through a slow and hard process throughout history. Referring to the petition of the Lord's Prayer "thy kingdom come," Barth says that

What is to be asked for, according to Calvin, is God's gradual seizure of power and final triumph within this history, in the changing of bad persons into good, the glory of the people, and the removal of the opposition of some definitely bad persons.³⁷

Barth seems to claim that he is more faithful than Calvin to the doctrine of God's sovereignty and transcendence when he declares that

The second petition, however, looks to a mighty act that limits and determines from outside the whole of human history with its brighter and darker elements, its advances, halts, and setbacks. It looks to an unequivocal act of grace of God, to the mystery of the kingdom of God which encounters all that history and limits it in its totality as its hope.³⁸

Yet, what is most significant is the fact that Barth seems to have established his doctrine of "reconciliation" in reliance on Calvin's doctrine of atonement. Barth believes that Calvin lends support to his contention that the content of the parousia or the

³⁷Barth, Christian Life, 242.

³⁸Barth, Christian Life, 242.

millennium is Christ's atonement, or "reconciliation" in Barth's terminology. Barth writes: It is the Word of God which forbids us to dream of any golden age in the past or any progress within Adamic mankind and history or any future state of historical perfection or indeed put our hope in anything other than the atonement which has taken place in Christ. It was along these lines that Calvin viewed the matter.³⁹

That Barth bestows equal weight upon justification and sanctification in the atonement,⁴⁰ exactly in the same way as Calvin does, is an evidence of Barth's dependence upon Calvin in his doctrine of reconciliation.

Actualism is an important feature of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation and it characterizes his idea of parousia. The question may be asked if Barth's actualistic principle would be compatible with the amillennial principles? We have shown that actualism is not found for the first time in Barth's theology. Augustine has already included it in his theological principles as he argues that our encounter with God takes place as an event depending upon the believers' holiness.⁴¹ Holiness means that Augustine's actualism is conceived in connection with God's grace, with the believers' faith, and particularly with the work of the Holy Spirit. Barth's view may be slightly different because of his strong emphasis on God's freedom. But in Barth as well as in Augustine actualism is purely a work of the Holy Spirit.

Actualism seems to fit perfectly the amillennial view of the millennium as it accounts for the fact that Christ's kingdom is indeed present now on earth but it still remains hidden in its penultimate form. But it can be discovered through God's

³⁹CD IV\1, 511.

⁴⁰With Calvin, Barth exhibits a high evaluation of "satisfaction," calling it "higher truth . . . revealed in the reality of [Christ's] cross" (CD IV\1, 276).

⁴¹See above, 90-91.

revelation, as an event created by the Holy Spirit. In this actualistically conceived encounter with Christ and his kingdom,⁴² Christ's kingship cannot be understood as a static presence of Christ as a king seated on a throne in Jerusalem, but as the dynamic presence of a king, a priest, and a prophet revealed in his preoccupation which consists in ruling the whole world and effecting a work of redemption for this world.

Barth was inspired by Augustine, not only in his actualistic principles but also in his view of the Devil as nothingness. Barth seems to have drawn on Augustine's idea of evil as the privation of good and also on his contention that "all substance that is not God is creature; and all that is not creature is God."⁴³ Barth follows Augustine approvingly in his principle according to which malum est privatio boni. He says:

Augustine used the term correctly to define the purely negative character of evil, i.e., the nullity of sin, evil and death, its nature as opposition both intrinsically and in relation to God and His creature. For Augustine privation is corruptio or conversio boni. It is not only the absence of what really is, but the assault upon it. Evil is related to good in such a way that it attacks and harms it. It seeks to destroy and consume it, tendit ad non esse, as the fire threatens to consume fuel, and is in process of doing so.⁴⁴

Barth does not relate directly his concept of nothingness to Augustine's idea of privatio boni, but we nevertheless observe two things: first, his emphasis on the "nullity of sin, evil and death," and second, the paradox in the nature of sin, evil, and death, that is, its being privatio but at the same time destructive. These two characteristics of evil are reminiscent of the nature of nothingness in Barth.

⁴²See above the way the amillennialist Herman Bavinck also construes Christ's encounter with the believers through an actualistic concept, 90.

⁴³On the Trinity, VI, 6, 8.

⁴⁴CD III3, 318.

We may conclude that Barth constructed his doctrine of the parousia within the framework of amillennialism, mainly under the influence of Augustine and Calvin. Because of their views of the kingdom of God, actualism, and the defeat of Satan as a reality in the church age, and above all, because of their emphasis on the priority of the Word of God and revelation, Barth identifies Augustine and Calvin as transcendentalists and idealists. "In this light," Barth says, "it may be said that Augustine and Calvin, who placed themselves under rather than over the Word, were idealist theologians."⁴⁵

If Barth can be ranked along with Augustine and Calvin among the amillennialists, is there any reciprocal contribution of Barth to amillennialism?

