Narrating the Singular Event: Karl Barth and the Scriptural Story

BAKER, PETER,WILLIAM

Peter William Baker, ‘Narrating the Singular Event: Karl Barth and the Scriptural Story’

Karl Barth’s theological expositions of biblical narratives in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* have helped to catalyse recent interest in Barth as a reader of Scripture and to generate the widely-held perception that the reading of biblical narrative plays a central role in his mature theological construction. Focusing on Barth’s concrete exegetical practice, this study argues that, while Barth does address himself to biblical narratives, he finds narrative as such theologically intractable. Barth is not a narrative theologian. Notwithstanding the significant development of Barth’s thinking regarding the historicity of divine grace, his stress on the singularity of the divine action in Jesus Christ and his difficult negotiations with the temporally-sequential and cumulative dimensions of biblical narrative offer a significant and underappreciated line of continuity between his biblical interpretation in his mature dogmatic work and his biblical expositions of the *Römerbrief* period. Barth’s reticence to make theological use of narrative also extends beyond the literary particularities of specific texts. His christological interpretation of the Old Testament, unlike traditional typological interpretation mediated by a single overarching biblical story integrating the narratives of specific Old Testament texts and that of the central figure of Jesus Christ, treats biblical narratives as a collection of free-floating parables which independently testify to a single shared subject matter. This mode of interpretation threatens to erode the particular integrity of biblical narratives, and risks distorting the dynamic relationship of mutually intelligibility in the canon of Christian Scripture between the Old Testament and the Christ of the New Testament. The opening of the first canonical Gospel offers an alternative approach to interpretative christocentrism, suggesting one avenue for a critical appropriation of Barth’s theology.

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Karl Barth and the Scriptural Story

by

Peter William Baker

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

1. Works by Karl Barth

AdT	Karl Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten: Eine akademische Vorlesung über 1. Kor. 15*
CD	Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (trans. G. W. Bromiley *et al*)
ER	Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. Edwyn Hoskyns)
KD	Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*
R1	Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (1st ed., 1919)
R2	Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (2nd ed., 1922)
RD	Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (trans. H. J. Stenning)

2. Other Publications

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary Series
BDAG	W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. F. W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BECNT	The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BMSSEC	Baylor-Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
CBQ	*The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CO	John Calvin, *Joannis Calvini opera quae supersunt Omnia*, ed. Edouard Cunitz, Johann-Wilhelm Baum, and Edouard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss, 59 vols (Brunswick: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DGJ	Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*
FC	Fathers of the Church
ICC	The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*

JSNTSupp	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSupp	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
$NPNF^2$	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
SJT	*The Scottish Journal of Theology*
SBJT	*The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

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Introduction

1. The theologian as reader

> *Optimus enim lector est, qui dictorum intelligentiam expectet ex dictis potius quam inponat, et rettulerit magis quam adtulerit, neque cogat id videri dictis contineri quod ante lectionem praesumpserit intelligendum. Cum itaque de rebus Dei erit sermo, concedamus cognitionem sui Deo, dictisque eius pia veneratione famulemur. Idoneus enim sibi testis est, qui nisi per se cognitus non est.*

> The best reader is he who looks for the meaning of the words in the words themselves rather than reads his meaning into them, who carries away more than he brought, and who does not insist that the words signify what he presupposed before reading them. Therefore, since our treatise will be about the things of God, let us concede to God the knowledge about himself, and let us humbly submit to his words with reverent awe. For he is a competent witness for himself who is not known except by himself.[1]

Whatever is known of God depends on God's knowledge of himself; whatever is said of God depends on God's testimony to himself. The Son makes the unseen Father known; he bears witness to what he alone has seen and knows, and sends 'another' witness, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, so that others become 'witnesses' concerning the Word made flesh whom they have seen and touched. Speaking of the things of God, then, requires devoted attention to what is *spoken* in the prophetic and apostolic testimony, as inscribed and passed on in Holy Scripture; to speak of God – the God of the gospel of Jesus Christ – involves, perforce, the act of reading. Taking the measure of theological speech requires considering the theologian as a reader of Scripture.

Karl Barth has seen with uncommon clarity and expressed with unrivalled insistence the dependence of human theological thought and speech on God's prior self-disclosure. Six decades after his death, the significance of his mature theological work, and especially his masterpiece *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* (*Church Dogmatics*), is undisputed. While few contemporary theologians would happily accept the designation 'Barthian', his theology continues to sustain much critical and comparative study and to influence many prominent undertakings in constructive theology. In recent decades, Barth's theological legacy has thrust

[1] Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 1.18, ed. P. Smulders, CCSL 62 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979); translation by Stephen McKenna in *The Trinity,* FC 25 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1954), 18.

forth another branch: he is now regarded as pioneer and patriarch by many of those who pursue the 'theological interpretation of Scripture'.[2] This latest development reflects an increasing emphasis amongst students of Barth's theology that here, especially, theological construction and biblical exegesis are inextricably entwined; that if what Barth has to say about 'the things of God', consistently unfolded over the thousands of pages of *Church Dogmatics,* has an enduring appeal, this should be sought not in its originality and creativity but precisely in the refusal of an original and creative enterprise which could properly be called 'Barth's theology'.

One imagines Barth's heartfelt agreement: whatever is fresh here, he himself would insist, comes from a fresh encounter with the Word of God attested in Holy Scripture. Barth regarded the exegetical and dogmatic theological tasks as distinct but inseparable, and famously charged his students to pursue 'exegesis, exegesis, and yet more exegesis!'[3] Accordingly, his own *magnum opus* is suffused with an extraordinary volume and variety of biblical interpretation. In the words of Francis Watson, 'from beginning to end, Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is nothing other than a sustained meditation on the texts of Holy Scripture […]. Barth's biblical interpretation is not a particular item, but the foundation and principle of coherence of his entire project'.[4] Therefore, to the extent that Barth's theological exposition offers 'a recovery or rediscovery of a logic intrinsic to Christian faith and its canonical Scriptures […], it represents not just an optional "resource" for a theologically oriented biblical interpretation, but a task and an obligation'.[5] The promise and challenge of Barth's theological work lies not only in its joyful assurance, its unabashed Trinitarianism, the breadth of its dogmatic scope, its integration of theological and ethical reflection, its sustained engagement with the sweep of the Christian theological tradition, but above all in its insistence on the centrality of Jesus Christ and unwavering attention to the biblical testimony concerning him, for whoever would aspire to be – as T. F. Torrance declared Barth – a 'biblical and evangelical theologian'.[6] To engage with Barth's theology on its own terms, then, is to ask how far we should follow him as a faithful guide to the Scriptures; to enquire into what kind of harvest his interpretative toil might yield for further labours in this field.

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[2] See Daniel J Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 14–21; Hans Madueme, 'Theological Interpretation after Barth', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3, no. 1 (2009): 143–56.

[3] 'Das Evangelium in der Gegenwart', *Theologische Existenz heute* 25 (1935): 17. The context of these words is also instructive in this regard. Cf. the anecdote related in David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the 'Church Dogmatics'* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1981), 11.

[4] Francis Watson, 'The Bible', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57.

[5] Watson, 66.

[6] Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

Yet to appreciate Barth's biblical interpretation is one thing; to appropriate it is quite another, for Barth is an exegete like no other. Appreciative studies of Barth's exegesis describe it in terms shading from admiration into delicate euphemism. Barth's exegesis is 'rich and creative'; he is a 'highly innovative exegete', displaying astounding 'exegetical ingenuity', making 'intriguing manoeuvres in his exposition of the biblical passages', resulting in interpretations that are 'often counterintuitive'.[7] Others, less enamoured of Barth's interpretative efforts, express themselves more directly – or, like the vast majority of New Testament scholars, simply pass by in silence. Barth certainly reads the Bible in the hope and expectation of hearing the self-disclosure of the God who is the sole fitting witness to himself. But what kind of reader is Barth? How closely does he resemble the *optimus lector*? In what measure has he drawn out the Bible's sense, and to what extent do his interpretative comments reflect decisions taken in advance of approaching a particular text? Does Barth's bravura interpretative performance – his astonishing christological readings of the Old Testament, say – perhaps emerge not from tapping deep and rich seams running through the Scriptures, but rather from his own personal genius, rendering the effort to follow and learn from him futile, or even hazardous? Richard Burnett suggests that, if this were the 'final verdict' on Barth's exegesis, it would call the value of 'his entire theology' – on its own terms – into question.[8] And yet, while the forceful expression and tight integration of Barth's thought naturally evokes a commensurate response, this temptation should be resisted. For one thing, the convenient expression 'Barth's exegesis' refers in fact to hundreds of specific exegetical expositions in *Church Dogmatics* (not to mention the remainder of Barth's corpus), which are sufficiently multifarious to defy a monolithic judgement. Moreover, no major theological work lends itself easily to wholesale adoption or repudiation. In responding to Barth's interpretation of Scripture, no blessing will be gained without a lengthy wrestle. A critical appropriation is required, and the shape of such an appropriation will be discerned only by tracing the steps and missteps Barth takes as he approaches and engages with specific biblical texts in specific dogmatic contexts.

To this end, the present study examines one important strand in Barth's biblical interpretation: his handling of biblical narrative. In the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*,

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[7] Mary Kathleen Cunningham, *What Is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 12, 79, 83; Bruce L. McCormack, 'The Significance of Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of Philippians', in *The Epistle to the Philippians: 40th Anniversary Edition*, by Karl Barth (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), v.

[8] Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period*, WUNT 145 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 9–11; cf. Watson, 'The Bible', 66.
Brevard S. Childs, 'Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis', *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 1 (1997): 16–26.

Barth devotes substantial energy to theological expositions of biblical narratives in a range of dogmatic contexts, and his constructive theological argumentation proceeds by way of the kind of aesthetic judgements fit for texts perceived as works of literary art. Through previous studies, this aspect of his exegesis has garnered wide admiration and has helped to catalyse the growth of interest in Barth as a reader of Scripture. Barth is often regarded as a narrative theologian *avant la lettre*, who has read the biblical narratives with uncommon attention and literary discernment, and in whose mature dogmatic construction narrative plays a central role.

Over against this consensus, the present study will argue that, while Barth does address himself to biblical narratives, he finds *narrative as such* – the rendering of meaning through an unfolding sequence of connected events – theologically intractable. The intensive christological concentration of Barth's dogmatic project is matched by a strong tendency to emphasise *singularity* in the interpretation of biblical texts. Thus Barth's interpretative expositions tend to marginalise the significance of the temporal sequence which is basic to the narrative form, and to compress the meaning of a cumulatively rendered narrative into the meaning of a singular event. This interpretative dynamic reflects a construal of Scripture as a pluriform witness to the essentially singular event of 'the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ', opening a gap between the Bible's textual form and its theological content. Notwithstanding the significant development of Barth's thinking regarding the historicity of divine grace, his difficult negotiations with the plural and sequential dimension of biblical narrative offer a significant line of continuity between his biblical interpretation in his mature dogmatic work and his early biblical expositions. Barth's reticence to make theological use of the narrative form also extends beyond the literary particularities of specific texts. His christological interpretation of the Old Testament, unlike traditional typological interpretation, is not mediated by the notion of a single overarching biblical story embracing both the figures of specific Old Testament texts and the central figure of Jesus Christ. The most instructive parallel for Barth's approach to biblical narrative is not a novel with a single cumulative story comprised of various narrative episodes, but rather a collection of disparate narrative vignettes which independently testify to a single shared subject matter. Barth is *not* a narrative theologian, and some of those features of his biblical expositions which appear idiosyncratic and implausible, even to those who are in deep sympathy with many of his theological and interpretative convictions, emerge precisely from his discomfort with the narrative features of the Bible.

2. Karl Barth as 'narrative theologian'?

Before proceeding to argue in detail for the thesis outlined above, it will be useful to sketch the salient features of the generally held view that biblical narrative is central to Barth's dogmatic theology (especially in the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*), to describe the origins of this consensus, and to offer a preliminary critique indicating the flaws in this perspective on Barth's theology and the need for further investigation. We must begin with the work of Hans Frei, who is the single most influential figure in this regard, having both directed attention to Barth as a reader and shaped the impression that, as a reader and a theologian, Barth takes biblical narrative very seriously.

Frei developed a distinctive notion of what it meant to read biblical narrative, which became identified with Barth's interpretative and theological practice. Central to Frei's own constructive theological project was the recognition of 'realistic' or 'history-like' narratives in the Bible, an appreciation of their distinctive communicative idiom, and an insistence on the interpretative procedure proper to these narratives.[9] Frei drew on the work of literary critics, above all Erich Auerbach, who discerned a generic affinity between the 'realism' or history-likeness of biblical narrative and that of the modern novel, especially in the way that the temporal extension and sequence constituent in the text's 'narrative shape' was crucial to that text's construction of meaning.[10] 'Like history and the novel,' Frei wrote, 'much biblical narrative in explicative interpretation is not "system" or pure factual description but the cumulative rendering of a temporal framework through realistic depiction and chronological continuity.'[11] Because its meaning lies neither in its ostensive historical reference nor its

[9] Frei offers an introduction to his theological concerns in the lecture 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal', in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* and *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (see references below) jointly represent the fullest realisation Frei's his theological project prior to its substantial reconfiguration, as signalled in the essay 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?', in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 117–52. Frei's later thinking is sketched rather than fully developed in his extant works (*e.g.* the posthumously compiled and published *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and Placher, William C. (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 1992). For useful reflections on Frei's theological contribution, see George Hunsinger, 'Afterword: Hans Frei as Theologian', in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 235–70; Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2004).

[10] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), vii, 12–16; cf. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 3–23.

[11] Frei, *Eclipse*, 152. See also *'*On Interpreting the Christian Story', in *Reading Faithfully, Volume 1: Writings from the Archives: Theology and Hermeneutics*, ed. Mike Higton and Mark Alan Bowald, vol. 1 (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 78.

signification of a mythopoeic religious consciousness, but simply in the story itself, questions of *Historie* focusing on the text's production can be (at least temporarily) set aside; the appropriate interpretative method (or 'analytical procedure') for realistic narrative is a 'literal reading' sharing similarities with both precritical biblical interpretation and the textual formalism employed by the 'New Critics'.[12] Furthermore, because the meaning of the story is identical with the rendering of the story-world, the biblical stories must be either 'hyperfiction' of zero religious significance, or must make the 'tyrannical' claim to offer the true story of the real world in which the reader also lives.[13] Prior to the eighteenth century, Christian figural reading was a key strategy for relating the Bible text, read literally, and the world of readers' everyday experience.[14] Figural or typological reading was the instrument by which the first Christian readers adopted the Hebrew Scriptures as their own Old Testament; by regarding the characters and patterns rendered in biblical narrative as 'types', figural reading wove the Bible's various realistic narratives into 'one cumulative story' depicting the 'one temporal sequence' of the real historical world.[15] This was 'literalism at the level of the whole biblical story and thus of the depiction of the whole of historical reality'; thus a reader's present experiences could be woven into this 'overarching story' by regarding elements of her own life as figures of the reality depicted in the Scriptures.[16] The narrative sequence of this overarching story thus played a central role in perceiving and articulating the Bible's unity and in its typological or figural interpretation and appropriation.

For Frei, Barth exemplified this lost-and-regained interpretative method. In the preface to *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* – Frei's painstaking historical account of how this kind of realistic, historical, and figural reading, which had flourished prior to the rise of historical

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[12] Frei, *Eclipse*, 10; cf. 19–17; *'*On Interpreting the Christian Story*'*, 75. Frei makes explicit the affinity between the long-missing 'appropriate analytical procedure' for the genre of realistic or history-like narrative and the methods of 'Anglo-American "New Criticism"' in 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative', 140.

[13] This point is worked out with respect to Jesus' 'living presence' as an inalienable dimension of his identity as rendered by the Gospel narratives in Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 143, 146–47; cf. Hunsinger, *'*Afterword: Hans Frei as Theologian*'*, 245. For the Bible's 'tyrannical' claim, see Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 14–15; cf. Frei, *'*On Interpreting the Christian Story*'*, 80.

[14] Frei, *Eclipse*, 1–3. Cf. Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Theory and History of Literature 9 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 53.

[15] Frei, *Eclipse*, 2.

[16] Frei, 2–3. Higton emphasises the nuances and complexity of Frei's presentation, especially the limited application of the overarching narrative framework's temporal sequence to relations of 'old' and 'new' and broad phases or stages, rather than enabling 'calculable relations of distance' (*Christ, Providence, and History*, 140–43.) Nevertheless, a single overarching story and its temporal character remains a central element in Frei's account of figural interpretation, and an element which has (as Higton's riposte to Dawn de Vries demonstrates) impressed Frei's readers – including those who viewed Barth's biblical interpretation through this prism. Cf. also John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 154–57.

criticism, was occluded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – Frei nominated 'Barth's biblical exegesis' as 'a model of the kind of narrative reading that can be done in the wake of the changes I describe in this book.'[17] The Bible, in Barth's eyes, was much like the modern novel in the eyes of a modern (i.e. 'New') literary critic.[18] Barth perceived the Bible to be 'largely and centrally realistic narrative', and associated its clarity and unity with this generic feature.[19] The Bible's meaning was clear because, as in a novel, the text means what it says: the meaning of the narrative is the narrative. Here, again, the narrative form's inherent temporality stands to the fore: a novelistic account

> speaks about the interaction of persons and temporal incidents in such a way that these two things render each other and by their interaction render the story and the meaning of the story. The *meaning* of the story is not something detached from the story, but emerges out of these temporal connections of character and incident with each other, which mean each other and nothing else. Whereas, of course, in myth in particular the interaction of character and circumstance in time is only a surface element – and this is not so in a novel and, Barth says, not so in the Bible.[20]

Barth refuses the abstraction of a biblical narrative's meaning from the cumulative unfolding of the narrative itself; he is 'an interpreter of the Bible as realistic narrative', having passed through historical criticism and out the other side, reading directly, literarily, naïvely once more.[21]

This was especially visible in Barth's christological interpretation of the Old Testament. For Frei, because figural reading is 'literalism at the level of the whole biblical story', Barth's 'remarkable use of figural interpretation of the Old Testament' likewise offers a good instance of the realistic reading of biblical narrative, reprising precritical interpretative practice in a postcritical key.[22] Barth sees the Bible as a cumulative narrative depicting the temporal

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[17] Frei, *Eclipse*, viii.
[18] Barth approaches the 'textual world' of the Bible' '[i]n much the same way as the now old-fashioned "newer" literary critics' (Hans W. Frei, 'Eberard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth', in *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and Placher, William C. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 162.) Frei's fullest elaboration of this parallel, drawing on Barth's hermeneutical comments in *CD* IV/2, 478-479, is found in Hans W. Frei, 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative: Karl Barth as Critic of Historical Criticism', in *Thy Word Is Truth: Barth on Scripture*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 55–59.
[19] Frei, 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative', 58.
[20] Frei, 56–57.
[21] Frei, 59. Frei identifies Barth's reading with Paul Ricoeur's 'second naivete': see 'History, Salvation-History, and Typology', in *Reading Faithfully, Volume 1: Writings from the Archives: Theology and Hermeneutics*, ed. Mike Higton and Mark Alan Bowald (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 158. Cf. Rudolf Smend's article, which Frei cites approvingly ('Scripture as Realistic Narrative', 54), in which Barth is portrayed as representing a '*wieder* naiv' Scriptural interpretation: 'Nachkritische Schriftauslegung', in *Parrhesia: Karl Barth zum 80. Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1966*, ed. Eberhard Busch, Jürgen Fangmeier, and Max Geiger (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag Zürch, 1966), 54.
[22] Frei, *Eclipse*, viii. Frei indicates that he has *CD* II/2, 340-409; IV/1, 224-228 especially in mind.

unfolding of a single 'sacred history'.[23] This overarching story is crucial: the storied and teleologically-structured relationship between signifier and signified (*i.e.* between type and antitype), which is a rendering of the real world and thus 'tensed between past and future', is the framework within which Barth's figural (or typological) reading can flourish. This mode of interpretation also closely parallels modern literary criticism: it is 'startlingly modern, startlingly like what a good literary critic might do', and 'highly reminiscent of some of the procedures of the old-fashioned newer criticism: the relation of images in a self-contained world, but one which, on its own terms, nevertheless subscribes to the diachronicity characteristic of narrative'.[24] Barth, Frei suggested, had a 'Dantesque' vision of the theological task, especially in its orientation to public history.[25] Barth perceived an inherently teleological and temporal economy of divine grace toward humanity, a 'narrated, narratable world' primarily and properly depicted in 'the narrative originally told in the Old and New Testaments', which is 'at the same time the ordinary world in which we live and move and have our being'; the fitting form for theological reflection was a secondary renarration, imaginative restatement, and redescription by means of concepts which were themselves fluid and figurally oriented to the primary narrative.[26] The diverse play of secular historical occurrence was figurally or typologically related to its fulfilment in the 'one history' of the covenant.[27] This story, read and retold, stood at the heart of Barth's theological vision.

Thus Frei exalts Barth as a paragon of precisely the approach to the Bible which Frei himself is advocating: Barth sees in the Bible that which Auerbach has also seen – the inherence of a narrative's meaning in its cumulative rendering interaction of character and incident over time, and the figural unity of the single biblical story – and like Dante he sees all history fulfilled, in

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[23] Frei, 'History, Salvation-History, and Typology', 158; cf. Frei's equation (in post-lecture discussion) of Barr and Barth 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative', 62; 'Eberard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth', 159–62.

[24] Frei, 'On Interpreting the Christian Story', 74; Frei, 'History, Salvation-History, and Typology', 159. Alongside the diachronic narrativity Frei discerns in Barth's figural practice, he also notes a rather perplexing synchronic structural relation between figure and referent – 'a direct juxtaposition overleaping time' – an insight to which we will return.

[25] 'Karl Barth: Theologian', 168. The similarity Frei draws is between Barth and the Dante presented in Auerbach's essay 'Figura'. See the discussion in Mike Higton, 'The Fulfilment of History in Barth, Frei, Auerbach and Dante', in *Conversing with Barth*, ed. John C. McDowell and Mike Higton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 120–41.

[26] Frei, 'Eberard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth', 160–61. According to Frei, the prolixity of *Church Dogmatics* is due to the fact that, especially in the later volumes, 'Barth's vision and statement of the world of discourse of which he was rendering an account became increasingly and self-consciously temporal […]. It was a world in which time elapsed, and that was of its very essence, so that he had both to proceed diachronically in describing it and take temporality into account in articulating the most appropriate and least distorting methods' (pp. 159-160).

[27] Frei, 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative', 49–52; see also Hans W. Frei, 'Karl Barth: Theologian', in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 168–69; 'History, Salvation-History, and Typology', 157–59.

all its irreducible variety and particularity, in that great story of God's covenant with humanity. In fact, however, the parallel between Frei's Barth and Auerbach's Dante is *too* precise: Barth has been assimilated to Frei's constructive programme. Frei's study of Barth helped to inspire some of the basic impulses driving his own theological project, but Frei also goes so far as to present his own original contributions in the guise of an exposition of Barth's thought.[28] Frei's presentation of Barth as a biblical interpreter is not only interwoven but actually entangled with his own theological and hermeneutical explorations.[29] Frei's interaction with Barth is also shaped by his own characteristic preoccupation with interpretative method. Frei admits that *Eclipse* 'falls into the almost legendary category of analysis of analyses of the Bible in which not a single text is examined, not a single exegesis undertaken', and even his attempt to remedy this situation in *The Identity of Jesus Christ* nevertheless exhibits a curious abstraction from the actual text of Scripture.[30] Similarly, Frei's scattered efforts to engage with Barth's actual exegesis are focused on his expositions of a few select passages, and are often limited to offering page references; the more extended treatments, while insightful, almost exclusively make glancing contact at points of interest for hermeneutical method rather than engaging in sustained reflection on Barth's biblical exegesis *as such*.[31]

Due to the entanglement of Frei's critical reception of Barth with his own constructive theological project, and his impressionistic portrayal of Barth's actual exegetical practice, Frei's account is misleading in its emphasis in key respects. Frei overemphasises Barth's attention to the generic features of biblical narrative, especially its temporally extensive and cumulative dimension, and the role of an overarching biblical narrative's temporal sequence in Barth's figural interpretation. In more muted fashion, Frei's presentation of Barth also suggests

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[28] On Frei's Barthian inspiration, see Hans W. Frei, 'The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909-1922: The Nature of Barth's Break with Liberalism' (Yale University, 1956); Frei, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal', 27–30; Hunsinger, 'Afterword: Hans Frei as Theologian', 236–39; Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History*, 36–46, 59–60, 66–67.

[29] Higton correctly observes that Frei 'describes the Barthian figural vision as his own' (*Christ, Providence, and History*, 167.) In truth, however, Frei is describing his own figural vision as Barth's. Introducing Frei's lecture 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative' in a volume of unpublished pieces, the editors note that the essay 'is almost as much an exploration of Frei's own view as it is an exposition of Barth', and quote Frei's letter to Martin Rumscheidt concerning this material, in which he worries over 'representing my own project under the guise of somebody else's writing, in this case that of Karl Barth' (Frei, 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative', 49.) Significantly, Frei could still present his own explorations as exposition of Barth even after his shift to a focus on the *sensus literalis* as a function of the believing community's use of Scripture: see *Types of Christian Theology*, 4, 44.

[30] Frei, *Eclipse*, vii. Noting Frei's preference in *Identity* for dealing with an abstract 'Gospel story' rather than exegeting the actual concrete narratives of the four canonical Gospels, David Lee concludes: 'Astonishingly, after all the analysis, rhetoric and argument, Frei's analysis simply *fails to engage with the New Testament texts*.' (*Luke's Stories of Jesus: Theological Reading of Gospel Narrative and the Legacy of Hans Frei*, JSNTSupp 185 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 66–67. Emphasis original.)

[31] See Frei, 'History, Salvation-History, and Typology', 157–69; 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative', 55–59. Cf. *Eclipse*, viii; *Identity*, 128; 'On Interpreting the Christian Story', 76.

a developmental schema in which there is a gradual but definite shift away from a focus on 'act' and toward a temporally extended history.[32] While Frei correctly observes that extended exegetical engagement with biblical narratives is more prominent in Barth's theological construction following *CD* II/2, this masks important lines of continuity between his earlier and later handling of narrative material. Nevertheless, Frei's presentation of Barth's theology, and especially of the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*, was to significantly shape the work of interpreters who gave serious attention to Barth's use of Scripture in Frei's wake.

In his work *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology,* Frei's Yale colleague David Kelsey adopted Frei's perspective on Barth and expanded its influence. Kelsey was concerned to demonstrate that, in practice, theologians appeal to scriptural authority in modes comporting with the 'irreducibly different ways' in which they concretely construe 'scripture'; a theologian's construal of 'scripture' is shaped by her imaginative judgment regarding 'what Christianity is basically all about.'[33] According to Kelsey's presentation, Barth regards narrative as the authoritative aspect of Scripture.[34] Theology's basic and central subject-matter is 'an agent in action in history: the incarnate Lord', and 'scripture is taken to have the logical force of stories that render a character, that offer an identity description of an agent'; thus biblical narrative 'functions as the occasion for encounter with an agent in history, viz., the Risen Lord.'[35] The story's central agent is known 'directly in and with the story', and not by abstraction from it.[36] The patterns which rule the theologian's speech about the agent rendered in the story are formal literary features of the written text itself, 'certain patterns in the narrated sequence of intentions and actions':

> they are like the patterns in a realistic novel or short story to which a literary critic might draw attention when he tries to analyse "characterisation." Indeed, it is as though Barth took scripture to be one vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel – at least Barth takes it to be non-fiction! The characteristic patterns in the narrative guide what the theologian says about the agent/subject of the stories, in much the way that patterns in a novel guide what a literary critic may say about the characters in a novel.[37]

[32] Frei, 'Eberard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth', 159–60; cf. Frei, *Eclipse*, vii–viii.
[33] Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 2, 159.
[34] Kelsey, 39–55.
[35] Kelsey, 39, 48.
[36] Kelsey, 39.
[37] Kelsey, 48–49. This description has been widely cited.

The Barth of the 'vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel' has leapt from the pages of Frei's work, with an Auerbachian appreciation for biblical narratives, read in a formalist literary-critical mode, and sharing Frei's conception of how narrative renders personal identity.[38]

Kelsey's treatment helps to clarify some of the strengths and limitations of the consensus perspective on Barth's theological use of Scripture. When Kelsey writes that Barth 'authorises his theological proposals by appeal to the New Testament narratives *just as they stand in the received texts*', this accurately situates Barth's approach to the canonical text in relation to other approaches which treat the text merely as an avenue to the circumstances which underlie the text's production.[39] In Kelsey's account of Barth's interpretation itself (focused on Barth's reading of the Gospels in the section of *CD* IV/2 entitled 'The Royal Man'), however, tensions begin to emerge. He insists that '[t]he picture [of Jesus] is not inferred from the details of the story. It *is* the stories.'[40] But Kelsey's argument is undercut by the equivocation, which is endemic in his presentation, between narrative/story and narratives/stories. If an appeal to 'narrative' is a key feature of Barth's theological *modus operandi*, does this mean that he directs his attention to the formal features of particular narrative-genre texts in their literary integrity, or to 'story' in a more diffuse and less textually specific sense?[41] A distinct but related issue concerns the scope of Barth's narrative construal of Scripture. Though Kelsey claims that Barth operates with various different construals of Scripture, the suggestion that Barth 'took scripture to be one vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel' nevertheless implies that he extends this narrative construal to the entirety of the Bible, and that it is not only each of the various biblical narratives which can be understood by analogy with a realistic novel, but the entirety of Scripture as a single 'narrative'.[42] Is there a single overarching biblical narrative in Barth's construal of Scripture, and if so, what relationship does it bear to particular biblical narratives 'as they stand in the received texts'? The problems evident here may be original to

[38] In footnotes to his text (nn. 74, 84), Kelsey refers appreciatively to both *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* and *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (though he is aware that the latter 'develops this way of construing scripture in a more sophisticated and self-conscious way than does Barth'). Frei later returned the favour ('On Interpreting the Christian Story', 79.)

[39] Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture*, 45, cf. 49–50. Emphasis mine.

[40] Kelsey, 45.

[41] A similar problem emerges when Kelsey attempts to show that Barth works from the close parallel between the patterns of intention exhibited in 'the history of Jesus' and those in 'the history of Israel' to the unity of 'one selfsame agent' and thence to the unity of the Bible, because '[t]he whole canon thus renders the same subject.' In the absence of a single realistic narrative identical with 'the history of Israel', Kelsey is forced to admit that 'the history of Israel as a whole, though not necessarily the testimony of any individual prophet, prophesies or prefigures Jesus Christ as mediator' (Kelsey, 46.) As noted above, this somewhat ironic tendency to abstraction from particular narrative texts in favour of a generalised 'story' is also evident in Frei's work.

[42] Moreover, if, as Kelsey suggests, a construal of Scripture is bound up with a theologian's basic perception of the essence of Christianity, it is difficult to understand how one theologian could concurrently employ multiple construals.

Barth's work or flaws in Kelsey's analysis; either way, further clarification of Barth's theological use of Scripture is necessary.

Similarly adopting the basic dimensions of Frei's intuitions, David Ford undertook a more sustained study of Barth's biblical interpretation, firming up the lines and filling in the details of Frei's brief sketch.[43] Ford gives the seminal account of Barth as a narrative thinker. Seeking to remedy the paucity of attention to Barth's exegesis in previous critical studies, Ford argues that Barth's dominant approach to the Bible involves the interpretation of certain biblical narratives, which 'provides the structure of argument and much of the content of his whole theology', and that his procedure for handling these narratives 'has much in common with literary criticism of the genre of realistic narrative'.[44] He contends that 'Barth is one of the readers who sees in the Bible what Auerbach […] and Frei see':

> Barth […] recognized that it is chiefly through stories that the Bible conveys its understanding of reality. He went further in insisting that this way of rendering reality is one in which form and content are inseparable. The portrayal of complexity, individuality, and particularity as they unfold in a sequence of characters and events in interaction is not something that can be understood except by following the sequence attentively. The meaning is built up cumulatively and in an irreducibly temporal form, and amounts to a rich reality to which abstractions and generalizations cannot do full justice. This way of writing is what I mean by 'realism', and it is found in many novels and biblical narratives which render a world of meaning in terms of its characters and particularities, presenting it as they go along.[45]

Once again, Barth's biblical interpretation is notable for his attention to narrative and its distinctive formal features, and particularly its temporally sequential and cumulative aspect. Ford, like Frei, focuses on Barth's biblical interpretation in the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*, but also attempts to trace the growing importance of biblical narrative through Barth's earlier theological work.[46]

Along with a basic perspective on Barth's approach to the biblical text, Ford has also inherited Frei's preoccupation with the decisions pertaining to hermeneutical method underlying Barth's theological exegesis. By exploring Barth's doctrines of election, creation, and reconciliation, Ford is successful in demonstrating that a literal reading of the biblical text in its present form supplies the 'data for theological reflection' – as opposed to a reading based

[43] For Frei's influence on Ford's thinking, see Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 9, 126, *et passim*.
[44] David Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', in *Karl Barth - Studies of His Theological Methods*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 56.
[45] Ford, 77. Ford also draws on J. P. Stern's literary-critical work to extend Frei's analysis.
[46] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 24.

on a reconstruction of the historical events or religious psychology underlying the text – and that 'literary' judgments on this text occupy an important place in Barth's theological argumentation.[47] Comparatively little attention, however, is given to supporting the positive claim that Barth appeals to the inherently temporal and cumulative rendering of meaning in narrative texts.[48] Where this is done, Barth's appeals to 'the Gospel story' not infrequently turn out, on closer inspection, to be references to a select, compressed sequence of events, or even a single event (usually Jesus' resurrection). Similarly, relatively little attention is devoted to exploring Barth's exegesis *as such*: that is, to tracing and evaluating Barth's exegetical decisions with specific reference to the text(s) occasioning his theological expositions. Ford offers some useful insights into the limitations of Barth's interpretative treatments of biblical narratives – chiefly regarding the way that a focus on Jesus Christ sometimes threatens to overwhelm other elements present in the text – but his evaluative conclusions are offered largely within the frame of 'realistic reading', according to how consistently Barth has executed this procedure.[49] This evaluative lens obscures a prominent feature of Barth's exegesis: his tendency to arrive at results that many Bible readers – even those committed to a christocentric reading of the biblical texts as they stand – might consider counterintuitive. Ford's treatment thus helps to clarify that Frei's analogy with the literary-critical reading of realistic narrative has substantial explanatory power for Barth's approach at the hermeneutical level, but offers only limited insights into Barth's exegetical practice in relation to theological construction.

Ford also directs substantial attention to Barth's 'typological' or figural reading of scripture, claiming that Barth employs a modified form of traditional typology, as outlined by Frei.[50] Barth insists on 'a framework which is that of the single narrative woven by typological interpretation';[51] the providentially ordered biblical history consists in a cumulative sequence leading up to and including the life of Jesus Christ, such that typological correspondences can be discerned by attending to literary parallels between a given biblical text and the story of Jesus Christ.[52] Barth's God orders the meaning of history like an author who shapes her

[47] Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', 73; cf. Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 82.
[48] Ford's most sustained effort to do so relates to Barth's doctrine of election.
[49] Barth's reading distorts the Gospels, for example, because he has read them not akin to a realistic novel but as if they were instances of sub-realistic *Bildungsroman* or *Entwicklungsroman* literature. See Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', 85–86; *Barth and God's Story*, 169.
[50] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 50.
[51] Ford, 52.
[52] See Ford, 79–90.

narrative such that the events of its decisive passage are prefigured throughout.[53] Yet Ford also observes an innovative 'concentration' of the traditional world of meaning:[54]

> Barth's comprehensive […] world of meaning is *an overarching story which is not the traditional one from creation to parousia but is the lifetime of Jesus Christ*. A doctrine of time based on an interpretation of the resurrection supports the inclusiveness of that stretch of time, and the Old Testament history and all world history are "figured" into it.[55]

Now 'the story of Jesus Christ is taken as the all-inclusive story of world history; all history is figuratively related to it'.[56] Ford argues, however, that this kind of 'christocentricity' 'upsets the human ecology' of the biblical story, threatening the integrity of its other *dramatis personae*.[57]

Thus on Ford's account, too, narrative plays an important role in mediating Barth's typological interpretations of Scripture. Ford offers an important advance over Frei's attempt to portray Barth as a kind of *Calvin redivivus* in his employment of more-or-less traditional figural interpretation, but also raises further questions. Is it coherent to claim, on the one hand, that figural interpretation depends on the inclusion of the Gospel story within a cumulative temporal sequence, such that 'the narrative framework of the rest of the Bible […] gives the context for the central story', and on the other that the central story includes all other history and *is* the overarching world of meaning within which it is to be figurally understood?[58] If not, does the tension lie in Barth's interpretation or Ford's explanation? Does it make sense to speak of typology founded in narrative teleology if types can not only temporally precede but also succeed their antitype? How fully does Ford's explanation – the juxtaposition of the literary patterns cumulatively rendered in the Gospels' realistic narratives and those patterns discerned in a type-text – illuminate Barth's strategy for the typological reading of biblical texts, and their use in dogmatic construction?[59] Are the distortions apparent in Barth's typological readings – the tendency for a narrative's 'literal' meaning to be swallowed up by its typological meaning – best explained in terms of literary *aesthesis* (e.g., by Barth's 'weakness for the "Entwicklungsroman" tendency')?[60] Even in this modified form, the notion that Barth

[53] Ford, 90–91. Ford considers Kelsey's suggestion that Barth regards the Bible as 'one vast, loosely-structured non-fictional novel' an endorsement of his own portrayal (p. 126).
[54] Ford, 116.
[55] Ford, 165. Emphasis added.
[56] Ford, 103.
[57] Ford, 171, 183.
[58] Ford, 38.
[59] Especially given that Ford focuses largely on the same subset of Barth's biblical interpretation as Frei.
[60] Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 115.

perceives an overarching story in Scripture which functions as the matrix for his typological readings is faced with insuperable difficulties.

The decades since the work of Frei, Kelsey, and Ford have seen increased interest in Barth as a reader of Scripture.[61] The works of Frei's former students have featured prominently within this overall trend, and have generally served to reaffirm Frei's basic perspective.[62] Paul McGlasson's *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth* constitutes a partial exception.[63] Its influence on the study of Barth as a reader of Scripture has been limited to McGlasson's insistence on 'the logical and material priority of biblical exegesis over hermeneutics' in Barth's theology and decision therefore to focus Barth's actual biblical exegesis rather than his hermeneutical statements.[64] However, McGlasson also offers an underappreciated challenge to Ford's account of Barth as primarily a 'narrative expositor of Scripture', highlighting the methodological pluralism of Barth's exegesis and arguing that 'there are […] narrative elements in Barth's exegesis rather than a single narrative method.'[65] Yet McGlasson's analysis still overstates the significance of the 'narrative elements' he detects in Barth's exegesis. One of these elements is 'the vast, temporal sub-structure which [Barth] gives to the Bible as a whole'.[66] According to McGlasson, Barth approximates traditional typological reading, attempting to read discrete narrative texts christologically by unifying them 'into a larger narrative world embracing both'.[67] But McGlasson himself also notes the protean shape of the 'temporal sub-structure' Barth finds in the Bible; it is comprised of a variable set of 'nodal points' (i.e., events) rather than fixed temporal periods, and

> Barth the expositor of Scripture sees the narrated structure of the biblical world as entirely *fluid*, both forwards and backwards. […] The biblical text is not, that is to

[61] See, among others, Christina A. Baxter, 'Barth: A Truly Biblical Theologian?', *Tyndale Bulletin* 38 (1987): 3–27; Watson, 'The Bible'; and the essays collected in the volumes George Hunsinger, ed., *Thy Word Is Truth: Barth on Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Daniel L Migliore, ed., *Reading the Gospels with Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017); Ben Rhodes and Martin Westerholm, *Freedom under the Word: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

[62] See e.g. Cunningham, *What Is Theological Exegesis?*; Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the 'Plain Sense' of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *'"*A Type of the One to Come*"*: Leviticus 14 and 16 in Barth*′*s Church Dogmatics*′*, in *Thy Word Is Truth: Barth on Scripture*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 67–85.

[63] Paul McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991). This is the published version of a Yale PhD dissertation completed under Frei's supervision.

[64] McGlasson, 2. The scope of McGlasson's study is *CD* I-II. Cf. Cunningham, *What Is Theological Exegesis?*, 13–14.

[65] McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas*, 123, 129. See also pp. 6-9, 123-135.

[66] McGlasson, 126.

[67] McGlasson, 57.

> say, constituted by so many narrative episodes which only make sense as non-interchangeable moments in one unbroken and unbreakable narrative line.[68]

McGlasson can even claim that Barth's exegesis lacks 'a unitary, stable narrative world'; specific instances can 'sublimate the narrative shape of the biblical witness' by merging its distinct moments 'into what approximates a unified, non-temporal view'.[69] Moreover, Barth's exegesis can expound a 'basically narrative text […] in such a way as to strip it of its characteristically narrative features'.[70] Thus McGlasson's account of the narrative aspect of Barth's biblical exegesis is not entirely coherent, and also fails to convince both at various points of detail (the charge of atemporality cannot be made to stick to Barth's mature theology) and in its attempt to offer an overall explanation for how Barth approaches narrative.[71] Nevertheless, without appreciating their full significance, the work serves to highlight features of Barth's handling of biblical narrative – especially relating to the temporal framework of an overall biblical narrative and its relationship to typological reading – which are problematic for the consensus view that Barth employs a basically narrative approach to the Bible. Indeed, in the judgement of John Webster, one of Barth's most prominent recent interpreters, 'Barth is not best characterised as a "narrative theologian"'.[72]

To summarise: according to the consensus stemming from Hans Frei's work, Barth's theology consists, in significant part, in reflection on biblical narrative. This is seen most clearly in *CD* II/2 and the subsequent volumes of that work, but is also perceptible in Barth's earlier works of theological interpretation. Barth's theological reflection and dogmatic construction moves within the circle of the biblical text, and is especially focused on certain biblical narratives. The meaning of these narratives is inseparable from their narrative form, especially in its temporal and cumulative dimension. The unity of the Bible, and the interrelation of the various biblical narratives, is established by means of figural or typological interpretation in which an 'overarching story' plays a crucial role. This perspective provides useful insights into the differences between Barth's and other approaches at the level of hermeneutical method, especially in identifying Barth's focus on the text itself (rather than the text as an artefact of an author's historical or psychological circumstances) as the data for

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[68] McGlasson, 127.
[69] McGlasson, 130, 102.
[70] McGlasson, 130. Cf. p. 73.
[71] McGlasson's comments on pp. 129-130 are too abstract and general to be useful. Additionally, the work as a whole is unfortunately marred by a tone of exasperated polemic.
[72] John Webster, 'The Grand Narrative of Jesus Christ: Barth's Christology', in *Karl Barth: A Future for Postmodern Theology?*, ed. Geoff Thompson and Christiaan Mostert (Hindmarsh: Australian Theological Forum, 2001), 35.

theological reflection. However, the studies cited have focused disproportionately on locating Barth's hermeneutical decisions with respect to a determinate thesis regarding the history of biblical interpretation, tending to displace attention to Barth's exegesis *per se* – as an effort to expound the meaning of the biblical text – and to its place as such in his construction of dogmatic theology. The genesis and characteristic shape of the analytical parallel between Barth and formalist New Critics is located in concerns specific to Frei's own constructive theological project, raising the question of the extent to which this parallel might be fruitful in illuminating Barth's own distinctive biblical exegesis. This perspective has rightly drawn attention to Barth's deployment of something like traditional typological exegesis, but the precise nature of Barth's typological interpretative procedure, and especially the question regarding the presence and function of an overarching biblical metanarrative, has emerged as another issue requiring further investigation and clarification.