2. Barth's Contribution to Amillennial Doctrine

Barth does not call his doctrine of the parousia the millennium but we have discovered in its content the architectonic structure of the millennium from the amillennial perspective. All amillennial theologians are well aware of the crucial importance of the period between Christ's first coming and his final return, the period that amillennialists identify as the millennium, but Barth seems to be the one who could establish its basic structure and bring out its main contents. Barth seems to be one who objectively cast a reflection upon the amillennial tradition and takes the amillennial tradition beyond its usual boundaries.

We have discovered through this study that Christ's parousia is the real substance of the millennium. Barth calls attention to the very meaning of the millennium as Christ's

⁴⁵Barth, "Fate and Idea" in Way of Theology, 48.

coming, a coming which includes three different forms. It consists in Christ's coming from above to be present on earth and to occasion an encounter between transcendence and history, eternity and time, God and human beings, an encounter which brought about a dialectical tension, but a tension which, in the end, is removed in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ The antithesis had to be set aside since the parousia has for its purpose reconciliation and redemption. And this is exactly what the millennium contains as amillennialists see it: it is God's work to reconcile the world to himself and to establish a covenant between himself and human beings. God achieves this through Christ's death on the cross and in his resurrection. In his resurrection Christ is revealed as Lord and King of the universe after defeating Satan who claimed that this world is his own possession and his kingdom. Barth's view on this score may not be novel, but he, nevertheless, could highlight what must be emphasized as the fundamental elements of amillennialism.

Barth is one who attempted a deep analysis of the nature of the Devil through his theory of "nothingness." His hesitation to ascribe a personality to nothingness as the Devil seems to be a weakness in his theory. But Bloesch⁴⁷ is right in pointing out that Barth's position betrays his being still under the spell of the modern age, despite his attempt to remain true to Scripture. Amillennialism, however, should learn from Barth that, in relation to God, Satan as "nothingness" is indeed "nothing" and is not worth comparing to God. That God allows him to remain active in the limited power he still has does not mean that his power is competitive.

⁴⁶CD IV1, 35.

⁴⁷See above, 44.

Let us turn to a final remark. We have seen above the dispensationalist Feinberg's critique of amillennialism as a doctrine which does not have "a unified system or scheme of eschatology."⁴⁸ This criticism is not true of Barth's eschatological principles. He introduces the period between Christ's first coming and his final return in an elaborate and unified system and structure by establishing an intimate connection between the three stages of the parousia and the perichoretic relation of the three persons of the Trinity. Amillennialists stress the unity of the millennium by referring to the presence of the triune God, but this important truth receives particular emphasis in Barth's theology.⁴⁹ Further emphasis is added when Barth grounds his notion of parousia in Christ's death and his resurrection. If what Barth calls parousia is the millennium, his millennial principles are indeed built on a strong foundation.

⁴⁸See above, 50.

⁴⁹In this connection, John Bolt rightly argues that "unity is ultimately found in the Triune God alone." (Christian and Reformed Today, 115).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

A. The Centrality of the Idea of Christ's Coming in Barth's Theology

Barth writes: "Aren't we threatened here with the idea of a God whose being is merely there instead of a God who comes? Wouldn't it perhaps be better for this God to be called nature?"¹ Barth insists that God being "there" cannot be said without God's "coming." Barth would not admit a simple immanence of God in the world. God is a God who comes. Barth sets forth three forms of this coming in his concept of parousia. This is the key to understanding God's relationship to the world.

When Barth speaks of "God who comes," he does not refer merely to Christ's return to put an end to history. Interestingly, Barth's exegesis of the return of the Son of Man according to Daniel 7:13 shows that this passage, which is pivotal for premillennialists, is not of primary importance for Barth. Rather than understanding it as a description of Christ's final return, Barth interprets it as a "preparatory form" of the parousia in its three forms. Barth says:

The coming of "the one like the Son of Man with the clouds of heaven"(Dan. 7:13); the coming of the righteous and victorious Messiah-King abolishing war

¹Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology" in The Way of Theology in Karl Barth, ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 42. (Emphasis added).

and establishing peace; above all the recurrent Old Testament picture of the coming of God of the covenant Himself manifesting Himself in movement from there to here---all these constitute materially the preparatory form of what in the New Testament is called parousia.²

If Daniel 7:13 is intended to be a "preparatory form," it indicates something which happens before the parousia, not during the parousia itself, as premillennialists believe. We observe in this statement Barth's subordination of the idea of "victorious Messiah-King" to the idea of the real parousia as the "coming of the God of covenant." Obviously, the real significance of Christ's coming is, for Barth, tied up to the whole period of his first coming and presence during the church era until his final advent, a period in which God is active in a reconciling work and in the establishment of the covenant between himself and his people.