3. Orientation

By reopening the question of the role played by narrative, as such, in Barth's dogmatic construction, and focusing on the concrete particulars of his exegesis, the present study seeks to more accurately characterise Barth's theological interpretation of biblical narrative and thus to resource its critical appropriation. This study is not primarily concerned with the importance of Barth's theological and exegetical work for philosophical reflection on the conditions for the possibility of understanding written texts; that is, for 'hermeneutics'.[73] Even where previous studies have rightly acknowledged the priority of exegesis over hermeneutics in Barth's theological work, Barth's interpretative comments have often been regarded mainly as a window through which one might peer in order to glimpse his methodological principles. The key issue here is not the recurring question of whether Barth's explicit methodological

[73] Though Barth resisted being drawn into sustained debate over a matter he regarded as secondary, his direct engagement with questions of hermeneutical method goes back to his break with the liberal protestant tradition. The prefaces to the second and third editions of *Der Römerbrief* reflect the wide recognition of the hermeneutical challenge constituted by the preface to the first edition, and the effort to describe and situate Barth's hermeneutical principles in relation to rival proposals – especially the array of approaches characterised by the term 'historical criticism' – has long been well-represented in both German and Anglophone Barth scholarship. See the references supplied in the introduction to Cunningham, *What Is Theological Exegesis?* The most perceptive studies of Barth's hermeneutics have recognised that, for Barth, it is matters of theological substance, themselves gleaned by exegesis, which are fundamental; hermeneutical principles are subordinate to a 'theology of interpretation', and not *vice versa*. See especially Donald Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); also Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*; John Webster, 'Barth's Lectures on the Gospel of John', in *Thy Word Is Truth: Barth on Scripture*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 125–47.

statements or the patterns implicit in his exegetical practice offer the best access to his hermeneutical principles, but whether Barth's actual attempts to exegete the biblical text are meaningfully illuminated and thus become – at least potentially – illuminating for fellow exegetes. I will attempt to reflect Barth's own priorities by focusing on his theological exegesis *as such*: his endeavour to responsibly perform the concrete task of interpretation by 'the submission of our ideas, thoughts and convictions to the witness which is in Scripture.'[74] My primary aim will be to trace the interplay of exegetical judgements and dogmatic concerns in Barth's interpretations of specific biblical texts within specific dogmatic contexts in *Church Dogmatics*.[75]

Before exploring part of the great edifice standing atop Barth's decades of theological and exegetical activity, however, I will excavate a much older stratum on this site in order to bring to light important clues for understanding the distinctive approach to biblical narrative evident in his later interpretative work. Part I traces two of Barth's early expeditions into 'the strange new world within the Bible': the famous second edition of *Der Römerbrief* (1922) and the lesser-known *Die Auferstehung der Toten* (1924). Barth's difficult exegetical negotiations with the limited appeals to narrative sequence in these Pauline epistles reveal an *anti-narratival* tendency in his interpretation of the biblical text. The origin of this tendency lies in part – but only in part – in the texts he has chosen to expound: it may be characterised as 'radical Paulinism'. Barth perceives in Paul's words a testimony to a divine activity which is intensely punctiliar – indeed, a singularity; this perception in turn guides Barth's exposition of the epistolary texts in such a way that the theological significance of narrative as such is severely circumscribed, and also extends to his handling of other texts in which narrative features more prominently.

Without attempting to offer a full developmental account, I will demonstrate that an essentially *singular* conception of the divine activity constitutes an important element of continuity in Barth's approach to biblical interpretation across the broad and eventful span of his career.[76] Notwithstanding the modifications in Barth's theological method, the basic

[74] *KD* I/2, 805; *CD* I/2, 719. Though grateful use has been made of the standard English translations of Barth's works, all translations offered are my own. For readers' convenience, dual references to both the German original and an English translation will be supplied throughout.

[75] Largely avoiding the language of 'hermeneutics', I shall prefer 'interpretation', 'reading', and 'exegesis', using these less-freighted terms interchangeably to describe Barth's concrete attempts to perceive and expound what the biblical authors – 'the apostles and prophets' – mean by their words.

[76] The project of charting breaks, continuities, and points of inflection in his theological development goes all the way back to Barth's own significant interest in managing his personal *mythos*. Previous studies in this area have largely focused on theological method: see e.g. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992); Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl*

decisions about the biblical text taken in his early theological exegesis retain a recognisable shape and continue to exert a powerful influence in his late dogmatic work. Thus in Part II, deploying Kelsey's concept of a 'construal', I will argue that Barth's biblical interpretation in his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation' operates according to a construal of Scripture as a pluriform testimony to a fundamentally singular event: the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, we shall see that Barth's exegesis of key passages in this dogmatic context, supposedly the heartland of his narrative theology, echoes the compressive tendency evident in his earlier biblical expositions.[77] Focusing on the issue of typological interpretation, I will argue that Barth's exegesis of the parable of the Prodigal Son offers a paradigm for the christological interpretation of christologically-anonymous texts, mediated not by appeal to a narrative context but by structural parallels between the type-text and the singular event of reconciliation. This model of 'parabolic' interpretation will then be seen to illuminate Barth's christological interpretations of two Old Testament narrative texts without recourse to an overarching biblical metanarrative: the story of David, Abigail, and Nabal (1 Samuel 25) and the creation narrative of Genesis 1.1-2.3.[78]

By way of conclusion, I will suggest one avenue for a critical and creative retrieval of Barth's theology, through an alternative approach to the christological interpretation of biblical narrative.

Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The present study offers a modest contribution to the underexplored interpretative dimension of Barth's development.

[77] For reasons of space, I will be unable to directly address those expositions of biblical narrative which particularly occupied the attention of Frei and those who followed him. While a re-examination of these passages would certainly be instructive and would, I believe, support the present thesis, it is also desirable to broaden the discussion beyond a few well-trodden *loci classici*.

[78] The final exposition mentioned here broadens the focus of Part II beyond *CD* IV/1-3 to include *CD* III/1.

Chapter 1. 'Pure event': the singular gospel in *Der Römerbrief*

Barth's star burns bright in the firmament of 20th-Century theology, and *Der Römerbrief* ('The Epistle to the Romans') was the work with which that star first came into the ascendant. This breakthrough text, which is Barth's most sustained and substantial early work of biblical exegesis and evinces a pronounced theological interest, offers an obvious place to begin in an exploration of Barth's theological exegesis. But of course, with *Der Römerbrief*, nothing is straightforward. Bibliographically, the first edition (1919) propelled Barth to fame, but the thoroughly rewritten second edition (1922) has become the enduring and definitive version.[1] Generically, one can imagine some mutual discomfort as this volume sits on the library shelf between other more typical works of 'New Testament commentary'. Then there is the work's content: Barth declares that Paul's voice was 'new' to him, and Barth's Paul has been a stranger to many.[2] The reader of *Der Römerbrief* finds herself in an unfamiliar world of restless paradox, of bracketing and negation, tangent and void; as soon as she has her bearings, everything is inverted and suspended in the air.

What can we hope to learn about Barth the exegete from this strange text? From the very first, the genuineness of *Der Römerbrief* as an exegetical treatment of Paul's epistle to the Romans has been regarded as dubious.[3] Even its more appreciative readers have seen here 'not a commentary, but a work of theological method, turned out in pauline dress', or perhaps 'a piece of irregular dogmatics', or even a 'hermeneutical manifesto'.[4]

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[1] The first edition (Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Erste Fassung) 1919*, ed. Hermann Schmidt [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1985]) was printed by G. A. Bäschlin in Berne in 1918, but lists 1919 as its date of publication. The second edition (Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922* [Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1940]) was completed in Safenwil 1921, but appeared in 1922 (originally published in Munich by Christian Kaiser Verlag), after Barth's move to Göttingen. See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (London: SCM, 1976), 105–6, 120–21.

[2] *R2*, v-vi; *ER*, 2.

[3] For a sample of early critiques of *Der Römerbrief*, see James M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology, Volume One*, trans. Keith R. Crim and L. De Grazia (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968); Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 15–19. For later criticisms, see e.g. James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 57; Krister Stendahl, 'Selections from "Biblical Theology, Contemporary"', in *Theology, History, and Biblical Interpretation: Modern Readings*, ed. Darren Sarisky (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 245.

[4] Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's 'Doctrine of Israel'* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 18; John Webster, 'Karl Barth', in *Reading Romans through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 205; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 510. Note that only Gadamer is expressing his own position. For an appreciative reading which largely ignores the work's exegetical dimension, see McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*.

For his part, Barth insisted in his authorial preface to the English translation published in 1933:

> My sole aim was to interpret Scripture. I beg my readers not to assume from the outset – as many in Germany have assumed – that I am not interpreting Scripture at all, or rather, that I am interpreting it "spiritually". […] I must assure them that, in writing this book, I felt myself bound to the actual words of the text, and did not in any way propose to engage myself in free theologising.[5]

A number of recent interpreters have judged that these claims must be taken seriously.[6] Formally, at least, *Der Römerbrief* is indeed a biblical commentary, taking up a passage of Paul's text, offering a translation and his interpretative comments, and then treating the next consecutive passage.[7] Certainly, Barth largely dispenses with some of the genre's standard conventions; most notably, the attempt to investigate the grammatical and syntactical features of Paul's text and to reproduce its meaning for the apostle's first-century audience by means of philological and historical work. Barth wishes to look with Paul, to see what Paul saw, but not merely to say what Paul said then; rather, to say what Paul might say now. *Der Römerbrief* is something like a contemporary performance of a classic piece: Barth brings his creative energies and distinctive concerns to the epistle in the hope and expectation that his explanatory paraphrase will speak freshly and forcefully in his own early-20th-Century European context. The accent lies on the text's generative role in the act of interpretation, rather than its constraining role, with Paul's words often serving as a 'point of departure' for Barth's bold theological and homiletic thrusts.[8] This carries the risk, of course, that the theological interpretation slips its moorings entirely and drifts away from the text, and Barth's commentary does not entirely escape this risk. Yet it is precisely *Paul's words* which offer the point of departure for Barth's exposition. The subject which occupies Barth is the subject with which he believes Paul to be occupied, and it is in the apostle's words that Barth seeks the Word.[9] In *Der Römerbrief*, therefore, we can expect to find Barth the exegete at work on the Pauline text.

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[5] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), ix.
[6] For representatives of this consensus (each with their own reservations and qualifications regarding the nature and quality of Barth's exegesis in *Der Römerbrief*), see Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*; Webster, 'Reading Romans'; Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation*; Wesley Hill, 'The Church as Israel and Israel as the Church: An Examination of Karl Barth's Exegesis of Romans 9:1-5 in the Epistle to the Romans and Church Dogmatics 2/2', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6, no. 1 (2012): 139–58; 'Rewriting Romans: Theology and Exegesis in Barth's Early Commentaries', in *Freedom under the Word: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, ed. Ben Rhodes and Martin Westerholm (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 53–69.
[7] See Webster, 'Reading Romans'; Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation*, 19.
[8] Francis Watson, 'Barth, Ephesians, and the Practice of Theological Exegesis', in *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 19.
[9] See *R2*, xii; *ER*, 8.

Yet here another issue arises: the Pauline text is an epistle, not a narrative. What can we learn here about Barth's theological interpretation of biblical narratives? At the basic level of genre, we must acknowledge that 'Paul is simply not a storyteller.'[10] Paul is 'set apart for the gospel of God', but he gives us no extended narrative version of that gospel comparable with those offered by the four canonical evangelists.[11] Where Paul's gospel comes to direct expression in his epistles, it is usually in the form of brief, concentrated statements which depict a surprising, paradoxical, and *single* act: 'Christ died for the ungodly'; '[God…] did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all'; 'for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'.[12] Similarly, where Paul has world- and salvation-history in mind, that which the Law and the Prophets narrate at great length the apostle sketches in a few brief, bold strokes: 'as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.'[13] Noticeably, Paul's more extended presentations of his gospel appear in material which he has likely adopted from elsewhere in early Christian tradition.[14] Perhaps extended narratives about Jesus Christ had some place in Paul's direct personal missionary and pastoral practice, but when Paul the epistler explicitly articulates what God did in Christ, he characteristically announces a singular act: infinitely rich in meaning and significance, to be sure, but an act which is nevertheless depicted as a unity.[15]

Nevertheless, this Pauline tendency to express the divine activity in Christ in singular fashion is not absolute. The very fact that Paul does appropriate traditional material in which the gospel is given more extensive articulation indicates that this mode of expression is perfectly compatible with his own understanding of the gospel.[16] Moreover, the reader can distil from Paul's epistles various moments in the gospel, which the apostle sometimes ranges in sequence. God's activity in Christ is a matter of distinct events in the past, present, and future: 'Christ died for us', 'we are now justified by his blood', 'we shall be saved by him'.[17] Paul's gospel also has a narrative penumbra. What God did in Christ is both surprising (Νυνὶ

[10] Francis Watson, 'Is There a Story in These Texts?', in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 232; cf. Watson, 'Barth, Ephesians, and the Practice of Theological Exegesis', 30.
[11] Rom 1.1.
[12] Rom 5.8; 8.32; 6.23. The diversity of these expressions attests the richness of the divine activity in Christ in Paul's thought (cf. also Rom 15.7; 2 Cor 5.9; Gal 5.1).
[13] Rom 5.18. See also 1 Cor 15.21-22; Gal 3.24.
[14] E.g. 1 Cor 15.3-8; Phil 2.5-11.
[15] See Watson, 'Is There a Story', 233.
[16] Additionally, it remains possible that that this traditional material, in part or whole, originates with Paul. See e.g. Markus Bockmuehl, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1997), 117–20.
[17] Rom 5.8-9.

δὲ!) and long-anticipated (μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν).[18] For Paul, the gospel was 'promised beforehand through [God's] prophets in the holy scriptures'; indeed, 'the scripture […] preached the gospel beforehand'.[19] Paul's focused statements of the gospel must be understood as summaries of a cohesive, interrelated sequence of events, these events themselves preceded and followed by others, rather than declarations of an absolutely singular event. If Paul's gospel is germane to expression as a singularity, it is not absolutely hostile to expression as a sequence. An interpretation which makes use of the categories native to narrative – temporal sequence, plot, characterisation – is one avenue available to the reader of Paul's epistles.[20] Exploring whether or not Barth pursues this avenue, and more importantly *why* he does or does not, will offer important insight into the role played by biblical narrative in his theological exegesis and construction at this stage of his development.

Moreover, whether or not Paul *tells* a story, it is indisputable that he *reads* stories.[21] More precisely, he reads Israel's stories, as told in Israel's scriptures, and interprets them in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can learn much about Barth as an interpreter of biblical narratives examining by how he responds to Paul's readings of biblical narratives.

To indicate the results of these explorations in advance: the distinctive mark of Barth's exegetical procedure is his attempt to focus determinedly on the basic subject matter with which Paul is occupied in the epistle, and *the way Barth conceptualises this basic subject matter inhibits an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a narrative* (i.e. as a coherent series of interconnected but discrete events unfolding cumulatively in a temporal sequence), and also *inhibits the location of this gospel within a scriptural metanarrative*. Barth understands Paul's gospel as a singular, 'non-historical' event, with a correspondingly singular meaning.

[18] Rom 3.26.
[19] Rom 1.2; Gal 3.8.
[20] Interpretations which emphasise this more extensive dimension of Paul's thought include Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols (London: SPCK, 2013); Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).
[21] On this point both Watson and Hays are in agreement: Watson, 'Is There a Story', 234; Richard B. Hays, 'Is Paul's Gospel Narratable?', *JSNT* 27, no. 2 (2004): 237. See further Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*; Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

1. Eternity, history, and narrative

Der Römerbrief owes its distinctive character as a work of biblical commentary to Barth's deliberate deviation from the standard 'historical-critical method of Biblical investigation'.[22] Without denying the value of this method, Barth insisted that genuine interpretation required a 'more critical' approach, consisting in 'the measuring of all the included words and phrases by the Subject [*Sache*] about which they, if one is not completely deceived, are clearly speaking'.[23] In a draft of the preface to work's first edition, Barth had described the distinctive approach he was endeavouring to follow as '*sachlicher, inhaltlicher, wesentlicher*': 'more in accordance with the Subject, content, and substance' of the Bible.[24] *Der Römerbrief* is Barth's thoroughgoing effort to understand and explain the meaning of Paul's words in light of their relation to their *Sache*. Though Anglophones lack a precise equivalent for this word, its meaning is approximated by terms such as 'subject-matter', 'object', 'theme'.[25] The rendering 'Subject' perhaps brings us closest to what Barth means by *die Sache*: a reference to the essential material content of Paul's text, and a recognition that this essential material content concerns not an inert 'object' or impersonal 'theme' but an always-active divine Subject.[26]

In the face of accusations that he had systematically imposed his own meaning upon Paul's text, Barth famously replied in the defiant preface to the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*,

> If I have a 'system', it consists in this: that I keep in sight as insistently as possible what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, in its negative and positive sense. 'God is in heaven and you are on earth.' The relationship of *this* God to *this* human being, the relationship of *this* human being to *this* God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the sum of philosophy rolled into one.[27]

Barth understands the Bible in general – and Romans in particular – to be fundamentally concerned with *God*, who is

> the pure limit and pure beginning of everything that we are, have, and do, standing in infinite qualitative distinction over against human beings and everything human,

[22] *R2*, v; *ER*, 1.
[23] *R2*, xii; *ER*, 8.
[24] *R1*, 582. Barth's draft prefaces are published in *R1*, 581-602; English translations and discussion may be found in Appendix 2 and Ch. 3 respectively in Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*.
[25] See Burnett, 74–78.
[26] This rendering does not quite capture, however, the important fact that this divine Subject is objective (i.e. entirely other than and irreducible to the human subject).
[27] *R2*, xiii; *ER*, 10.

> absolutely never identical with that which we call God – what we experience, intuit and worship as God.[28]

If such a God discloses himself to humanity, it can only be as the boundary and limit of all human endeavour, exposing humanity's inadequacy for a positive relationship with God. Nevertheless, with God the impossible is possible: 'God's mercy triumphs! It is given to us that this positive relationship between God and humanity, the absolute paradox, *exists*.'[29] The relationship between this God and this humanity can only be a *diastasis*: 'a relation in which the two members stand over against each other with no possibility of a synthesis into a higher form of being'.[30] For Barth, Paul is concerned in Romans with this God, this humanity, this relationship; a perception of this '*inner dialectic of the Subject* [Sache] in the wording of the text' is the *sine qua non* for true interpretation of the epistle.[31]

The specific way in which Barth understands and articulates this hermeneutically crucial *Sache* has major implications for his approach to biblical narratives. Before commencing our detailed exploration, we will summarise its results: for Barth, the gospel of Jesus Christ declares a fundamentally punctiliar event rather than a temporally extensive process, an event which cannot be assimilated into a temporal and causal sequence. This means that the gospel cannot be understood or depicted as a narrative, nor as part of a narrative, and results in a tendency for Barth's textual interpretation to minimise the character of biblical narratives as a cumulative temporal sequence of interconnected events, and to effectively compress the meaning of biblical narratives into the meaning of a single complex event.

As indicated in the quotations above, the relationship between time and eternity supplies key language and conceptualities for Barth's articulation of the relationship between God and humanity. Barth makes God synonymous with eternity, and humanity synonymous with the temporal world, depicting the diastatic relationship between God and humanity in terms of a 'dehistoricised eschatology', in which the temporal world is divided from eternity (protology and eschatology) by the 'line of death' (*Todeslinie*).[32] Barth's exposition of the name Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν in the context of Rom. 1.3-4 establishes the essential features of this conceptuality which guides Barth's interpretation of the entire epistle.

> *Jesus Christ our Lord*, that is the gospel, that is the meaning of history. In this name two worlds meet and diverge, two planes intersect, one known and one unknown.

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[28] *R2*, 315; *ER*, 330-31.
[29] *R2*, 69; *ER*, 94.
[30] McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 129.
[31] *R2*, xiii; *ER*, 10.
For another articulation of Barth's understanding of Romans' *Sache*, see Webster, 'Reading Romans', 213–15.
[32] McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 233.

> The known is the world which was created by God, but fallen from its original unity with God and therefore in need of redemption – the world of the "flesh", the world of humanity, of time, and of things: our world. This known plane is intersected by another unknown plane, by the world of the Father, the world of the original creation and final redemption.[33]

Temporal and material phenomena – including the human religious impulse as an immanent psychological and historical factor – are not and cannot be identical with or even continuous with divine revelation. Such phenomena exist on an entirely different plane to what is eternal: the divine being and activity. In 1915 Barth expressed had expressed this thought more directly: 'World remains world. But God is God.'[34] Now the relationship between time and eternity serves to depict the *diastasis* of world and God.

Although Barth's interpreters have been much exercised by the '"infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity', properly speaking, Barth gives fundamental importance to the *relationship* between these dialectically opposed members, and not to their dialectical opposition as such. Time and eternity, whilst dialectically opposed and radically distinct, are also dialectically related; they are two different planes, but these planes intersect. 'The gospel' is about this intersection. The line of intersection (*Schnittlinie*) is imperceptible, except at a single point (*der Punkt der Schnittlinie*).[35] Barth describes the character of this point dialectically; it is both historical and non-historical.[36] This 'point' is a human figure existing within the temporal, material, perceptible world: '*Jesus*, Jesus of Nazareth, the "historical" [*„historische"*] Jesus, "born of David's lineage according to the flesh"'.[37] As such, the 'point' occupies a definite place within the structure of the temporal, spatial, perceptible world. God's revelation is located at a particular time and place in history: the life of Jesus – the years AD1-30. Conversely, according to his dialectical theological method, Barth also wishes to assert the opposite: 'And insofar as this world of ours is touched in Jesus by that other world, it ceases to be historical, timely, material [*historisch, zeitlich, dinglich*], directly perceptible.'[38] The point at which the unknown world of God encounters the known world of time is not a point of contact and transformation (*i.e.* an *Anknüpfungspunkt*), but a point of rupture and negation

[33] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29. The immediately following quotations from Barth's commentary all form part of his reflection on Rom 1.3-4.
[34] The expression comes from Barth's 1915 lecture 'Kriegszeit und Gottesreich', cited in McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 129.
[35] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[36] This language does not imply a sceptical judgement on the facticity of some or all of the events communicated in the Gospels (i.e. a judgment of the kind made by those questing after 'the historical Jesus'), nor that Barth's thinking is 'anti-historical' (i.e. that it entails an absolute separation between the eternal God and the temporal world). Cf. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 233–34.
[37] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[38] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.