The emphasis on the idea of God as One who comes suggests that Barth's theology is transcendental in nature. Barth's doctrines of the parousia, revelation, and even reconciliation are fundamentally transcendental. In his lecture titled "Fate and Idea in Theology" Barth indicated that he had to choose between two philosophical principles, "realism" or idealism."³ Barth made it clear that he opts for idealism, for it fits well with his doctrine of the Word of God, of revelation, and of the church. "It is beyond question," Barth holds, "that an idealist theologian can sincerely and genuinely be connected to God's revelation and to its witness in Bible and church."⁴ Then he appeals to Augustine

²CD IV\3.1, 292.

³It is interesting to note at this point that in his approach to Scripture Barth has recourse to realism (see above, 142-143), whereas with respect to philosophy he finds idealism closer to his theology.

⁴Barth, "Fate and Idea" in The Way of Theology, 45.

who, in his view, lends support to his contention: "Idealism will not relinquish the concept of revelation. It will insist on its 'I desire nothing but God and the soul' as little as did Augustine, the great idealist among theologians."⁵ Barth indicates the difference between realism and idealism, saying that "the realist asserts: 'God is reality,' idealism counters: 'God is truth.'"⁶ The idealist principle is grounded in the idea of God as transcendent truth.

However, Barth does not accept this pure transcendentalism without reservation. Barth argues that transcendentalism must take into account historical realities. This means that even though the idea of "God who comes" is a transcendental concept, it does not imply that the "God who comes" remains aloof from the life of this world but gets involved in the history of this world. Barth is not agreed if "By referring to timeless truths of reason, directly accessible to everyone, the idealist brushes aside the realist's accidental and particular truths of history."⁷ This suggests that Barth's transcendentalism is a modified transcendentalism.

B. A Modified Transcendentalism

Barth's transcendentalism found its highest expression in his idea of "otherness of God." But from there emerged a dramatic shift to the "humanity of God." Barth writes:

He who may not have joined in that earlier change of direction, who still may not be impressed with the fact that God is God, would certainly not see what is now

⁵Barth, "Fate and Idea," in The Way of Theology, 45.

⁶Barth, "Fate and Idea" in The Way of Theology, 46.

⁷Barth, "Fate and Idea" in The Way of Theology, 47.

to be said in addition as the true word concerning His humanity.⁸

Barth now couples the "otherness of God" with the "humanity of God," but without the "swallowing of the immanence by the transcendence."⁹ Barth acknowledges that he was wrong when he viewed "this 'wholly other' in isolation, abstracted and absolutized, and set it over against man."¹⁰ Barth's new emphasis is now on the humanity of God, whose significance he expresses in these terms:

Who God is and what He is in His deity He proves and reveals not in a vacuum as a divine being-for-Himself, but precisely and authentically in the fact that He exists, speaks, and acts as partner of man, though of course as the absolutely superior partner.¹¹

If God still remains an "absolutely superior partner" it means that God did not cease to be "wholly other," but God became man in Jesus Christ so that his covenant with human beings may be fulfilled and that his union with human beings may be real. The covenant does not put an end to God's otherness since God still remains God for humans. "It [covenant] is done primarily and basically as His will to be the God of man, to let man be His man."¹² This union of God with humans has been made possible through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true God, man's loyal partner, and as true man, God's. He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the

⁸Barth, Humanity of God, 42.

⁹Barth, Humanity of God, 42.

¹⁰Barth, Humanity of God, 45.

¹¹Barth, Humanity of God, 45.

¹²CD IV1, 35.

Servant exalted to communion with God.¹³

In fact, the dialectic of transcendence and history remains, but Barth insists that Jesus Christ is the solution to the dialectical tension. "It is in Jesus Christ that antithesis is met and overcome."¹⁴ The result is the reality of human "communion with God."

All this means that Barth's theology is fundamentally transcendental, but it is a modified transcendentalism. In Christ God abased himself to accept humanity and its history, notably its sinfulness as his own cause, so that he may put an end to its sin. "In face of the sin of man, and God's striving with it and conquering of it and of its consequences, it is His covenant will."¹⁵ Pure transcendentalism is incompatible with the covenant God makes with human beings. Amillennialism is definitely a transcendental theology, but it also does justice to God's immanence as it sees God as One who, in Jesus Christ, gets involved in human history and in the life of the world that he prepares to become his kingdom.

C. The Millennium Defined

On the basis of the close connection that Barth establishes between the idea of "coming" and "presence," transcendence and immanence, we may extract Barth's understanding of the millennium: the millennium, which Barth calls parousia, is not a static but a dynamic reality during the church age, characterized by repeated "breakthroughs" of Christ and his kingdom. It is Christ's coming manifested by

¹³Barth, Humanity of God, 46.

¹⁴CD IV1, 35.

¹⁵CD IV1, 35.

continually repeated events of revelation of his lordship and kingship over the world and the reconciliation of the world with God.

Yet to this transcendental and actualistic "coming" corresponds an immanent and historical "presence" of God on earth as a trinitarian presence. Most importantly, God is now present through the Holy Spirit, as the One who moves history forward until it reaches its goal at Christ's return, the time when revelation will become final revelation, reconciliation will be turned into redemption, the kingdom will reach its consummation, and the covenant will attain to its fulfillment.

From this perspective, the parousia or the millennium constitutes one history, one "salvation history," and one period.

D. The Term Amillennialism

Amillennialism is the historic faith of the church. We may join Gary DeMar as he forcefully argues that "it's amillennialism that shows up in the early church."¹⁶ Yet, in spite of the importance of this doctrine, amillenarians as well as non-amillenarians are puzzled by the term "amillennialism," knowing that it does not express accurately the content of the amillennial doctrine. Amillennialists like William E. Cox and Anthony Hoekema regret deeply the usage of this term to express the amillennial position.¹⁷ Hoekema mentions Jay E. Adams's suggestion of the term "realized millennialism" as a

¹⁶DeMar, Christian Reconstruction, 96. We have seen earlier that DeMar is not alone in this contention. See above, 56-57.

¹⁷Cf. Cox, Amillennialism, 1-2; Hoekema, "Amillennialism" in The Meaning of the Millennium, 155: "The term amillennialism is not a happy one."

substitute for "amillennialism" but he confesses that he finds it unsatisfactory.¹⁸

This problem of terminology may account for Barth's avoidance of the word "amillennialism." Of course, he must have been aware of this term but he knew its inadequacy to convey the amillennial thought and attempted to articulate the amillennial belief by means of his concept of three-stage parousia. It may not be Barth's intention to suggest a new title for the amillennial teaching but he tried to highlight the structure and the substance of amillennialism, which would help the younger generations to reflect upon a new heading which would cover the idea of Christ's coming and presence as Lord and King, the church era, and salvation history.

¹⁸Cf. Hoekema, Meaning of the Millennium, 155-56.

APPENDIX

THESES FOR ORAL DEFENSE

1. Approaching Barth's eschatology from the perspective of the amillennial tradition helps resolve the scholarly debate over the tension between transcendence and history and eternity and time in his theology. Transcendence and history, eternity and time are united in Christ as the eternal and transcendent God who has come and is present now on earth as Lord, King, Reconciler, and Redeemer through the Holy Spirit.

2. Not only Barth's eschatology but his theology as a whole stands or falls with his theory of Christ's "coming" (parousia) and that of "nothingness."

3. The more Barth moved through the concepts of revelation, reconciliation, and redemption in his eschatological thought, the more he moved from the Kierkegaardian formula of "infinite qualitative difference" between God and human beings to the humanity of God, to a closer relationship and even a real union between God and his people.

4. The idea of "coming" and "presence" are the key to understanding Barth's concept of God's "being" as equal to his "act."

5. By associating sin, death, and the Devil with "nothingness," Barth sees "nothingness" to be the recapitulation of all evil in the world. The consummation of the

kingdom means the end of "nothingness."

6. Although Christ's return will be a time for "final" revelation, eternal life will still be characterized by continuing revelation since, for Barth, God will remain hidden and revealed.

7. Revelation can be history, according to Pannenberg's theological principle, if the former is considered as God's "act token" and the latter as human "act type," and if both acts are synthesized into one "act" which ultimately originates from God.

8. A blend of the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and the instrumental doctrine of the Devil seems to account for Origen's universalism according to which even the Devil will ultimately be saved.

9. Tillich's idea of God as "being itself" (or "ground" and "power" of being) is an attempt to give equal weight to God's transcendence and his immanence. But Tillich's concept of God is doomed to be panentheistic and implies a purely immanent God. Transcendence must outweigh immanence in God's nature if we want him to be the God who is "maker of heaven and earth."

10. Although knowledge cannot save as the Gnostics believe, faith cannot be separated from knowledge for an apologetic and evangelical purpose. It is easy to ignore and to lose a faith without knowledge.

11. Heidegger's view of Dasein ultimately leads to a message of doom as Dasein is seen to be imprisoned in the world and its final destiny is death.

12. Despite Kierkegaard's understanding of Christ's incarnation as a mediation between God and humanity, as a paradox, and as the content of faith, he tends to see the decision of faith or the "leap of faith" as the way to bridge the gap between God and human beings.

13. Miracle is to be seen from the perspective of the opposition between the work of the Holy Spirit and that of the evil spirit. While the evil spirit works for death, corruption, and eternal perdition, the Holy Spirit works for the greatest miracles of life, resurrection, and eternal salvation. The Holy Spirit and the evil spirit are things that David Hume, the great critic of miracles, did not know.

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