(*Bruchstelle*).[39] The continuous fabric of the temporal-spatial world is breached – blown apart – by the touch of eternity. Even the historical phenomena associated with the man Jesus – the 'Leben Jesu' – however striking, are to be regarded as 'craters and voids'; even this portion of history is neither identical with nor even continuous with God's revelation.[40] This point on the line of intersection utterly resists assimilation into the chain of historical causality: 'Jesus as the Christ is the plane unknown to us, which cuts through the plane known to us vertically, from above [*senkrecht von oben*].'[41] Therefore 'this point on the line of intersection itself has – like the entirely unknown plane whose presence it announces – absolutely no extension on to the plane known to us'.[42]

The single 'point' at which the relationship between God and humanity is perceptible cannot itself be understood in the context of a broader temporal sequence. Under the impress of eternity, this point cannot be fixed within a temporal sequence and measured according to its historical antecedents or consequences. It loses its direct intelligibility as an event within the temporal and spatial world; its significance is simply not available to discovery according to the methods of historical investigation which might be applicable and fruitful elsewhere. The opaque meaning of this 'point', the life of Jesus, is rendered transparent only by the resurrection: 'The resurrection is the *revelation* and the discovery of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God and the apprehending of God in him'.[43] If the intersection of time and eternity (*die Schnittlinie*) is perceptible only in Jesus (*der Punkt der Schnittlinie*), then it is perceptible as such only in the resurrection. Barth's theological focus, already constrained to the life of Jesus, is hereby drawn in even more tightly to the single event of the resurrection. Insofar as the life of Jesus means the disclosure to human beings of the 'other world', this meaning is discovered in his resurrection. The punctiliar character of this *Punkt* is hereby intensified: ultimately, to speak of revelation is to speak not of a series of events within a certain temporal interval – the life of Jesus – but to speak of a singular occurrence: the resurrection.

Barth describes the singular occurrence of the resurrection, again, in dialectical fashion: it is both historical and non-historical.

> In the resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh. But it touches it as a tangent touches a circle, without touching it, and precisely as it does *not* touch it, it touches it as its limit, as *new* world. In this way the resurrection is the event [*Ereignis*] before the gates of Jerusalem in AD30,

[39] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[40] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29. See further section 1.2 below.
[41] *R2*, 6; *ER*, 30.
[42] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[43] *R2*, 6; *ER*, 30.

> inasmuch as it 'happened' [*„eintrat"*] and was discovered and recognised there. And yet the resurrection is also not at all this event, inasmuch as its necessity, manifestation and revelation are not caused by this happening, discovery, and recognition, but rather the resurrection itself is their cause.[44]

The resurrection is an event which can be said to have happened at a definite location within time and space, and as such it is available to human perception. Yet again Barth immediately asserts the reverse: the resurrection cannot be identified with this temporal-spatial event, because the resurrection does not arise from within the chain of historical causality. At the tangent-touch of eternity, history is disrupted and loses its historical character. Barth regards the resurrection as an event in history, but unlike all other historical events it is not an element within a sequence or a story. Bruce McCormack captures the nature of the resurrection-event in Barth's thought here: it is 'a pure event; an event without before or after'.[45] As an event which is non-historical in this sense, Jesus' self-revelation as Messiah cannot be fixed to a particular location in time and space, but ranges freely across the temporal-spatial continuum.[46] 'Insofar as Jesus reveals himself and is discovered as the Messiah, he is indeed already "appointed as Son of God" *before* Easter Sunday, and certainly also likewise after Easter Sunday.'[47] In the resurrection the historical sequence of events is radically relativized: notwithstanding the punctiliar singularity of the disclosure of Jesus as the Christ, this disclosure is an event both before and after its historical occurrence.

This dialectically historical and non-historical Christ-event has radical implications for the structure of history as a whole.

> Therefore the years 1-30 are the time of revelation and the time of discovery. This is the time in which – as the reference to David shows – the new, different, divine designation of *all* time is *seen*, and which furthermore dissolves its own particularity among other times [*die ihre Besonderheit unter andern Zeiten selbst*

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[44] *R2*, 6; *ER*, 30.

[45] McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 253. Alain Badiou, whose interest in Paul's writing is not theological, similarly describes Paul's Christ-event as '*évenement pur*': *Saint Paul: La Fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 47. According to Badiou's reading, Paul portrays the resurrection as 'an event that ruptures history with a radical novelty, one which cannot be explained or even named within pre-existing categories of thought and practice', and which 'takes place *in* a specific cultural and historical context, but is not constituted *by* it' (John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 176.)

[46] Again, the description 'non-historical' does not imply that Barth understands the resurrection, and the resurrected Jesus, as merely a pious fabrication, or a mythological symbol of a religious/psychological breakthrough (see e.g. *R2*, 183, 185; *ER*, 203, 205). The resurrection is a (*the*) 'non-historical' event in the sense that it does not occur in causal or temporal continuity with other historical events. Cf. Watson, 'Barth, Ephesians, and the Practice of Theological Exegesis', 28–29; George Hunsinger, 'The Daybreak of the New Creation: Christ's Resurrection in Recent Theology', *SJT* 57, no. 2 (2004): 168–80.

[47] *R2*, 6; *ER*, 30.

> *auch wieder aufhebt*], by opening the possibility that every time could become a time of revelation and a time of discovery.[48]

God's revelation can be dated to a particular point in history, but the touch of eternity immediately undercuts this historical particularity. As an event in history which is nonetheless non-historical in character, the Christ-event conditions *all* history. No historical moment stands in closer proximity than any other to the non-historical Moment of resurrection.[49] Time does not make contact with eternity at the apex of a developmental process immanent to human history or psychology: 'Time, things, and human beings at this point in the world known to us do not, in themselves, rise up above other times, things, and human beings.'[50] Negatively, this means that history's immanent structures dissolve into insignificance in relation to this Moment (or rather, precisely in their shared *lack* of relation to this Moment). When viewed from the infinite height of the 'unknown plane', history must appear as a flat and uniform sheet. Positively, this means that the Moment of resurrection – because it is not bound to any particular temporal moment – is directly present to every temporal moment. Because of the homogeneity of history and the omnitemporality of the Moment of resurrection, Barth is able to speak of history's singular meaning.[51]

Barth reinforces and develops this theme in his exposition of Rom 3.21-26 (entitled 'Jesus'). The disjunctive manifestation of God's righteousness in Christ Jesus, apart from the law (v. 21), means 'that in history there occurs a dissolution of this history, in the known cohesion of things there occurs a rupture of this cohesion, in time there occurs an immobilisation [*Stillstellung*] of this time.'[52] The punctiliar rupture of history confers a uniform meaning on all history. Barth insists that διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (v. 22) must refer to *God's* faithfulness in Jesus Christ.[53] This faithfulness of God means that

> there are, time and again, at many scattered points in history [*an vielen zerstreuten Punkten der Geschichte*], possibilities, opportunities, and witnesses oriented to the recognition of his righteousness. Jesus of Nazareth is, among these many points, the one point at which the others are recognised in their connected meaning as a

[48] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[49] 'Moment' is capitalised here for the sake of clarity, and to indicate the importance acquired by the term *der Augenblick* in this work (see below).
[50] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[51] This singularity underlies the bold hermeneutical stance which Barth defends in the preface to the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*: the historical distinction between 'here' and 'there' disappears in the face of the text's *Sache*. See *R2*, x-xiii; *ER*, 6-10; also Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation*, 12–19.
[52] *R2*, 78; *ER*, 103. Emphasis removed.
[53] *R2*, 66 (cf. xvii); *ER*, 91 (cf. 14).

> line, as the real crimson thread of history [*der eigentliche rote Faden der Geschichte*].[54]

The light shining from the resurrection of Jesus Christ illuminates all history, such that various points within the fabric of history may be perceived as witnesses to the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. These points map the line of intersection where the eternal plane cuts across the temporal plane. Each point bears witness to the meaning of history, not in virtue of some inherent characteristic (e.g. a psychological phenomenon), nor in virtue of an external structure which binds them together (e.g. an overarching narrative to which each occurrence belongs), but rather because of the 'direct' relationship of the non-historical moment of Jesus Christ to its (and every) historical moment. The manifestation of God's righteousness is μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν (v. 21) because 'the meaning of every epoch is directly related to God [*unmittelbar zu Gott*]'.[55] That is, the witness-character of the law and the prophets is not mediated by a biblical metanarrative of God's salvific action in history; rather all human history, including but not limited to Israel's history, takes on the character of witness.[56]

We pause here to note that Barth's image of the 'roter Faden' especially displays his aversion to associating God's activity with the kind of unfolding process that could be depicted in a narrative. The line of intersection – at least insofar as it is perceptible – is not in fact a line at all, but a scattered collection of discrete points which resolve into a line when viewed from a certain perspective. These points are not a continuous sequence of temporally successive occurrences, but are rather the historical trace of a singular event irrupting at different temporal and spatial locations. The fabric of history is pierced again and again by the single needlepoint of the resurrection. The line connecting these pinpricks may not be traced on the fabric itself; the dots are not connected by any stable and persistent material, temporal, psychological or historical property. The relation between God and humanity is experienced within history as the non-historical: this relation does not develop longitudinally on the temporal plane and is unsuited to depiction in the inherently temporally-successive form of a narrative.

Barth's concept of time and eternity in the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*, as outlined above, was oriented to a specific rhetorical purpose. This was the rod with which he sought to chastise the 'all too human' liberal Protestant theology of his time. The *Sache* of Paul's epistle

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[54] *R2*, 70 (NB: the printed text ('*diesen dielen Punkten*') has been emended to '*diesen vielen Punkten*'); *Romans*, 96.
[55] *R2*, 70; *ER*, 95.
[56] 'God's righteousness is the fulfilment of *all* promise [aller *Verheißung*].' Here 'promise' comes to refer not to specific divine speech-acts in the history of Israel, but rather serves as a general characterisation of history as such. *R2*, 70; *ER*, 95.

– the self-disclosure of the infinitely transcendent God which annihilates and reconstitutes all human thinking, doing, and being – rendered impossible the effort to make the historical phenomenon of human religiosity the basic *datum* for theological reflection; any supposedly theological speech on such a basis was merely 'speaking about the human in a somewhat higher pitch'.[57] Nevertheless, while Barth did not primarily and explicitly set himself to construct a theological basis for the interpretation of biblical narrative, his '*sachlicher*' approach entailed at least two significant interpretative implications.

First, Barth's perception of the epistle's *Sache* inhibits a conception and expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ *as a narrative*. The point at which the relationship between God and humanity is perceptible is intensely punctiliar. Even the life of Jesus, already described as a single *Punkt*, is further compressed into a vanishingly small mathematical point: the singular occurrence of the resurrection. The meaning of 'Jesus Christ' is compressed into this single event. On this understanding, therefore, the gospel is not the story of Jesus Christ which unfolds on the temporal plane in a cumulative sequence of interrelated but distinct events. The gospel is compressed into a singularity: a Christ-event whose meaning is finally identical with the resurrection. Indeed, Barth can paraphrase Paul's thematic statement in Rom 1.16-17 as follows: 'The gospel of the resurrection is "the power of God".'[58]

Second, Barth's conception of time and eternity inhibits an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ *as part of a story*. The singular event of the gospel is both historical and non-historical in character, and therefore cannot be absorbed into a broader historical context. Conceived in these terms, the relationship between God and humanity cannot be regarded as a developmental factor in human history. Yet by the same token, the intensely punctiliar, both-historical-and-non-historical revelation of the relationship between God and humanity cannot be understood as an event – even as the decisive event – within a story played out on the stage of history. This is true even of the story of Israel, which accordingly fades into the background of Barth's exposition. The gospel event cannot be securely located within a temporal sequence; it has no antecedents or consequences, but in all its singularity occurs multiply as 'pure event' at any and every temporal location. The gospel is not therefore to be conceived of or depicted as part of a broader metanarrative.

[57] Karl Barth, 'The Word of God as the Task of Theology', in *The Word of God and Theology*, trans. Amy Marga (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 183. See also Barth's *retractatio* in a 1956 lecture, published as *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes*, Theologische Studien 48 (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956).
[58] *R2*, 11; *ER*, 35.

This anti-narratival construal of the epistle's subject-matter is not an inescapable demand of Paul's text, but emerges from the fundamental theological and exegetical decisions Barth makes as he engages with the text. The deliberate and peculiar character of these decisions emerges in sharp relief when we compare his exegesis with another possible interpretation of the same material – proffered by the very same interpreter – in the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* (1919). Exploring the relationship of Barth's commentary to Paul's text by comparing the first and second editions of *Der Römerbrief*, Francis Watson finds that, with Barth's new commitment to the infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity, 'the latter treatment drifts away from exegesis in the direction of the "free theologising" that Barth is so anxious to deny'.[59] A key element in this shifting relationship between Paul's text and Barth's commentary is a move to downplay exposition of the text in terms of the temporal sequence on which narratives depend.

In both editions of the commentary, Barth's exegesis of Romans 1.3-4 expounds the name 'Jesus Christ our Lord' in terms of 'two worlds [*zwei Welten*]'.[60] In the first edition, these are two temporally adjacent histories ('zwei Geschichten').[61] That Jesus is the 'Christ' means that he belongs to an old story as its completion. Jesus' human existence is securely embedded in the structures and dynamics of the history of Israel:

> He was once in the fleshly nature, a part of an aeon, of a chapter of human and earthly history [*Geschichte*] which, seen in the light of that which is now, lay in the darkness or at least the twilight of the divine shadow: a member of the Israelite people of God and its royal family, as such the heir of divine promises, but as such also born into the need and weakness of his time, of his generation and of an entire world not yet partaking in fulfilment.[62]

But a transition has taken place: 'That is what he *was*, that now lies behind.'[63] That Jesus is 'our Lord' means that he belongs to a new story – 'the story of another humanity [*die Geschichte einer andern Menschheit*]' – as its commencement.[64] Barth even refers to Jesus as the hero of this new story ('Er ist der Held der […] göttlich-irdischen Geschichte').[65] The sequential events of Jesus' life constitute the bridge between these two histories and the turn from one to the other: Barth 'takes seriously the Pauline sequence; Jesus Christ is *first* born of the seed of David, and *subsequently* raised from the dead and appointed as Son of God in

[59] Watson, 'Rewriting Romans', 69.
[60] *R1,* 13; *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[61] *R1*, 13.
[62] *R1*, 13.
[63] *R1*, 13. Cf Watson, 'Rewriting Romans', 66.
[64] *R1*, 13.
[65] *R1*, 13.

power.'[66] In the 1922 commentary, however, the 'two worlds' are no longer explained as two histories but as two geometrical planes ('zwei Ebenen') which are spatially rather than temporally related.[67] In Barth's later exegesis, 'The Jewish messianic context disappears from view, and so too does the recognition of temporal sequence.'[68] Jesus' birth in David's line and his resurrection by which he is declared 'Son of God' are no longer regarded as distinct life-events in temporal sequence, but as the two irreducible poles of the dialectic of 'Jesus Christ'.

The peculiarity of Barth's approach to Paul's epistle to the Romans in the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* consists, in part, in his tendency to minimise the importance of temporal sequence and cumulative development for understanding the text. Barth's re-presentation of Paul's gospel, conceived and expressed in terms of the relationship between time and eternity, was designed to problematise – indeed, to forestall – the possibility of theological reflection on the basis of a reconstructed developmental account of religion as a psychological or historical phenomenon of human existence. As we have seen, an additional consequence is that theological reflection on the basis of the life of Jesus Christ, understood as the kind of temporal sequence which could be depicted in a narrative, has also become problematic. Likewise, the nature of the gospel, as Barth articulates it here, dissolves any historical sequence and therefore any narrative context within which one might seek to place it; any such context – including an overarching biblical metanarrative – cannot be regarded as theologically meaningful. Barth's conception of the *Sache* of Paul's epistle to the Romans, which guides his 'sachlich' interpretation of the text, inhibits the usefulness of biblical narrative, *qua* narrative, for theological construction. These interpretative consequences would far outlast the immediate polemical context in which they originated, and continue to shape Barth's approach to interpreting biblical narrative. From a consideration of the conceptual structures which help to shape Barth's exegesis, we now turn to the exegesis itself. How does Barth interpret Paul's epistle at the points where the category of narrative, and the features native to that category, might prove fruitful for exegesis? To the extent that the story of Jesus and the story of Abraham figure in Paul's epistle, what does Barth make of these stories?

[66] Watson, 'Rewriting Romans', 66.
[67] *R2*, 5; *ER*, 29.
[68] Watson, 'Rewriting Romans', 66.

2. The story of Jesus

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul does not offer an explicit retelling of the story of Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus's life does come into view throughout the letter. For the apostle, the end of Jesus's life is clearly its most salient feature. But alongside undifferentiated references to Jesus's 'death' (e.g. Rom 5.6-10), Paul also mentions various distinct events associated with Jesus's passion: he was 'delivered over' (4.25), 'crucified' (6.6), 'buried' (6.5), 'raised' (5.25; 8.34). Moreover, Jesus now 'lives' (6.10), having ascended to 'the right hand of God […] is interceding for us' (8.34) as 'Lord of both the dead and of the living' (14.9), and finally 'we shall be saved by him from the wrath of God' (5.9). Statements such as 'the Messiah did not please himself' and 'the Messiah became a servant to the circumcised' suggest his earthly ministry (15.3, 8). Paul's focus on Christ's death does not exclude the other events of his life – both before and after his death.[69] Whilst the apostle does not offer an explicit narrative linking these events, they are sometimes coordinated in sequences which might serve as the outline for a narrative.[70] For some interpreters, 'Paul's statements about salvation are unintelligible apart from a narrative framework.'[71]

These features of Paul's text – however one might judge their extent and significance – suggest at least the possibility of an exegetical treatment which draws on some of the features of narrative for the purpose of interpretation. If, as we have argued above, the conceptuality governing Barth's exegesis militates against understanding the gospel in narrative terms, it will be instructive to explore the way he handles the possibility of a narrative interpretation where it is offered by the epistolary text. In what follows below, we will see that in Barth's treatment of Romans the story of Jesus is ambiguous, indirect, negative, and singular in its import for theology.

Barth gives his most sustained reflection on the human existence of Jesus Christ in response to the elliptical statement of Rom 8.3: 'For that which was impossible for the law – that matter in which it was weak through the flesh – God [did]: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin [ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας], he condemned sin in the flesh'. For Barth, God's 'sending' of 'his own Son' means the genuine entry of the Son

[69] See also James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), Chapters 8-9.
[70] *E.g.*, Rom 4.25; 5.6-11; 6.3-11; 8.32-34; 14.9. For an interpretation of Romans 8 along these lines, see Douglas A. Cambpell, 'The Story of Jesus in Romans and Galatians', in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 102–8.
[71] Richard B. Hays, 'Christ Died for the Ungodly: Narrative Soteriology in Paul?', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 26, no. 1 (2004): 52. But cf. Watson, 'Is There a Story'.

into nature and history.[72] Yet, because this sending is 'περὶ ἁμαρτίας', it is 'the divine reaction against sin', and as such 'is to be described only in the most forceful negations, only to be proclaimed as paradox'.[73] The mission of the Son does not take place 'immediately, with its divinity directly identifiable'; it occurs '"in the likeness of sin-controlled flesh [*im Gleichnis des sündebeherrschten Fleisches*]", in the form of a servant, in unidentifiability, incognito'.[74] Under these conditions, both Jesus' divinity and his humanity appear deeply ambiguous: 'the observer is at liberty' for all kinds of interpretations of 'the historical occurrence of God's own Son'.[75] Whatever historical phenomena constitute the human life of Jesus of Nazareth – his God-consciousness, religious and moral heroism, sinlessness, miracle-working, call to repentance, consciousness of his own mission, private communion with God, announcement of the kingdom, and even his death and resurrection – lie open to multiple interpretation, evasion, and even outright dismissal.

This exposition of Paul is polemically directed at the efforts of 'modern theology' to give a theological account of Jesus Christ on the basis of a historically reconstructed *Leben Jesu*.[76] It is particularly instructive to compare Barth's understanding of the life of Jesus with the influential treatment of Heinrich Holtzmann.[77] With the decline of the Griesbach hypothesis of Matthean priority, Holtzmann reconstructed a proto-Markan source ('A'), and endeavoured to sketch Jesus' life on the basis of this source. The key feature of Holtzmann's 'life of Jesus' was the psychological development, in seven stages, of Jesus' messianic consciousness. From this developmental account Holtzmann drew the conclusion that Jesus' significance consisted in his moral teaching, and sought to locate Jesus' moral teaching within a broader historical frame encompassing Judaism and the early church. Holtzmann's work set the agenda for 'life of Jesus' studies until the early 20th Century.[78] Barth takes arms against precisely this kind of historical and developmental calculation of Jesus' theological import by emphasising the singularity and ambiguity of the Christ-event over against the intelligible sequence of events

[72] *R2*, 260; *ER*, 277.
[73] *R2*, 261; *ER*, 278. Barth takes περὶ ἁμαρτίας to indicate that the divine πέμψας takes place with reference to ἁμαρτία, rather than seeing a technical reference to the 'sin offering' of the Levitical *cultus* (cf. Lev 5.1-13; 16 LXX, etc.).
[74] *R2*, 261-62; *ER*, 278-79.
[75] *R2*, 262-63; *ER*, 279-80.
[76] *R2*, 263; *ER*, 280.
[77] See H. J. Holtzmann, *Die synoptischen Evangelien: Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1863). See also John S. Kloppenborg, 'Holtzmann's Life of Jesus According to the "A" Source: Part 1', *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 4, no. 1 (2006): 75–108; William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 111–22.
[78] According to Albert Schweitzer, Holtzmann's brief outline 'became the creed and catechism of all who handled the subject during the following decades.' *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery, vol. 2nd (London: A. & C. Black, 1911), 204.

in Jesus' life. For Barth, Jesus' historical existence provides no means of access to his theological significance; any aspect of this existence may be referred to any number of historical explanations.[79] So thoroughgoing is Barth's critique that the human life of Jesus is rendered hermeneutically indeterminate to the point of opacity. For all the sights and sounds of this history, it signifies nothing. Any effort to tell Jesus' tale will be *idios*: one's own, and nothing more.

Yet there is a different kind of story in which the events of Jesus' life can take on an indirect coherence and significance. This narrative form is suggested by Barth's rendering of ἐν ὁμοιώματι as 'im Gleichnis': *Gleichnis* implies likeness or similarity, but also carries the sense of 'parable'.[80] Precisely in its ambiguity, the life-story of Jesus indirectly (i.e. parabolically) signifies the relativity of human historical existence. This parable exposes and condemns the 'false absoluteness' of sinful flesh: the life-story of Jesus cannot directly and positively teach the meaning of either divinity or humanity, but it can thus bear indirect and negative testimony to the incoherence of human life considered *in se* and apart from its proper relation to God.[81]

Understood as a parable which communicates negatively and indirectly, the life-story of Jesus becomes coherent: it communicates a definite and singular meaning.[82] The meaning of the parable of Jesus's life is God's condemnation of sin, as seen in the singular defining tendency of his life: diminishment unto death, from which the impossibility of securely describing the life of Jesus in positive human terms (e.g. as miracle-worker, sage, eschatological preacher, etc.) flows as a consequence.

> But this judgement on the sin which dwells in the flesh – this exposure of the flesh as that which it is: parable of the Spirit [*Gleichnis des Geistes*] – takes place in that aforementioned *diminishing* tendency of the life of Jesus, as it is marked in the temptation account and reaches its nadir and goal in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. But precisely for the sake of the execution of this judgment, the form of a servant, the unrecognisability, the *kenosis*, the incognito, is an essential and not merely an incidental attribute of the Son of God.[83]

[79] Barth cites D. F. Strauss's verdict on Jesus' resurrection – 'all-time hoax [*welthistorischer Humbug*]' – to demonstrate the limits of the reconstruction of an historical 'Leben Jesu' as a means of theological inquiry (*R2*, 263; *ER*, 280). For Barth, Strauss's challenge to historicism, like Feuerbach's challenge to psychologism, indicates the point at which true theology must begin. Cf. Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 527–54.
[80] The NT itself does not employ the noun ὁμοίωμα with reference to parabolic discourse.
[81] *R2*, 264; *ER*, 281.
[82] Barth's focus on the singular meaning of the parable of Jesus' life accords well with the interpretative paradigm for Jesus' parables established by Adolf Jülicher, who argued that each parable made only a single point. See *DGJ*, and further discussion below in Chapter 4.
[83] *R2*, 264; *ER*, 281. In-text references (Rom 5.6-8; 6.8) omitted. See below for discussion of these texts.

The parabolic life-story of Jesus indirectly communicates a singular and negative meaning: the exposure and abolition of human possibilities as such. Wherever Paul's references to the life of Jesus draw Barth's attention, this singular negative meaning is emphasised.[84] Barth's comments on the Pauline statement Χριστὸς… ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν (Rom 5.6) exemplify Barth's exclusive focus on Jesus' death, and the way in which this singular event draws all else in the story of Jesus into its gravitational field. The hidden identity of Jesus as the Christ

> becomes perceptible in his *oboedientia passiva*, in his death on the cross: uniquely and solely and exclusively in his death on the cross. The doctrine of the *munus triplex* is a darkening and weakening of the concentrated New Testament outlook. There is no second or third *other*, which could perhaps stand independently *next to* this unique, sole and exclusive meaning of Christ; neither Jesus' personality, nor the Christ-idea, neither his Sermon on the Mount nor his healings of the sick, neither his confidence in God nor his brotherly love, neither his call to repentance nor his message of forgiveness, neither his struggle against traditional religion nor his call to follow him into poverty, neither the social nor the individual, neither the immediate nor the eschatological side of his gospel. *None* of these shine in their *own* light. But they all shine in *the* light which emanates from his death. There is no line of the Synoptics which could also possibly be understood without the cross.[85]

Here Barth regards the entirety of Jesus' life and death in a unitary perspective. He resists any effort to divide this life and death into discrete periods or spheres, each with its own significance, either by means of the traditional 'threefold office' or by a more modern conception of Jesus as a pioneering religious and ethical exemplar.[86] The various events and patterns of Jesus' life are to be understood exclusively with reference to the singular event of his death, and the single pattern of diminishment which leads to this death. As the death of Jesus becomes the interpretative key to the life of Jesus, the meaning of his life is compressed into the meaning of his death.[87]

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[84] In addition to the other references in this section, see Barth's comments on διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Rom 3.22): 'The faithfulness of God is his entering into and persistence in the deepest human questionableness and darkness. But the life of Jesus is the complete obedience to the will of the faithful God. […] He takes the form of a servant. He goes to the cross, into death. He is at his climax, at the goal of his way, a purely negative quantity'. Barth, *Römer II*, 71–72. Similarly, on ὃ γὰρ ἀπέθανεν, τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ ἀπέθανεν ἐφάπαξ (Rom 6.10): 'The abolition of human possibilities in the death of Christ is as such the abolition of the possibility of sin. For that reason *the meaning of the life of Jesus must be his death*, because the entire human possibility which lies this side of the line of death is as such the possibility of sin.' Barth, 186. Emphasis added.

[85] *R2*, 136; *ER*, 159.

[86] Cf. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay, 2nd ed., 1902, 3.417.

[87] Barth identifies the Pauline emphasis on Christ's death (his '*oboedientia passiva*') in texts such as Rom 5.6, but displays little interest the way the apostle balances this emphasis by broadening his perspective to include Christ's *oboedientia activa*, e.g. in the references to the 'one righteous act' and 'obedience of one man' in Rom 5.18-19. Cf. Barth's comments on these verses: *R2*, 160-61; *ER*, 181-82.

The story of Jesus' life has a single meaning, but as 'parable' this story communicates only indirectly; it is not theologically intelligible in and of itself. An exogenous factor is required, therefore, to render the story meaningful. Paul's reference to Christ as ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν (Rom 6.9) elicits from Barth a reiteration of his claim that the meaning of Jesus' life is compressed into the meaning of his death:

> Death becomes the sole (the sole!) parable of the kingdom of God. This is the clear meaning of the 'life of Jesus': Jesus the physician and saviour, Jesus the prophet, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Son of the Father – all of this receives with increasing clarity and definition the meaning: Jesus the crucified. All of this is obviously not meant as human possibility and cannot be interpreted as such.[88]

This reiteration is followed by an assertion that Christ's death can only be understood in light of his resurrection from the dead:

> Over against the crucified one stands the risen one. The clear meaning of this life is not comprehensible without the revelation and perspective of the invisible glorification of God which has taken place in him. This revelation and perspective is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.[89]

The resurrection is the pinpoint aperture by which Jesus' human life becomes a *camera obscura*: a negative projection of the 'other world' beyond the closed and darkened room of the human history to which Jesus' life belongs. Jesus' resurrection 'is the "non-historical" event [*„unhistorische" Ereignis*] κατ᾽ ἐξοχήν.'[90] As a 'non-historical' event, the resurrection does not occur in causal or temporal continuity with other historical events and resists assimilation into any sequence unfolding on the historical plane: it 'is not a "historical" event [*ein "historisches" Ereignis*] *alongside* the other events of [the visible human history of Jesus of Nazareth], but the "non-historical" event which encloses these other events as their limit, to which the events before and on and after Easter Day point.'[91] Thus there is no 'direct unmediated continuity between the "historical" facts of the resurrection *history* [*den „historischen" Fakten der Auferstehungs*geschichte] (e.g. the empty tomb of the Synoptics or the "appearances" [*Erscheinungen*] of 1 Cor 15) and the resurrection *itself* [*der Auferstehung* selbst]'; the resurrection is not 'in any sense itself a fact of history [*ein Faktum der*

[88] *R2*, 182-83; *ER*, 202.
[89] *R2*, 183; *ER*, 203. Cf. Barth's comment on Rom 8.3: the mission of the divine Son 'is recognisable as such only through the revelation of God, not otherwise' (*R2*, 262; *ER*, 279).
[90] *R2*, 185; *ER*, 205.
[91] *R2*, 183; *ER*, 203.

Geschichte]'.[92] The story of Jesus' life conveys its singular negative theological meaning only indirectly and in only in virtue of an event which is 'non-historical' and thus remains irreducibly external to the story as such. Strictly speaking, the story of Jesus Christ, in itself, as a cumulative sequence of interconnected events, remains theologically meaningless. On this account, narrative criticism of the canonical 'stories' of Jesus' life (in themselves) is no less a theological dead end than historical criticism of the 'histories' of Jesus' life.

Although Barth's direct concern here is with an exposition of Paul's epistle to the Romans, he also suggests a strategy for reading the Synoptic Gospels in light of the Pauline gospel (as he understands it): 'There is no line of the Synoptics which could also possibly be understood without the cross.'[93] Scattered throughout Barth's exposition of Pauline texts referring to the life of Jesus are snatches of direct interpretative commentary on the canonical Gospels which further illustrate the tendencies we have already observed in Barth's reading of biblical narrative. Barth describes Jesus' life as both 'a history within history, concretely real among concrete realities, temporal within time, human within humanity', and also as something more: 'in the concealment of the life of Jesus' the abolition of the present order of things indirectly reveals the new world.[94] This elicits a reference to the imprisoned Baptist's interactions with Jesus (Luke 7.18-23/Matt 11.2-6, with Luke 10.18): though the ambiguity of Jesus' earthly existence moves John to question whether Jesus is the awaited 'one', the eyes of faith can see in the activity of Jesus and his disciples (especially that activity directed against Satan and his dominion) a witness to the disruptive arrival of the Kingdom of God. Simeon's prophecy over the infant Jesus (Luke 2.34-35) anticipates both the indirectly revelatory character of Jesus' life and its negative message.[95] The theme of rejection which emerges from Jesus' interactions with other characters in the Gospel narratives is briefly sketched and presented as an example of the essentially negative meaning of Jesus' life:

> The Son of Man proclaims the death of men, he proclaims God as the First and Last. And the echo answers, as unmistakeable witness to what is proclaimed: "he preaches grandly", "he is out of his mind", "he leads the people astray", "he is a friend of tax-collectors and sinners".[96]

[92] *R2*, 184; *ER*, 204. Barth plays here on the double meaning of *Geschichte*: because the resurrection event is not a fact of 'history' (*Geschichte*), it cannot form part of the resurrection 'story' (*Auferstehungs*geschichte). The resurrection event belongs neither to *Historie* nor to *Geschichte*.
[93] *R2*, 136; *ER*, 159.
[94] *R2*, 78; *ER*, 103-104.
[95] *R2*, 80; *ER*, 105-106.
[96] *R2*, 78; *ER*, 103.

Barth finds in the Gospels confirmation that the meaning of Jesus' life is deeply ambiguous: that this human life is revelatory, but only indirectly so, and that the meaning of Jesus' life is not a multiform positive display of humanity under God, but rather a singular negative judgement on humanity by God. The Pauline gospel, as Barth understands it, provides the interpretative lens through which the Synoptic Gospels ought to be read.

For Barth, the cumulatively unfolding temporal sequence of events comprising Jesus' life is theologically meaningful in only a strictly limited sense. In itself, the life of Jesus is hermeneutically indeterminate to the point of opacity. The story of this life is parabolic, communicating not positively and directly but negatively and indirectly. The singular meaning of this parable is God's negation of all human possibilities as such. Even this negative meaning is not inherent within the story of Jesus itself, but becomes apparent in light of the resurrection, understood as an event which is extrinsic to the story itself. Barth's understanding of the Pauline gospel constrains his expectations for how narratives of Jesus' life will inform theological conceptions of God and humanity. Perhaps it is for this reason that Barth allows many of Paul's references to the events of Jesus' life identified at the outset of this section to pass without comment. Barth's interpretation tends to compress the life of Jesus into the singular event of Jesus' death, and Barth's theological appeals to the life of Jesus in *Der Römerbrief* are in fact appeals to this singular event, rather than appeals to an interconnected and cumulative sequence of events which could be conceived and presented as a story. Along with his conception of the Pauline gospel, with its radical focus on the singularity of the Christ-event over against the sequence of events in Jesus' life, Barth also offers an interpretative programme for the canonical Gospels. His *ad hoc* interpretative excursions in these texts strongly tend to converge upon a singular meaning. Asking Pauline questions of the Gospels, Barth receives Pauline answers. But this Paulinism has radicalised the apostle's tendency to focus on Jesus' death: Barth compresses Jesus' life into a single event, denying meaningfulness to the story of Jesus' life as such and equating its theological significance with the event of Jesus' death, understood in light of the 'pure event' of the resurrection.

3. The story of Abraham

In Chapter 4 of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle offers his theological interpretation of a specific narrative-genre text – Abraham's story, as told in the book of Genesis – asking, 'what does the Scripture say?' (4.3). We will examine the role that the Genesis narrative plays in Paul's theological argument in three sections of this chapter (4.1-8, 9-12, 16-25). Barth's

exposition of these passages, and especially his approach to the issues of 'witness' and temporal sequence which they raise, illustrates his resistance to making theological appeals to biblical narrative *as a narrative* (i.e. as a literary representation of a number of interconnected but discrete events unfolding cumulatively in temporal sequence).

a. Romans 3.31-4.8

Barth's exposition of Romans Chapter 4 actually begins with Rom 3.31: 'Do we therefore nullify the law by faith?' Barth takes Paul's rhetorical question not as a potential objection to the claims presented in the preceding argument, but rather as an expansion of Paul's fundamental claim (as Barth understands it) that the manifestation of God's righteousness in Christ Jesus is an historical and non-historical event which entails the *krisis* of all history, the dissolution of the structure of history and the disclosure of its singular meaning. To 'nullify the law by faith' is equivalent to inserting the resurrection into the historical sequence of events; it is to 'set faith as a second thing, another thing, a different thing to be grasped *alongside* the law, rather than grasping faith in the law, and Christ *alongside* Moses, rather than Moses in Christ'.[97] Is the gospel an event within a history, a discrete occurrence subsequent to some prior occurrence? Barth's emphatic answer to the question – as he has arranged it – is, of course, 'by no means!' (Rom 3.31). The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a development arising in response to a previous factor in human history (e.g. the law), which might later be surpassed in a further dialectical countermovement. The gospel is not an event within history; all history is comprehended in the gospel event.

> *Therefore* we remove [*aufheben*] all similarity [*Gleichheit*] between the Moment [*Augenblick*] of the last trumpet and everything which comes before and after [*was vorher und nachher ist*], and thereby declare the contemporaneity [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] of all times, of everything which precedes and follows, because we see no more 'before' and 'after' which would not, in all its alterity [*Andersartigkeit*], stand in the light of this moment and participate in its elevation and meaning.[98]

Because the eschatological Moment of the gospel cannot be securely located within a historical context (i.e. a sequence of 'before' and 'after'), every element of which this context is comprised – regardless of its temporal location – is equidistant to and from this definitive

[97] *R2*, 90-91; *ER*, 115.
[98] *R2*, 91; *ER*, 116. Similarly, Barth speaks in his comments on Rom 4.15 of 'the Moment which has no before and after [*der Augenblick ohne Vorher und Nachher*]' (*R2*, 114; *ER*, 137).

Moment and therefore contemporaneous. Thus the law, along with *all* history, attests the righteousness of God: this is the sense in which 'On the contrary, we lift up the law' (3.31).

The question and answer of Rom 3.31, thus understood, sets the stage for Barth's exposition of Chapter 4. The figure of Abraham serves as 'a paradigmatic illustration of the proposition that faith is the meaning of the law'.[99] As Barth considers the story of Abraham, he sets out to show that the resurrection of Jesus Christ does not stand in a relative continuity with the life of Abraham, as either a positive extension or a negative counter-movement in the unfolding history of religion. Rather, what occurs in Jesus is the secret basis of the figure of Abraham, insofar as the latter remains significant for faith and is not merely a feature of the irrelevant hinterland of human history. Barth offers a quote from Overbeck which captures his own contention: 'The Old Testament did not merely precede Christ in the common sense, but rather he himself lived in it, or the Old Testament was the witness which directly accompanied his pre-historical life and, as it were, depicted [*das … sozusagen abbildende* Zeugnis] this life.'[100]

Barth turns to Rom 4.1-8 to demonstrate this claim. For Barth, Abraham's personal story, set within the context of history more broadly, displays a conspicuous righteousness. However, Abraham is not reckoned righteous on this basis, but rather on the basis of his faith (Rom 4.1-5). Barth takes Paul's reference to Abraham's faith to indicate Abraham's renunciation of human righteousness according to God's 'No' to such activity.[101] Even Abraham's faith is not a positive human action. 'Rather, *he is* what he is as a believer, by reason of what *he is not'*; it is as 'void [*Hohlraum*]' that Abraham is counted righteous by God.[102] Insofar as Abraham's life constitutes an active personal history within the frame of a broader human history, it can bear only a negative witness to the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

> Therefore none of the personal (and thus praiseworthy) characteristics belonging to Abraham and his like – his heroic experience and action, his conscious or unconscious personality and godliness – are considered to be his righteousness before God. Everything in his life which is grounded in another factor, which is the effect of a cause, which is a consequence or an outcome in a sequence and as such is perceptible, stands *on this side* of the line of death which separates time from eternity and men from God (although even in this way it still strongly bears witness to what lies beyond).[103]

The story of Abraham's life, as a continuous temporal sequence belonging to the intelligible sphere of regular history, bears only indirect witness to the righteousness of God. Here there is

[99] *R2*, 92; *ER*, 117.
[100] *R2*, 93; *ER*, 118.
[101] *R2*, 99; *ER*, 123.
[102] *R2*, 96-97; *ER*, 121.
[103] *R2*, 95-96; *ER*, 120.

a clear parallel – and, as we shall see, more than a parallel – with the diminishment and death of Jesus's life-story: 'It is Jesus's way unto death which is manifest in Abraham's way of life.'[104] In the righteousness of Abraham, reckoned according to faith, we therefore catch a glimpse of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The righteousness reckoned to Abraham in the book of Genesis – the 'Yes' of God concealed in the 'No' of God – is 'the "witness which depicts" [*das „abbildende Zeugnis"*] the life of Christ, the manifestation of the severity, the purity, and supremacy of this Moment over against every 'before' and 'after' [*gegenüber allem Vorher und Nachher*], the manifestation of the resurrection.'[105]

As the previous quotations have indicated, Barth does not understand this relationship between Abraham and Christ as a mere anticipatory parallelism between two figures who inhabit the same medium. Abraham and Jesus do not represent two discrete and relatively significant developments in an evolving religious consciousness. Nor are they two characters in the unfolding narrative of a salvation-history, related as 'type' and 'antitype'.[106] Abraham is not a distinct figure inhabiting a narrative context which also embraces Jesus Christ, and the resurrection is not a second occurrence distinct from and subsequent to the prior occurrence of Abraham's justifying faith. The relationship between Abraham and Jesus is direct and immediate: Abraham's life – compressed into the single justification event of Gen 15.6 – attests Jesus's life because the Christ-event *actually occurs* in Abraham. As non-historical event, the resurrection is not limited to a single occurrence at a fixed time and place in history (i.e. 'before the gates of Jerusalem in AD30'), but this same utterly singular event occurs repeatedly across the breadth of time and space. Freed of historical sequence, this event can pierce the fabric of history at multiple temporal and spatial locations without partaking of their historical particularity and thereby losing its own singularity. Thus the resurrection of the Crucified is not merely foreshadowed in the life of Abraham; it 'forehappens' (so to speak) in the life of Abraham. The speaker in Ps 32 (quoted in Rom 4.7-8) likewise describes not a 'psychological occurrence' in his own life story, but rather the irruption of 'the timeless Moment [*der Augenblick ohne Zeit*] which encloses within itself the new qualification of every "before" and "after"'.[107] It is the advent in the Old Testament history of the 'non-historical' Moment of the resurrection which makes these figures into 'witnesses':

> Therefore, what applies to Abraham applies also to the dateless and nameless figure depicted in the 32nd Psalm: he lives from the resurrection, he is its witness. He is

[104] *R2*, 97; *ER*, 121. 'Es ist der Todesweg Jesu, der offenbar der Lebensweg Abrahams ist.'
[105] *R2*, 99; *ER*, 124.
[106] Cf. section 4.3 below.
[107] *R2*, 101; *ER*, 125.

> not to be understood in himself, in his piety, without Christ. He is the reflection of the life of Christ which tears a longitudinal rupture across the ages [*Er ist Abbild des die Zeiten im Längsschnitt aufreißenden Lebens des Christus*].[108]

Because of this direct relationship of the 'non-historical' Moment of resurrection to every historical moment, *all* history can be perceived as a unity in its witness to Christ. The 'crimson thread' of history's meaning is not to be identified with a biblical metanarrative. This crimson thread runs through the biblical story but also outside and beyond, not merely from Abraham through Moses and David to Jesus, but also through Socrates and on into the 16th century and beyond. 'Jesus would not be the Christ, if figures like Abraham, Jeremiah, Socrates, Grünewald, Luther, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky remained ultimately in the historical distance in contrast to him, and were not rather understood in him in their essential unity, contemporaneity and solidarity'.[109] That is, the law and the prophets (and Abraham, and David) bear witness to the righteousness of God, not because they inhabit a biblical metanarrative which is their shared context, but rather because *every historical moment* testifies to Christ.[110]

To summarise: for Barth, Paul's discussion of the story of Abraham (and David) in Romans 4.1-8 is oriented to the issue raised by the question of Rom. 3.31. Abraham and Jesus are not related as discrete quantities in a developmental sequence; their connection is not historical but non-historical. Again, we see here that Barth's perception of the Pauline gospel militates against a consideration of the theological significance of biblical narratives – both at the level of individual stories, and at the level of an overarching salvation story (i.e. a biblical metanarrative). The personal history of Abraham related in the Genesis narrative can bear only the indirect witness of that which is negated by the *krisis* of God's righteousness. Abraham's theological relevance is compressed into a single point: not his history (i.e. the story of his life), but the single 'non-historical' event of God's justifying word. Barth's tendency to singularity in interpretation reflects a tendency in the Pauline text: the apostle makes the single event of Gen 15.6 the interpretative key to the Abraham story, such that it puts all Abraham's activity (i.e. his 'works') in the shade and renders Abraham 'a secondary figure in his own story'.[111] Nevertheless, as Paul's argument progresses the apostle broadens his perspective to consider more of Abraham's life-story, while Barth's commentary retains a singular focus (see below). In addition to marginalising the theological significance of Abraham's story, Barth also rejects the idea of an overarching story of which both Abraham and Jesus form parts. Though Barth's

[108] *R2*, 102; *ER*, 126.
[109] *R2*, 93; *ER*, 117. On the significance of these figures for Barth, see e.g. *R2*, 98, 118; *ER*, 122, 141.
[110] See also *R2*, 121-23; *ER*, 145-47.
[111] See Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 179; see also pp. 169-182.

primary polemical target is the effort to trace an historical or psychological process of development linking Abraham to Christ, his refusal to countenance any relationship between Abraham and Christ involving 'before' and 'after' equally excludes the possibility of linking them as discrete figures in a shared narrative context. The relationship of 'witness' between Abraham and David on the one hand and Christ on the other is not mediated by a shared narrative context; it is immediate, generated by the non-historical touch of eternity at these points on the fabric of history.

b. Romans 4.9-12

In Rom 4.9-12, Paul makes direct appeal to the temporal sequence of events in Abraham's life in order to ground his theological argument for the primacy of faith. The apostle introduces the biblical figure of Abraham in chapter 4 in order to show that, according to Israel's *torah*, the experience of the Jewish people's 'forefather according to the flesh' attests that the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ comes about precisely as he has been arguing: through faith (cf. 3.21, 31). Did Abraham find himself 'justified by works [ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη]', and therefore able to boast before God (Rom 4.2, cf. 3.20, 27-28)? No: Paul identifies Gen 15.6 as the definitive summation of what Abraham 'found': 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' (Rom 4.3 = Gen 15.6 LXX). Abraham, like the 'David' of Ps 32, was 'blessed' because God counted him righteous apart from works (Rom 4.4-8). Can such blessing be confined to 'the circumcision' (Rom 4.9): those with a religio-ethnic link to these totemic Jewish forefathers (cf. 3.29-30)? Paul answers this question by an appeal to the temporal sequence of the narrative context of Gen 15.6. The divine judgement on Abraham's faith does not hover above the entirety of Abraham's life; notwithstanding its summary force, the location of this statement *within* the sequence of Abraham's life is of crucial theological significance.

According to the presentation of the Genesis narrative, the patriarch is reckoned righteous (15.6) well before God commands that he and all the males of his family be circumcised (17.10-14, 26-27). Between the pronouncement of Gen 15.6 and the circumcision of ch. 17 comes the conception and birth of Ishmael (ch. 16), who is said to be thirteen years old at the time of his circumcision (17.25). According to the narrative account of Abraham's life in Genesis, then, we are to conclude that the event of his 'justification' chronologically precedes the event of his circumcision by some thirteen years, at a minimum.[112] Paul draws on this chronology to

[112] Though the narrator offers no direct information for dating the episode of Genesis 15, there is no indication that events have been presented out of chronological sequence. On the contrary, according to Gen 15.2 Abram is

conclude that the divine pronouncement of righteousness took place 'not when he was circumcised, but when he was uncircumcised' (οὐκ ἐν περιτομῇ ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ; Rom 4.10). By this appeal to the narrative of Abraham's life – portrayed here as a sequence composed of the two discrete, successive, and irreversible states of uncircumcision and circumcision – Paul is able to answer the anticipated question of Rom 4.9 by giving essential context to the divine pronouncement of Gen 15.6: the Law testifies that in Abraham himself God justified an uncircumcised believer. On the basis of this temporal argumentation, Paul draws his conclusion: circumcision, with all its entailments, has the confirmatory character of a 'sign' and 'seal', rather than playing a fundamental and effective role in Abraham's justification, and Abraham therefore serves as the forerunner and father of all who are righteous by faith, regardless of circumcision (Rom 4.11-12).[113]

As we have repeatedly observed, Barth tends to relativise the significance of temporal sequence. How then will he approach a text in which Paul's theological argument turns on his explicit appeal to the chronological sequence of the Genesis narrative? Barth's comments on Paul's conclusion that Abraham was justified οὐκ ἐν περιτομῇ ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ (Rom 4.10) are illuminating, and worth quoting at length:

> Only under this condition [*Voraussetzung*; i.e. to Abraham the *Unbeschnittene*], which incidentally also corresponds to the temporal course of the story [*die übrigens auch dem zeitlichen Verlauf der Geschichte entspricht*], is the righteousness which the Law ascribes to Abraham intelligible as 'reckoned'. When the call of God was issued to Abraham, he was *not yet* [noch nicht] godly, *not yet* the Patriarch, *not yet* the theocrat. The call of God to human beings precedes the oppositions circumcised-uncircumcised, religious-unreligious, ecclesiastical-non-ecclesiastical virtually, objectively, and in this case as in many others even temporally [*geht* [...] *virtuell, sachlich und in diesem wie in vielen andern Fällen sogar zeitlich voran*].'[114]

We may observe two distinct logics in operation here: the temporal or chronological (*zeitlich*) logic of the story, and another logic which Barth characterises as *sachlich*. As Barth re-iterates a little later, 'Abraham's religious justification obtained through circumcision does *not yet* come into consideration before God materially and chronologically [*sachlich und zeitlich*]'.[115]

Barth's *sachlich* logic appeals to his perception of the *Sache* disclosed in Paul's letter:

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childless; it is this situation to which Sarai responds in Gen 16.2. Therefore the events of ch. 15 must be taken to have occurred during the ten years prior to Ishmael's birth in which Abram lived childless in the land of Canaan (Gen 16.3).

[113] 'From the chronology of Genesis Paul learns that uncircumcision does not debar one from righteousness' (Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 214.)

[114] *R2*, 103-4; *ER*, 128.

[115] *R2*, 104; *ER*, 128.

> 'that religion in its historical reality is *not* the presupposition and prerequisite of the positive relationship of God to humanity, but this relationship is original [*ursprünglich*] and primary, and that this relationship for its part is the presupposition [*Voraussetzung*] of the historical reality of religion (and its opposite!).'[116]

If this is the character of the *Sache*, Abraham's faith *must* precede his circumcision: religious activity such as circumcision is predicated on faith. Religion (and equally irreligion) is conceptually subsequent to faith, because 'faith is the presupposition of these oppositions and of their original mutuality'.[117] It is on this basis that religious phenomena must take on a secondary and derivative importance.[118] We may observe that Barth's *sachlich* argumentation stands in some tension with Paul's text at this point. Paul does not in fact argue that God's call and Abraham's faith preceded his uncircumcision – as faith precedes the very opposition circumcision-uncircumcision – but that 'ἐλογίσθη […] ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ' (Rom. 4.10).[119] Nevertheless, as the word *sachlich* itself implies, it is the *sachlich* logic which is fundamentally operative in Barth's efforts to assimilate what Paul writes in Rom 4.9b-12.

In addition to his appeal to the conceptual structure of the *Sache*, Barth also acknowledges the 'temporal course of the story': the unfolding chronological sequence of the Genesis narrative according to which Abraham is 'not yet' circumcised when he is pronounced righteous, even stressing this 'not yet'. Circumcision follows faith not only conceptually (i.e. *sachlich*), but also chronologically (*zeitlich*). Nevertheless, we must carefully note the relationship between these two logics. The temporal course of the story 'corresponds [*entspricht*]' to something more basic: the structure of the *Sache*. This correspondence of the *zeitlich* to the *sachlich* is not necessary, but rather incidental and additional in nature ('übrigens auch'): a bonus. There is correspondence in this case, and perhaps also in many other cases, but its absence would not cause undue perturbation. For Barth the correspondence of the *zeitlich* order uncircumcision-circumcision to the *sachlich* order faith-religion is dispensable; the appeal to the *Sache* is fundamental and decisive.

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[116] *R2*, 104; *ER*, 129.

[117] 'Der Glaube ist die Voraussetzung jener Gegensätze, ihr ursprüngliches Gemeinsames'. *R2*, 104; *ER*, 128.

[118] This is the thrust of Barth's comments on Paul's description of circumcision as σημεῖον and σφραγίς in Romans 4.11-12. Barth's understanding of religious phenomena as derivative from the relation between God and humanity revealed in Jesus Christ is expressed in his description of any such phenomena as 'Offenbarungseindruck' and 'Hinweis auf die Offenbarung selbst' (*R2*, 105; *ER*, 129).

[119] Admittedly, here Paul is reading the Genesis narrative retrospectively in light of ch. 17: it is only with Abraham's circumcision that his previous state can be regarded as 'uncircumcision'. In this sense, the *command* of God (i.e. Gen 17.10-14) precedes the opposition circumcision-uncircumcision. See Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 213–14. Matters are further complicated by Barth's conflation of God's call to Abraham in Gen 12.1-3 with the justification-event of Gen 15.6. This can be seen as another instance of Barth's tendency to compress a narrative comprised of distinct temporally successive events into a single complex event.

This is a clear instance in which Barth's theological exegesis relegates temporal sequence to a subordinate position. In Rom 4.10, Paul deploys temporal reasoning at a crucial turn in his argument, and Barth must grapple with it; he has committed himself to a commentary on the Pauline text. But Barth can make only a subordinate place for temporal sequence in his exposition of Paul's argument. For Barth, appeal to the temporal sequence of the narrative and appeal to the conceptual structure of the relation between God and humanity operate in parallel: the former is incidental, the latter is fundamental. In Barth's exposition, non-temporal reasoning according to the *Sache* has displaced Paul's appeal to temporal sequence from its decisive role in the apostle's argument.

c. Romans 4.13-25

In addition to the explicit chronological reasoning of Rom 4.10, Paul makes in Rom 4.13-25 a somewhat subtler appeal to the temporal unfolding of Abraham's life-story. Barth's commentary on these verses, again, shows him to be uninterested in drawing on the theological resources afforded by attending to the narrative dimension of the biblical text.

Here the apostle argues that God's promise 'to Abraham and his offspring' is guaranteed οὐ τῷ ἐκ τοῦ νόμου μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ (4.13, 16). Abraham is the father of 'all' – both Jew and Gentile – who share his faith, and not only of the law-adherent (4.16). This leads Paul to a meditation on the scriptural words 'I have made you the father of many nations' (4.17).[120] To believe these words is not faith in the indiscriminate benevolence of a generic deity, but in 'God: the one who makes the dead live' and καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα (Rom 4.17): that is, in the God whose character is revealed in the rendering of the Genesis narrative to which this promise belongs.

The extensive duration and cumulative unfolding of the Genesis narrative is vitally important for Paul's characterisation of God and of Abraham's faith in God. The apostle also quotes the text of Gen 15.5 LXX (οὕτως ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου; Rom 4.18), equating this promise with God's promise in Gen 17.5 (Rom 4.17) such that the latter is understood to be a *re-iteration* of the former promise made – according to the chronology of the Genesis narrative – more than thirteen years earlier.[121] According to the narrative context of Gen 17.5, Abraham is at this point even older than his (already advanced) age at the time of the original promise.

[120] Quoting Gen 17.5 LXX.
[121] For a detailed analysis of the exegetical decisions according to which Paul reads Gen 17.5 and 15.5 in essential continuity, see Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 209–19.

His body is now νενεκρωμένον, ἑκατονταετής που ὑπάρχων (Rom 4.19). Likewise, Sarah's prospects for conceiving a child have scarcely improved. This is precisely the point made by the Genesis narrative in this context: 'Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"' (Gen 17.17). The inexorable passage of time, diligently marked by the narrator, has served to amplify the initial problem of Sarah's infertility (Gen 11.30; 12.4; 16.3, 16; 17.1). Moreover, the intervening events of the narrative have foreclosed the possibility that Abraham might overcome this impediment by producing the promised offspring with another woman (ch. 16; cf. 17.18-19).[122] The promise of Gen 17.5 is 'fraught with background', shadowed by the loss of time and opportunity; Paul recognises this dimension of the narrative and exploits it to make his point in Rom 4.20-22.[123] It is the narrative's depiction of life steadily slipping away which makes Abraham's faith in God's re-iterated promise 'hope against hope', and which brings to the fore the issue of God's ability to do the impossible. As the promise of God seemingly grew more unlikely to be fulfilled, Abraham 'grew strong [ἐνεδυναμώθη]' in faith.[124] Abraham continued to believe God's words when lost time had sharpened the apparent impossibility of their realisation to an agonising point. Paul draws on the Genesis narrative – precisely *as a narrative*, in which distinct events gain their meaningfulness from their cumulative interconnection in an unfolding temporal sequence – to show the character of the faith which God 'counts as righteousness' (Rom 4.22),[125] and to finally conclude that those 'who believe in him who raised Christ Jesus our Lord from the dead' share the faith by which Abraham was justified – faith in the God who does the seemingly impossible – and are thereby assured of a similar justification (Rom 4.23-24).

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[122] In narratological terms, significant amounts of both 'story time' and 'discourse time' pass between promise and re-iteration; with the latter comes the narrowing of narrative possibilities. See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 62.

[123] The phrase is borrowed from Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 12.

[124] Although ἐνδυναμόω need not necessarily imply a progressive growth in strength, this sense is possible (cf. Acts 9.22), and seems most likely in this context. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Volume 1*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 248; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 285.

[125] Paul's argument in v. 22 displays a certain relativisation of temporal sequence: according to the Genesis narrative, the divine speeches which Paul quotes and the events to which he alludes in Rom 4.17-21 occur *after* the divine reckoning of Gen 15.6, and therefore cannot be its cause (as διό implies) in a straightforward chronological sense. At this stage in his argument Paul emphasizes the summary aspect of the divine pronouncement in Gen 15.6: this judgement stands over Abraham's entire life. Nevertheless, as we have observed, this summary judgment is concretely understood with reference to the narrative of Abraham's life as a sequence of distinct and interrelated events unfolding through time. Paul appeals to the Genesis narrative, *qua* narrative, to supply the sense of 'the faith of Abraham' (Rom 4.16) which 'was reckoned to him as righteousness' (4.22).

Barth's theological exposition is – to say the least – not sensitive to this dimension of the Pauline text. Barth begins a new section at 4.17b, choosing to interpret the following verses in isolation from Paul's concern with the realisation of God's promise for all Abraham's 'offspring' (Rom 4.13-16). Barth's exposition of v. 17 imports the relative clause ὅς ἐστιν πατὴρ πάντων ἡμῶν from v. 16, converting it into an independent clause ('Abraham is the father of us all') and bringing it into direct connection with κατέναντι οὗ ἐπίστευσεν θεοῦ, thus passing over the intervening clause quoting Gen 17.5 (καθὼς γέγραπται…). For Barth, the resulting combination ('Abraham is father of us all before God in whom he believed') indicates the 'non-historical' importance of Abraham, and downplays the importance of Abraham's personal history and its situation within a broader historical frame. What matters in the historical personage of Abraham is not the concrete and visible events of his life (i.e. 'the separateness of the particular, and the contingency of the personal'), and certainly not their status as 'past', but rather the 'non-historical illumination' which floods these particulars.[126] Barth explains Abraham's fatherhood 'of us all' not with reference to the story of Abraham's life, but the opposite: 'That Abraham is "our father according to the flesh": this does not prove itself and come true in the flesh, in what is perceptible, but rather in the imperceptible. That he is father of us all: this is *before God*.'[127]

For Barth, this understanding of the text (i.e. the text as he has rather torturously reconfigured it) is definitive for the meaning of the section 4.17b-25. Barth's further comments on vv. 18-22 are uncharacteristically brief. These verses appear to add little to the understanding already described: that Abraham's life was negated and thereby established by God. Paul's reference in v. 19 to the concrete details of the Genesis narrative prompts Barth to quote Genesis 17.17 to the effect that Abraham had a realistic understanding of the situation into which the Word of God was spoken. Nevertheless, the critical moment remains *outside* Abraham's story: 'that he resisted the temptation which reality prepared for him […] can only be the non-historical beyond history [*jenseits der Geschichte das Ungeschichtliche*]'.[128] The dynamically cumulative character of Abraham's faith is passed over in silence.

[126] *R2*, 116; *ER*, 140.
[127] *R2*, 117; *ER*, 141. Reference removed. Barth equates designating Abraham 'our father according to the flesh' (Rom 4.1) with the statement 'Abraham is the father of us all' (Rom 4.16), completely overlooking the religio-ethnic question with which Paul is occupied. Here Adolf Schlatter's complaint in his 1922 review of *Der Römerbrief*'s second edition is justified: 'But are we still hearing Paul when the Greek and the Jew have disappeared from the Letter to the Romans?' (Translation in Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology, Volume One*, 121–25.)
[128] *R2*, 119; *ER*, 143.

In Barth's exposition, the meaning of the section Romans 4.17b-22 is effectively reduced to 4.17b (in the reconfigured form indicated above), which latter verse Barth takes to radically marginalise the significance of Abraham's personal history relative to the radiance of 'the non-historical' in his life. As demonstrated above, the personal history of Abraham, precisely in its character as a cumulative sequence of distinct and interrelated events, plays a vital role in Paul's argument in Rom 4.13-25. According to Barth, however, 'the *historical* Abraham [historische *Abraham*] really does not concern us at all'; what matters is 'the *non-historical* Abraham [unhistorischen *Abraham*] of Genesis'.[129] That Barth not only avoids but actively downplays the theological significance of the story of Abraham, *qua* story, further confirms his resistance to pursuing theological construction by means of meditation on biblical narratives.

We have observed that Barth regards the story of Abraham, like the story of Jesus, as singular in meaning. This meaning is negative and indirect. This is because the story of Abraham is not only 'like' the story of Jesus; the life of Abraham is another historical venue at which the 'non-historical' Moment of resurrection is manifest. The story of Abraham is not a typological foreshadowing of the gospel; Abraham and Jesus are not discrete and distinct quantities inhabiting a shared narrative context, because the gospel is not and cannot be part of a story. Barth is able to understand Abraham's life as a story involving a temporal sequence, but the contrast between Paul's explicit temporal logic in Rom 4.10 and Barth's reticence to employ similar logic serves to make Barth's aversion to narrative argumentation all the more striking. Finally, Barth's inattention (even evasiveness) regarding Paul's appeal to the cumulative effect of the Genesis narrative serves to confirm that Barth's conception of the epistle's *Sache* inhibits his theological consideration of biblical narrative, especially in its sequential and cumulative dimensions.

4. Conclusion

In *Der Römerbrief,* Barth engages with the epistle to the Romans in light of what he takes to be the text's *Sache*: the *krisis* of the human world brought about in the revelation of God the Wholly Other. By identifying this God's revelation in history with the 'non-historical', Barth was taking aim at a liberal Protestantism whose theological programme was, in his view, too ready to find 'God' revealed in factors operative in human history. The conceptual framework

[129] *R2*, 124; *ER*, 148.

by which Barth prosecutes his attack also entails significant consequences for the theological interpretation of biblical narratives. Eternity and time confront one another in an indissoluble dialectic; in their encounter, eternity disrupts time, disclosing history's limitation and exposing it to a judgement in which it cannot stand. God's activity in history cannot be conceived in terms of a continuous temporal sequence, rather, it is a disruptive event cutting across the temporal plane 'from above'. Because God's revelation is 'non-historical', it is intensely punctiliar, and not to be conceived in temporally extensive terms. The 'non-historical' dissolves the structures – including the narrative structure – of history. This means that the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be thought of as a story, nor as a part of a story.

Barth's interpretation of Paul's epistle, guided by his perception of the *Sache* underlying the text, is both a receptive and a constructive activity. Interpretation the of text and discernment of its *Sache* exist in a symbiotic and mutually interdependent relationship. When Barth writes 'If I have a system', he is by no means conceding that he has systematically imposed an alien interpretative framework on Paul's text. The apostle Paul is no evangelist: he makes very restrained use of narration in his articulation of the gospel, tending to express God's activity in Christ in condensed summary statements. Thus Barth's *sachlich* interpretation, with its reticence about the theological value of biblical narrative, responds to a genuine feature of Paul's thought. Yet, as we have seen, Paul's preference for compressed descriptions of the gospel does not amount to a construal of God's activity in history as an absolutely punctiliar event. The apostle's focus on the death (and resurrection) of Jesus Christ is balanced by a more muted witness to the multiformity of the divine activity in Christ, which includes sending, ascension, present heavenly intercession and future salvation and judgement. If the life of the man Jesus is not emphasised, neither is it entirely suppressed. Paul is able to summarise the life of Abraham in a single event (i.e. the event of Gen 15.6), but the temporally successive events of Abraham's life are the explicit and essential context within which this summary event may be rightly understood. Barth's commentary on the epistle recognises, purifies, and amplifies the Pauline stress on the unity of the divine action in Jesus Christ. We might call this Barth's 'radical Paulinism'.[130]

This interpretative tendency is seen most clearly in Barth's treatment of Paul's appeals to temporal sequence. Barth's consistent marginalisation of such Pauline argumentation reveals his discomfort with temporal sequence, and with narrative as such. Barth engages with biblical narratives, but downplays those very features which constitute them as narratives. He stresses

[130] The phrase is borrowed from Watson, 'Barth, Ephesians, and the Practice of Theological Exegesis', 30.

the unity of biblical stories, effectively compressing the meaning of a cumulative sequence of distinct but interrelated events into the singular meaning of a singular event. In the final analysis, there is one 'non-historical' occurrence which becomes event both before and on and after Easter Day: the resurrection of the Christ. The direct and disruptive presence of this event to every point on the historical plane illuminates the biblical narratives such that they shine indirectly with its light. Both the New Testament Gospels and Old Testament narratives are read according to Barth's 'radically Pauline' hermeneutic. Theologically, the meaning of history as a whole, and the meaning of any narrated passage of history, is the meaning of the one Moment of resurrection. Singular event has displaced narrative as the *datum* for theological reflection.

We now move on to Barth's exposition of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. Here a different set of temporal and sequential articulations of God's activity in Christ will provide an opportunity to see the same basic anti-narratival interpretative tendency at work in Barth's exegesis.

Chapter 2. The end of the story: Barth's biblical interpretation in *Die Auferstehung der Toten*

With the bouquets and brickbats following the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* came Barth's translation from the pastorate at Safenwil to a professorship of Reformed Theology at Göttingen. Alongside his lectures on various Reformed thinkers and confessions, Barth continued to devote attention to biblical exegesis. In the summer semester of 1923, Barth delivered a set of lectures on 1 Corinthians.[1] These were published in 1924 as *Die Auferstehung der Toten* ('The Resurrection of the Dead').[2]

This text has not, on the whole, attracted much scholarly attention, especially as an exercise in biblical interpretation.[3] Such analyses as have been undertaken, however, tend to overemphasise the importance of narrative in the work. For example, drawing on the developmental accounts of McCormack and Ford, Katherine Grieb suggests that Barth's theological exegesis in *AdT* displays his growing focus on biblical narrative in this crucial period of his theological development. Between the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* (1922) and the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* (1932), Ford draws attention to a stylistic shift away from the 'non-mimetic' language of Barth's earliest biblical interpretation, and a shift in theological method toward a focus on 'the possibility of human reflection (*Nachdenken*), a sort of correspondence to the pattern of God's action given in the biblical narratives.'[4] In *AdT*, the style of *Der Römerbrief*, with its mathematical language of paradox, persists. 'But the resurrection and the change it effects between God and humanity is the centre of the work and Barth is thinking narratively as he describes it.'[5] Grieb does not offer a rationale for this assertion, and a close examination of the text reveals the opposite: that Barth is *not* 'thinking narratively' as he describes the resurrection, and that Barth's understanding of 'the resurrection

[1] Busch, *Karl Barth*, 149.
[2] Karl Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten: Eine akademische Vorlesung über 1. Kor. 15*, 1st ed. (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1924). ET: *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933).
[3] As John Webster observes, most treatments have focused on issues which are ancillary to the main substance of the text. Webster himself does take *AdT* seriously as a work of biblical interpretation, and offers a helpful exploration of the relationship between Paul's text and Barth's comments. See *Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 69–90.
[4] A. Katherine Grieb, 'Last Things First: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56, no. 1 (2003): 53. Cf. Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible'. Ford himself does not mention *AdT*.
[5] Grieb, 'Last Things First: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead', 53.

of the dead' is in fact inimical to narrative conceptualisation and depiction.[6] This is captured well in David Fergusson's passing observation that 'Barth's early tendency to telescope all eschatological occurrence into a single momentary event renders any narrative account of the last things problematic.'[7] Our main concern in this chapter will be to give a more detailed exploration of how this telescopic or compressive tendency shapes Barth's theological exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15 in *AdT*.

There is good reason to assume that any exegetical treatment of 1 Corinthians would need to be guided by a sensibility for sequence and narrative. In this epistle, perhaps more than any other, history matters. Throughout the letter, Paul makes many appeals to the Corinthians' own story. Once they were 'pagan' idolaters (12.2), socially and intellectually undistinguished for the most part (1.26), their lives arranged in a variety of religious, economic, and marital configurations (7.17-24) and implicated in various kinds of sin (6.9-11a). This situation was drastically altered by a life-changing encounter with the gospel Paul preached, most often described as the moment of 'calling' (1.9, 26; 7.18-24), but also as the giving of grace (1.4), enrichment (1.5), revelation (2.10), redemption (6.20), cleansing, sanctification and justification (6.11b). Paul's pastoral exhortations in the present are underpinned by a retrospective look to this past and a prospective look to a shared future, perhaps close at hand (7.29-31), involving disclosure and judgement (3.12-15; 4.5; 6.2-3), cosmic transformation (2.8; 7.31; 13.8-12), and the inheritance (or not) of the kingdom of God (6.9). The *shared* dimension of this personal history is especially important in this epistle. Paul makes repeated reference to the nature of his initial encounter with the Corinthians: his coming and the 'planting' work of preaching or delivering that which he had previously 'received' (2.1; 3.6; 11.23; 5.1-3); their response of faith (3.5), receipt of the Spirit (2.12), and baptism (1.13-16). He became their 'father in Jesus Christ through the gospel'; as his 'work in the Lord' they became the seal of his apostleship (4.14; 9.1-2). But this good beginning led on to a complicated and turbulent history, enacted in written communications (5.9; 7.1), oral reports (1.11; 5.1; 11.18), the sending of emissaries (4.17), and personal visitation (4.19-20), and shadowed by mutual disappointment and disaffection (3.2; 4.3). Paul's second (canonical) epistle to the

[6] Grieb's suggestion later in the article that the resurrection is 'the preeminent sign in 1 Corinthians' of 'the entire narrative of the history of Jesus Christ' may be true of the epistle itself, but this thought appears nowhere in Barth's interpretation. Grieb, 54.

[7] David Fergusson, 'Barth's Resurrection of the Dead: Further Reflections', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56, no. 1 (2003): 71. Cf. Kuo-An Wu, 'The Concept of History in the Theology of Karl Barth' (University of Edinburgh, 2011), 90. Fergusson notes Barth's later explicit disavowal of this understanding of time and eternity in *CD* II/1. This thesis will argue that something of Barth's 'telescopic' tendency nevertheless persists in his treatments of biblical narratives, even into the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*.

Corinthians stands as testimony to the further extension of this same history. And yet behind this shared history another more fundamental story can be glimpsed: the story of Christ Jesus, who was 'crucified' by 'the rulers of this age' (2.2, 8), whose death was nevertheless the sacrifice of 'our paschal lamb' (5.7), and who was raised up as Lord (6.14), 'whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1.30). The story of the risen Lord also includes an encounter with Paul (9.1), which is the originating point of Paul's apostolic ministry (9.19-23).[8] As the allusion to the story of the Exodus indicates, the foundational story of the Lord Jesus Christ, along with the story of the apostle Paul and the Corinthian church, is itself bound up in a daring wider appropriation and reinterpretation of the salvation-historical story of Israel's Scriptures, in which Christ and his church are now central figures.[9] The Israelites of the wilderness generation 'drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ' (10.4). These events took place 'as examples for us', and were 'written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come' (10.6, 11; cf. 9.10).[10]

Of course, all these overlapping and interwoven 'stories' are largely implied in Paul's text; they only become available in narrative form if the reader does the constructive work of arranging their various events in chronological order. But the letter also embeds brief but crucial passages of actual narration. The story of Jesus' actions 'on the night when he was betrayed' provides the decisive interpretative context for critical reflection on the community's eucharistic practice (11.23-26; cf. 10.16-17). And in the fifteenth chapter (15.3-8), Paul offers a tantalising glimpse of the heart of his apostolic proclamation:

> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Sketched here in the briefest strokes is the climactic passage of the story of Jesus Christ, woven into the story of 'the Scriptures' as fulfilment, and flowing seamlessly into the story of the apostles (and therefore the apostolic communities) as origin. And this chapter also hints at a

[8] This apostolic ministry is itself presented as an echo of Jesus' suffering (see 4.9-13), possibly alluding to early narrative traditions concerning Jesus' passion which later found their way into the narratives of the canonical Gospels.

[9] Of course, even the application of the title 'Christ' (Gk. Χριστός, translating Heb. מָשִׁיחַ) to Jesus involves an appropriation and reinterpretation of Israel's story.

[10] Paul also appropriates and reworks key Septuagintal expressions in 1 Cor 1.2 (Mal 1.11) and 1 Cor 8.5-6 (Deut 6.4). See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 57–58, 380–84.

final act of the story, still to be unfolded: the last trumpet, the resurrection and transformation of 'all', the final victory, and the unchallenged reign of God.[11]

There is available to Barth, therefore, an interpretative approach to the epistle which finds in it a central role for narrative modes of conception and depiction: to discern in 1 Corinthians Paul's endeavour to specify the narrative shape of the divine activity and of Christian existence and to develop the theological and pastoral implications of this shape – especially, perhaps, in the fifteenth chapter. As already indicated, Barth chooses not to interpret the epistle in these terms. This analysis will trace Barth's fundamental interpretative decisions in relation to the text, the outworking of those decisions in specific exegetical judgements, and the shape of the interpretation which eventually emerges from these judgements. Barth sets out to give an exposition of the epistle in light of its fundamental subject matter; because this subject matter concerns a reality which cannot be conceived in terms of a narrative sequence, textual elements which appear to communicate a narrative sequence must be interpreted in other terms. As a result, Barth gives a compressed account of God's activity in relation to history, and of the human historical existence founded that in activity, which emphasises singularity over cumulative temporal sequence.

1. 1 Corinthians and 'the last things'

What kind of book is *Die Auferstehung der Toten*? The work is even more difficult to describe than *Der Römerbrief*. Barth's own 'precise' description of *AdT* as an 'exposition [*Erklärung*] of 1 Cor 15 in the context of the first letter to the Corinthians' indicates the somewhat unusual scope and nature of this text.[12] Part I occupies the entire first half of the book and deals with chs. 1-14 of Paul's epistle, focusing on their connection with ch. 15. The book's second half deals with ch. 15 in two parts: Part II is an elucidation of the chapter's theme, and Part III is comprised of interpretative comments on successive passages of the biblical text (ch. 16 is not treated). As John Webster observes, these interpretative comments closely track 'the language, argumentative structure and content of the biblical text', and yet 'commentary' is not an entirely apposite description of Barth's interpretative treatment,

[11] For an interpretation of 1 Cor 15 which sees Paul drawing heavily on the biblical story of creation via Gen 1-3 and Ps 8, see N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003).

[12] *AdT*, 5. Barth's preface is omitted by Stenning's ET. Webster notes that *Erklärung* is Barth's customary term for his exegetical lectures, and 'signifies something mid-way between close exegesis and theological exposition.' Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 76. Note, however, that Barth also refers to *Der Römerbrief*, which shares with *RD* an expository dimension but adheres more closely to the format of a biblical commentary, as an 'Erklarüng' (see below).

especially in light of the uneven attention devoted to the text and the presence of the non-exegetical Part II:

> Barth's *Erklärung* of Paul's text stands, then, somewhere between commentary and thematic study. […] [Barth] seeks to follow the indication of what Paul has written, to find himself with Paul before the matter which is brought to expression in 1 Corinthians and, under the instruction of Paul's own words, to indicate to his own readers the object of Paul's testimony. Barth's text is an attempt to explicate, by attending to the Pauline text and its setting, that by which Paul's own words are moved, and which is also a moving presence to its readers through the text's service.[13]

This is, of course, entirely consistent with the exegetical methodology of *Der Römerbrief.* Barth indicates as much in the preface to *AdT*: 'The work is liable to the same methodological reservations and objections as those which were raised against my exposition of the Letter to the Romans [*Römerbrieferklärung*].'[14] While acknowledging the indispensability of 'an exegesis which is primarily historically-interested', Barth insists that he will continue to offer, 'as a necessary *corrective,* the attempt at a *theological* exegesis [theologischen *Exegese*].'[15] Methodologically, Barth considers *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, like *Der Römerbrief*, to be an attempt to discern the *Sache* of a Pauline epistle – the fundamental object (or rather, Subject) which occasions and enlivens the text – and to expound the text in light of this object. The goal is *Sachexegese*: an exegesis which proceeds constantly in light of the epistle's *Sache*. What, then, is the perception of the object or *Sache* of 1 Corinthians which guides Barth's exegesis? As we shall see, '*theological* exegesis' means exegesis oriented to *God*; God, and God's relationship to that which is not God, is the *Sache* with which the text is concerned.

a. The Sache *of 1 Corinthians*

Barth's method for understanding and explaining Paul's epistle is to 'firmly [*energisch*] enquire: what is he really speaking of?'[16] For all its apparently disparate subject matter, 1 Corinthians offers a single answer to this question. A single thread, relatively obscure in chs. 1-14 but becoming visible in ch. 15, runs through the entire letter and binds it into a whole. Among the various subjects treated in chs. 1-14, Barth seizes on particular Pauline vocabulary, especially the phrase ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, as an indication of the one *Sache* at issue.

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[13] Webster, 77.
[14] *AdT*, v.
[15] *AdT*, v.
[16] *AdT*, 54; *RD*, 102. Cf. the exemplary 'energisch' exegetical labour of Calvin described in *R2*, xi.

> The sole, or at any rate decisive, assumption which I make is that when Paul spoke of God (ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐκ θεοῦ, εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ, and so forth), he really meant *God*, and that it is permissible, indeed imperative, to understand all his ideas – however they might incidentally be historically and psychologically conditioned – from this standpoint; to take him at his word, and thus to reckon that all his utterances – however ambiguously they might be regarded within the realm of history [*innerhalb der Geschichte*] – refer completely unambiguously, beyond the realm of history [*über die Geschichte hinaus*], to *God*, and that this relationship gives to everything its proper concrete meaning, however little we are able to ascertain this equally clearly everywhere.[17]

The flourishing religious life of the Corinthian church threatens to become an end in itself, and therefore Paul's efforts to show the true nature of this religious life in light of the rule of God, and to indicate the true nature of the rule of God to the religious Corinthians, necessarily assume a shattering critical force. But this critical assault originates in 'the most positive thing that can be conceived': the subject of ch. 15.[18] 'Here Paul's key position [*Schlüsselstellung*] is disclosed to us. Ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν names the point from which Paul speaks and to which he refers.'[19]

The 'resurrection of the dead', then, is the theme of the epistle, and this is seen clearly in ch. 15.[20] As we have noted, *AdT* is formally less commentary-like than *Der Römerbrief*. Yet Barth's articulation of the *Sache* of 1 Corinthians here more closely follows the language and conceptuality of this epistle than was the case for Romans in the earlier work. In *Der Römerbrief*, Barth conceived the *Sache* of that epistle in terms of the relationship between time and eternity and expressed this *Sache* in the etic language of mathematics and geometry. But 'the resurrection of the dead' (ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν) is the explicit theme of 1 Cor 15. Barth's other term for indicating the epistle's *Sache*, 'the last things', also arises from this chapter.[21] Yet Barth is adamant that we must not misconstrue what is meant by 'the last things':

> Last *things* are, as such, not *last* things, however great and momentous they might be. One would only speak of *last* things if one were to speak of the *end* of all things, of their end understood simply and fundamentally in this way: of a reality so radically superior to all things that the existence of all things is *established* [begründet] entirely in it and in it alone, thus speaking of their end as nothing other than their beginning. And one would only speak of the end of history

[17] *AdT*, 54; *RD*, 102-3.
[18] *AdT*, 56; *RD*, 107.
[19] *AdT*, 56; *RD*, 107.
[20] For an excellent treatment of what Barth means by 'the resurrection of the dead' as the theme of the epistle, R. Dale Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, Barth Studies (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 35–38.
[21] Although the exact formulation does not appear in 1 Cor 15, various things are described in this chapter as 'last' (ἔσχατος ἐχθρός; ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ; ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι; vv. 26, 45, 52).

> [*Endgeschichte*], of the end-time [*Endzeit*], if one spoke of the *end* of history [Ende *der Geschichte*], of the end of time [*Ende der Zeit*].[22]

'The last things' does not refer to the closing passage of world-history (Barth terms such a passage 'Schlussgeschichte' in distinction from *Endgeschichte*), and 'the resurrection of the dead' does not denote a final or nearly-final event within a historical sequence.[23] The problem with 'the end of history' in this sense is that it denotes the end *of history* ('last *things*'); such an 'end' is a function of history as the field within which the immanent possibilities of the world generally and humanity in particular are realised, and concerns the fullest reach of that realisation. No, for Barth '*last* things' means the *end* of history, *Endgeschichte* conceived as time's limit: temporality's encounter with an utterly distinct reality which radically and resolutely transcends temporality (*i.e.* the eternity of *God*). This limitation calls history and all its possibilities radically into question.

Yet the significance of 'the last things' is not solely negative. Precisely as the final limitation of all time, 'the last things' are the summoning goal and originating basis of temporality, and therefore give a positive determination to all time.

> Time as such is finite by virtue of its limitation by eternity. But [the last word] must be understood as the word that first establishes, as the history of the beginning, 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 does indeed establish it thus as finite, but also *establishes* it. Whoever realises this is relieved from the temptation to confuse the end of history [*Endgeschichte*] with a closing passage of history [*Schlussgeschichte*], however staggering and splendid it may be. Of the *real* end of history [wirklichen *Endgeschichte*] it may be said at *any* [jeder] time: The end is near![24]

The affirmation that 'the end is near […] applies fundamentally also to yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow'.[25] Eschatology is not concerned with the final passage of history, but with a qualitative characterisation of *all* history. Eternity overshadows history: the abundant immanent possibilities of life are seen in all their radical contingency as they are supremely confronted by death. But the encounter of eternity and history does not mean eternity's implacable negation of history. 'The last things' means 'the resurrection of the dead', and therefore not the annihilation but the fulfilment of history.[26] In dialectical fashion, the dead –

[22] *AdT*, 57-58; *RD*, 110.
[23] NB: Barth continues to use the term *Endgeschichte* to refer to both the genuine '*end* of history' and an ersatz 'end of *history*' (*i.e. Schlussgeschichte*).
[24] *AdT*, 59; *RD*, 112.
[25] *AdT*, 59; *RD*, 112.
[26] Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, 36.

precisely as the dead – are given life; the end – precisely as the end – becomes a beginning.[27] The resurrection *of the dead*, and the *resurrection* of the dead, the *last* things as the *origin* and secret of history; God, but not simply God in isolation or even God *in se*, rather God in relation to that which is not God. This is the fundamental matter with which Paul is occupied in 1 Corinthians 15. The exegete must labour with the text in this light and to this end.

b. 'The end of history'

The consequences of this perception of Paul's theme for understanding biblical narratives and for employing narrative conceptions in theological construction start to become clear as we consider its implications for the relationship of time to eternity. Barth's conception of the *Sache* is a unity, not a plurality. 'The last things' are singular. The various things that could be described as 'last' refer in fact to the singular reality of God's eternity standing over against the sequential plurality of human experience. In the Bible, at least insofar as biblical language and conceptualities are shaped by a genuine apprehension of God's eternity (on which qualification more below), a sequential *Schlussgeschichte* becomes a singular *Endgeschichte*.

> The 'last things,' however momentously they may be arranged in sequence, the closing passage of history [*Schlussgeschichte*], however complexly it may be spun out, here become, willingly or unwillingly, the end of all things, the end of history [*Endgeschichte*], to the extent that, where the idea of eternity is not quite unknown, the real end at last – the absorption of all this and that, all here and there, all once and now into the solemn peace of the One – usually occurs at a definite place.[28]

Biblical eschatology is concerned with unity rather than plurality, and with singularity rather than sequence. This eschatology has the character of an event (it 'occurs' at a definite place), but not of a story.

Nor can this singular event be assimilated into a wider story. The 'last things' refers to the qualitative limitation of *all* temporality, and is not directly concerned with the final chapter of the world's story. Events within the historical process which give an intimation of the end of that process – supernovas and ice ages – may perhaps offer some salutary parabolic promptings.[29] But no continuously unfolding historical sequence will culminate in 'the last things'. A 'Christian monism' which sees continuity between the 'now' of life as we know it and the 'then' of a hereafter, 'clashes irreconcilably against the discontinuity, against the

[27] See *AdT*, 60; *RD*, 114.
[28] *AdT*, 58; *RD*, 111.
[29] See *AdT*, 57; *RD*, 108-9.

dialectic of Pauline thought, against the No'.[30] Time and eternity are not separated; the latter not only limits but also grounds and conditions the former. That is, God's 'No' also hides a 'Yes'. Yet this discontinuity – this 'No' – virtually eradicates the theological significance of history's sequential, progressive and cumulative aspect. 'The last things' are equidistant from every point in the sequential unfolding of history, and the historical sequence never converges with nor even approaches 'the last things'. Entirely independent of the unfolding of the historical sequence, 'the end is near'. It is impossible, therefore, to tell a story which includes as its closing passage 'the last things'.

How does this accord with the idea that the resurrection of the dead means new life, the fulfilment and not the abrogation of history? Fergusson 'wonders whether, if not altogether missing, there is something strangely muted in what Barth says about the hope of the resurrection of embodied and social persons'.[31] Certainly eschatology is about '*last* things', but surely this must also include 'last *things*'? John Webster vigorously opposes this line of questioning insofar as it suggests that Barth has left no room for a genuine history of human activity (*i.e.* ethics). Barth's interpretation does attempt to ground ethics in eschatology; if he is rather sparse with the details, it is a matter of the specific exegetical and interpretative task at hand (and of Barth's own developing sense of the proper scope and texture of theological ethics).[32] Similarly, if Barth is 'frustratingly unspecific about the eschatological events in which humankind will be caught up, then one might simply point out that his reticence merely reflects that of the text which he is expounding.'[33] Nevertheless, the analysis below will show that the sketchiness of Paul's eschatological narrative cannot fully account for this lacuna in Barth's presentation. Barth's theological and exegetical decisions simply exclude the possibility of understanding and expressing the gospel of 'the last things' and its consequences as the kind of history which could be conceived and described as a narrative.

c. Barth's sachlich *reading strategy*

Barth's conception of the *Sache* and his interpretative approach are mutually reinforcing: his understanding of the *Sache* both derives from close attention to the text and serves in turn as the guiding star for his detailed exegesis. It is artificial and inaccurate to speak of Barth's conception of the *Sache* as a *result* of his reading strategy, or vice versa. Nevertheless, before

[30] *AdT*, 65-66; *RD*, 123.
[31] Fergusson, 'Barth's Resurrection of the Dead', 71.
[32] Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 89.
[33] Webster, 85.

we turn to Barth's exegesis of various passages in 1 Cor 15, it is worth reflecting directly on the reading strategy which accompanies the conception of the epistle's *Sache* outlined above.

As we have seen, Barth has a strong sense of the epistle as a coherent unity, and this is a 'sachliche Einheit': a unity deriving from the letter's singular *Sache*.[34] We can speak of one *cantus firmus* or 'crimson thread' running through the whole; this is the 'common denominator' shared by the various elements of the epistle, and therefore it is legitimate to speak of the epistle's 'meaning' in the singular.[35] All Paul's ideas presented in the text may be interpreted from the single standpoint of the *Sache*: 'the discourse of the apostle in the whole epistle proceeds from a single point [*von einem einzigen Punkt*] and harks back again to this one single point, and […] 1 Cor 15 is to be understood as an attempt to express in words this one single point in itself'.[36] Making sense of the epistle, therefore, will involve seeing the various features of the text always in relation to the one *Sache*. This strategy involves the risk of looking *past* those features to the *Sache*. As Webster admits, 'the emphasis upon a single argumentative trajectory and upon thematic unity can seem to yield a rather reduced account of the material, especially in treating the ethical exhortations of the letter: the surface of the text can at times become rather incidental to its deeper theme.'[37]

The question of the relation between the text's surface and its theme, or the transparency of the text to its *Sache*, is an important one. This question is sharpest at precisely the point which concerns us: the congeniality of the *Sache* (as Barth understands it) to conception and expression in terms of narrative sequence. As we have seen, Barth finds the key to 1 Cor 15 in 'last things' – understood not as *Schlussgeschichte*, but as *Endgeschichte*. And yet Barth is conscious that one could in fact draw from 1 Cor 15 the material with which to construct a kind of *Schlussgeschichte*.[38] The '*last* things' with which Paul is occupied in 1 Cor 15 are in fact entangled with 'last *things*'. Unlike other speculative accounts of the closing passage of history, the Bible's perspective on such things is at least haunted by eternity (in what Barth considers to be the genuine sense of this word):

> The representations of the 'last things' or of the 'end-of-history' [*„Endgeschichte"*] which are attached to the language and conceptual world of the Bible, however primitive they may perhaps be, have at least the great advantage

[34] *AdT*, 54; *RD*, 102.
[35] *AdT*, 52, 54; *RD*, 100, 102.
[36] *AdT*, 59-60; *RD*, 113.
[37] Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 82.
[38] *AdT*, 57; *RD*, 109.

> over their fellows that the thought of eternity […] is not entirely unknown to them.[39]

But there can be no absolute separation of the biblical language and conceptuality from other accounts which 'perhaps also speak' of eternity but know nothing of 'the eternity of *God'*.[40]

Barth acknowledges therefore that it is entirely possible to read 1 Cor 15 in ways which are not congenial to his conception of the text's *Sache*. In fact, the kind of *sachlich* reading proposes is fraught with danger, and specifically the danger of reading Paul as if he is indeed concerned with looking backward and forwards to a past and future history comprehended in a single continuous temporal sequence:

> To how many misunderstandings has 1 Cor 15 been exposed from time immemorial! How infinitely cautious must we be here, if we are to understand, taking one step at a time, if we are to avoid straying to the right or the left into meaningless trivialities or into utterly hopeless obscurities: into ideas out of which no way of knowledge leads either forward or backward. How obvious it is, for example, to read vv. 3-11 with the eyes of a historicising understanding […]. What an awful heteronomy of faith and of obedience one can discern from vv. 12-34, where instead of upon their own freedom, both are based apparently so unequivocally upon a third and fourth, upon a historical event [*historischen Ereignis*], and in the light of the beyond! […] And finally, are not vv. 50-57 quite characteristically one of those end-of-histories which are precisely not the end-of-history, but only egregious continuations of history [*eine jener Endgeschichten, die gerade keine Endgeschichte, sondern nur unerhörte Fortsetzungen der Geschichte sind*]?[41]

Barth seems by turns confident that sustained effort will render the text transparent to the *Sache* which lies behind it, and conscious of the perhaps insuperable difficulties involved in really understanding Paul.[42] We are justified in wondering, then, to what extent will Barth's *sachlich* reading of this text need to read critically, *against* Paul's text, in order to discern the *Sache* which it partly reveals and partly obscures?

This question is central to Rudolf Bultmann's 1926 review of *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, which remains, almost a full century later, one of the most substantial engagements with this work.[43] Bultmann is in complete agreement with Barth that the search for 'a material unity, *i.e.* one grounded in the subject-matter [*sachlichen, d. h. in der Sache gegründeten Einheit*]' and

[39] *AdT*, 58; *RD*, 110.
[40] *AdT*, 58; *RD*, 111.
[41] *AdT*, 61-62; *RD*, 116-17.
[42] *AdT*, 62-63; *RD*, 118.
[43] Rudolf Bultmann, 'Karl Barth, "Die Auferstehung der Toten"', in *Glauben und Verstehen, Bd. 1*, Tübingen (Mohr Siebeck, 1933), 38–64. ET: Rudolf Bultmann, *'*Karl Barth, The Resurrection of the Dead*'*, in *Faith and Understanding I*, ed. Robert W. Funk, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM Press, 1969), 66–94.

an exegesis conducted in light of this unity is the correct approach to the epistle.[44] Bultmann also agrees that the text's *Sache* concerns eschatology, but argues that 'the last things' are not to be understood in terms of an objective (and speculative) 'resurrection of the dead'; for Bultmann, 'the indescribable eschatological event' becomes real in the presence of love in the Christian community at Corinth.[45] The climax of the letter is not ch. 15, but ch. 13. But even an accurate perception of the *Sache* will not guarantee fruitful exegesis. The exegete gains from Paul 'a *critical standard*' which must then be recursively applied to Paul's own statements.[46] *Sachexegese* demands *Sachkritik*. Bultmann faults Barth's exegesis of ch. 15 for failing to take this further step. Here Paul *does* speak of '*last* things', 'but at the same time he is speaking of last *things*, of the "closing scene of history" [*Schlussgeschichte*] which Barth very rightly distinguishes from the real end of history [*von der eigentlichen Endgeschichte*]'.[47] Paul's presentation assumes and articulates a world-view which includes mythological (*mythologisch*) components, and to the extent that this is so, deviates from 'his legitimate concern and his intention'.[48] These elements cannot be explained away as figurative, or evaded by re-interpretation. In order to rightly understand the chapter in light of its subject-matter, a critical sifting of its contents will be required.

Bultmann of course is using the word 'mythological' in its narrow technical sense to describe a kind of ancient *Weltanschauung*. Yet the junctures of Paul's thought at which Bultmann finds components of this mythological world-view present are those which involve *mythos* in the broader and less technical Aristotelean sense: a story, or narrative. Paul thinks in terms of stories, of both past and future, and where he does his proper theme is obscured. Paul's employment of a narrative mode of thought, and Barth's resistance to recognising this narrative mode, both emerge as Bultmann critiques Barth's exposition of 1 Cor 15.20-28. Bultmann argues that 1 Cor 15.20-22 expresses something of the truth of Christian existence: the truth that Christ's resurrection and *parousia* are a singular eschatological event.[49] Verses 23-28 represent Paul's effort to stress an aspect of this truth which has not come to full expression in vv. 20-22: 'the futurity of the resurrection life' and therefore the provisionality of what is given in the present.[50] But Paul has maladroitly attempted to express the 'eternal future' of the

[44] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 66; 'Auferstehung', 38.
[45] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 79–80.
[46] Bultmann, 67.
[47] Bultmann, 80; 'Auferstehung', 51.
[48] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 81; Bultmann, 'Auferstehung', 52.
[49] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 84.
[50] Bultmann, 84.

kingdom by speaking of a temporal future which consists in impending cosmic events. Paul's statements about the future derive from his Jewish-Christian world-view and 'describe the different dramatic events of the closing scene of history [*von den verschiedenen dramatischen Akten der endzeitlichen (=schlussgeschichtlichen) Ereignisse reden*]'.[51] 'And (for better or worse), Paul is speaking about different, temporally successive events [*von verschiedenen zeitlichen Ereignissen*].'[52] There is no doubt in Bultmann's mind that this lingering narrative eschatology (i.e. 'myth') is for the worse. Therefore Paul's true meaning can only be reached by a critical winnowing of his statements. Bultmann takes Barth's 'many artificial and torturous experiments' with the text as an implicit acknowledgement that a *Sachkritik* is necessary.[53] In fact, Barth is already tacitly engaged in just such a material criticism, because he *has* grasped and expressed the text's *Sache*. But this is, in Bultmann's view, *despite* rather than *because of* the text itself. Bultmann presses his point home: this matters because the wheat of eschatology and the chaff of historical thinking are not so easily separated as Barth's rather cavalier and disingenuous approach would suggest. 'We are not dealing here with a mere juxtaposition of genuine Pauline concepts and ideas which belong to the area of the thought of his time. The two interlace and interpenetrate.'[54]

In this context we need not venture into the labyrinth of the hermeneutical debate between Barth and Bultmann. It will suffice to note that Bultmann's critique highlights the tension involved in Barth's efforts to read the text as though narrative sequence were of little or no importance for what Paul really wanted to say. Even if Paul's truest intentions can and must be represented without drawing on the characteristic features of narrative representation, a responsible exegesis of the text must reckon with the fact that what Paul has actually written *cannot* be explained without some appeal to an unfolding temporal sequence. If the temptation of reading the text as *Schlussgeschichte* originates in the Pauline text itself, and is not therefore a mere phantom which may be swiftly banished, a *sachlich* reading focused on understanding the text as a testimony to *Endgeschichte* will need to enter some kind of negotiation with the text, especially at points where Paul apparently appeals to some kind of narrative sequence. While Barth never overtly deploys *Sachkritik* as a reading strategy, as we closely follow his exegesis of the chapter we will see him grappling with the text – not always successfully – at just these points.

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[51] Bultmann, 84; 'Auferstehung', 55.
[52] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 85; Bultmann, 'Auferstehung', 56.
[53] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 85. On the details of Barth's exposition, see section 2b below.
[54] Bultmann, 86.

2. Event without sequence: Barth's anti-narratival exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15

We now turn to Barth's systematic exposition of 1 Cor 15 in order to see how his conception of the epistle's *Sache*, along with its attendant reading strategy, concretely shapes his exegetical practice. As we examine Barth's treatment of selected passages, we will see that, at points where the Paul might be seem to be concerned with distinct and interrelated events in temporal sequence, presented in outline or even in a brief narrative, Barth consistently eschews interpreting the text in these terms.

a. 1 Corinthians 15.1-11

These verses are Paul's 'reminder' to the Corinthians of the gospel which he preached and they received. Barth maintains that historical-apologetic questions about the genuineness of the resurrection, or historical-critical questions regarding the relation of this traditional material to the tradition represented by the Synoptic Gospels, are entirely incidental to Paul's interests in this passage:

> it must be emphasised that *neither* for Paul *nor* for the tradition, the παράδοσις, to which we see him appealing here, was it a question of giving a so-called 'resurrection account,' [*Auferstehungsbericht*] relating to the historical [*historische*] fact 'the resurrection of Jesus,' or […] a 'historical proof of the resurrection.'[55]

In fact, Paul is not even interested in relating a *Geschichte* concerning the events surrounding Jesus' passion. The stress lies not on the material content of what Paul 'delivered' to the Corinthians, but on the identity of what Paul 'delivered' with that which he 'received', such that there is no primitive gospel to be found behind 'Paulinism'.

> Paul intends to say: It was and is not my idea to deliver to you the gospel in this perfectly definite outline, τίνι λόγῳ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν (v. 2), but I have so delivered it as I myself received it. In other words, the gospel of the primitive church has no other meaning than my gospel.[56]

Paul is apparently uninterested in the sequential outline (or brief narrative) of events which is the substance of the Pauline *kerygma*, both in relation to 'what actually happened' and *per se*. According to Barth, neither *Historie* nor *Geschichte* are the primary issue here.

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[55] *AdT*, 74; *RD*, 138.
[56] *AdT*, 74; *RD*, 139. Even more important for Barth than this identity is the fact that Paul's gospel, like the gospel of Peter and the Twelve, originates in the 'appearance' or 'being seen' of Jesus (i.e. revelation).

What, then, of the description in vv. 3-8 of the content of what Paul delivered to the Corinthians, with its fourfold ἀπέθανεν, ἐτάφη, ἐγήγερται, and ὤφθη? These verbs certainly have the appearance of a brief chronological sequence: the bare bones of a story. But for Barth this appearance is misleading:

> In the series of facts [*Tatsachenreihe*] thus described, it would be easy to find the actual substance of that which Paul himself received and then delivered, and then we would indeed be dealing with a so-called resurrection account [*Auferstehungsbericht*], an enumeration of events [*Aufzählung von Ereignissen*]. But a closer inspection of the text immediately shows, first of all, that the four facts mentioned are by no means chronologically successive or adjacent [*keineswegs chronikartig hinter oder nebeneinander stehen*].[57]

Barth will acknowledge that, in some sense, we are dealing here with four historical facts. But three of the four elements are qualified by 'entirely non-"historical" [*ganz un„historischen"*]' factors in such a way that their historical character is drastically attenuated.[58] These elements cannot, therefore, be pressed into service as a historical 'proof'. It should be stressed that this vocabulary does not imply that Barth passes a negative or even a doubtful judgement on whether these events 'really occurred' in the sense of being 'facts of empirically accessible and verifiable history [*historische Tatsachen*]'.[59] The burden of Barth's interpretation is precisely to exclude this kind of judgement. Barth wishes to disconnect the real significance of these events from the plausibility (or otherwise) of their historical occurrence, and to connect it to the way they are overshadowed by what lies beyond the limits of the empirically accessible field of historical possibilities: the activity of God. That 'Christ died' (ἀπέθανεν) is a matter of empirical history, but the judgement that Christ died 'for our sins' cannot be rendered on this kind of historical basis. The resurrection (ἐγήγερται) of Christ is no bare empirical historical fact, as seen in its dependence for its proof on the general truth of 'the resurrection of the dead', which latter cannot emerge within history but only upon its frontier (*i.e.*, it belongs to 'the *last* things'). Though the repeated passive verb ὤφθη certainly implies various acts of human seeing, the focus is on Christ as the subject of this verb, and the divine activity of revelation – of which 'it can really be equally well said that it was, is, and will be, never and nowhere, as that it was, is, and will be, always and everywhere possible'.[60] Only the phrase 'and was buried' (ἐτάφη) can be understood 'as really chronological information' – and even here 'the *history* [Geschichte] which undoubtedly comes to expression in this ὅτι ἐτάφη is illuminated in the

[57] *AdT*, 75; *RD*, 139-40.
[58] *AdT*, 75; *RD*, 140.
[59] *AdT*, 76; *RD*, 142.
[60] *AdT*, 76-77; *RD*, 143.

most dazzling manner from the *boundary* of history [*von der* Grenze *der Geschichte*]'.[61] The activity of God, which as such is categorically and irreducibly *external to* the temporally continuous fabric of historical possibility (at least for the Barth of 1923), either strongly colours or wholly claims these apparently sequential historical events such that all are, to one degree or another, lifted off the fabric of history. As a result, the temporal sequence is disrupted to the point of disintegration: 'Therefore the series of four facts [*Tatsachen*] is to be understood like this: not as a chronologically monotonous unreeling of homogeneous things, but as maximally differentiated things in a repeatedly fractured series'.[62] 'Facts' of this kind are not simply events which can be arranged in a tidy temporal sequence; what Paul declares here cannot therefore be understood as the outline of a temporally continuous narrative. The Pauline gospel is not a story; the elements of which it is composed are of such a kind that they cannot be integrated by this mode of expression.

Along with this understanding of Paul's gospel, in which the content of the gospel cannot be conceived as a sequence or depicted as a narrative, Barth also offers a reading strategy for those sections of the New Testament Gospels which treat the same reality as the apostle does, but 'unlike Paul attempted to narrate a *history* [*die* Geschichte *erzählen… wollten*]'.[63] Barth emphasises the absence of any actual report of the resurrection itself, and the 'utmost obscurity and dissonance in all indications of time and place' concerning the appearances of the risen Christ.[64] The resurrection and appearances belong to wholly different order than ordinary historical events, and they are therefore simply not susceptible of being assimilated into a temporally and spatially continuous narrative. A radical distinction is to be drawn between these appearances and the 'seeing' of the empty tomb. Barth stresses the ambiguity of the latter event, claiming that the Gospel narratives preserve the possibility that Jesus only apparently died or that his body was stolen, and pointing out that the Gospels refrain from drawing any conclusion as to the meaning of the empty tomb.[65] The Gospels are not to be read as an attempted *Historie* and as such subjected to an *historisch* analysis; their unique subject matter so disrupts the narrative that we are barely in the realm of *Geschichte*. Barth's radical Paulinism leads him to an anti-narratival hermeneutic for biblical narrative. His suggested reading

[61] *AdT*, 75-76; *RD*, 141.
[62] *AdT*, 76; *RD*, 141.
[63] *AdT*, 77; *RD*, 143.
[64] *AdT*, 77; *RD*, 143.
[65] This reading of the Gospel narratives, while plausible, is also open to challenge. One might argue that the narratives are in fact crafted so as to unambiguously determine the meaning of the empty tomb (see Matt 28.6), and to eliminate possible ambiguity (Matt 28.11-15), thus rhetorically nudging readers toward rendering a definite and positive judgement in the realm of *Historie*.

emphasises the discontinuities of the narrative to the point that its elements are rendered so heterogeneous that they can scarcely be interpreted as mutually intelligible parts of an integrated whole. The Gospel narratives disintegrate in the attempt to narrate the unnarratable. The ironic result of this disintegration is that the substance of the gospel both received and delivered by Paul, and indicated in the New Testament Gospels, is singular: the 'appearance' (or being-seen) of Jesus Christ. 'Only the ὤφθη, that which *he* did, is, at any rate, the substance [*Inhalt*] of the gospel, and, we can now very well say, the central substance of the gospel which Paul himself received and delivered'.[66]

We need not invest much time in disputing Barth's exegesis of 1 Cor 15.1-11, or in establishing an alternative exegesis. We need only show that Barth's exegesis is disputable: that it is not necessary and self-evident to read these passages as he does. Other interpreters judge that the historical status of the events described in 1 Cor 15.3-8 cannot be so thoroughly relativised. C. K. Barrett, like Barth, is concerned to stress that for Paul the resurrection is not the kind of event that can be demonstrated by historical evidence as such, and yet 'it is not unrelated to history, for the affirmation [i.e. that God raised Christ from the dead] began to be made at a particular point in time, which can be dated by historical means, and it was motivated by occurrences which can be described in historical terms.'[67] Bultmann finds Barth's exegesis entirely unacceptable on the grounds that he 'can understand the text only as an attempt to make the resurrection of Christ credible as an objective historical fact.'[68] For Paul, *both* the resurrection of the dead and the resurrection of Christ are plainly understood as 'historical fact'; the phrase 'in accordance with the Scriptures' strengthens rather than abrogates a sense of historicity; Christ's appearance is explicitly related to the realm of spatio-temporal experience by the reference to 'most of whom are still alive', and the indication that Paul is the final member of this group.[69] Even disregarding the question of historical-apologetic intent, according to Conzelmann 'it is clear that the enumeration [in 1 Cor 15.3-8] is meant as a historical, chronological one.'[70] Still other interpreters find narrative proper to be an indispensable concept for understanding the passage. For Michael Gorman, 'It is crucial to note that these four articles […] are not speculative theological or philosophical assertions but

[66] *AdT*, 79; *RD*, 146.
[67] C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968), 341.
[68] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 83. Cf. Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament: Volume One*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM, 1952), 295.
[69] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 83. Cf. Hendrikus Boers, 'Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15', *Interpretation* 21, no. 1 (1967): 54.
[70] Hans Conzelmann, 'On the Analysis of the Confessional Formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5', trans. Mathias Rissi, *Interpretation* 20, no. 1 (1966): 23.

narrative statements. Paul's gospel is a story, a narrative about what God and Christ have done "for us".'[71] N. T. Wright sees this as the community's 'foundation-story', which is itself the climax of 'the entire biblical narrative'.[72] For Richard Hays, the verses are straightforward evidence that Paul understands the divine incursion into the world in narrative terms.[73]

Therefore, Barth's exegetical decision to interpret this passage as an appeal neither to empirically-available *Historie* nor to a kerygmatic *Geschichte* – and indeed, to understand Paul's gospel in terms which are antithetical to conception and representation in the form of a narrative – is just that: a positive decision in the face of plausible alternatives. The extent to which Barth's reading is strained (however each interpreter judges it) will give an indication of the pressure exerted by Barth's perception of the text's theme on his interpretation of the text's details. Our analysis suggests that Barth's determination to engage in *sachlich* exegesis of the letter, and his conception of the letter's *Sache* as a singular event (but not a temporal sequence), leads to an interpretation in which such indications of temporal sequence as are present in the text are thoroughly minimised or even evaded. Thus narrative modes of thought and representation cannot and do not play a meaningful role in Barth's theological exegesis of the text.

b. 1 Corinthians 15.20-28

In this passage Paul abandons his exploration of the counterfactual 'if there is no resurrection of the dead' (15.12-19), and begins to enlarge upon that which he *does* consider to be the case: 'Christ has been raised from the dead' (v. 20). Barth's exegesis follows Johannes Hofmann's reorganization of the text on the basis that it offers 'a great *simplification*. If it is correct, then here too Paul developed no eschatological mythology'.[74] Thus the 'ἀπαρχή… ἔπειτα… εἶτα…' of vv. 23-24 does not explicate the τάγματα of three distinct elements in temporal sequence. Instead, Barth makes the expression 'εἶτα τὸ τέλος' (v. 24) – translated as 'At this last moment [*In diesem letzten Zeitpunkt*]' – a further specification of 'ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ' (v. 23), denoting the single condition in which all the action of vv. 24-27a (taken as a single sentence with multiple interjections) will occur, not as successive events in sequence,

[71] Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 102. See also page 105.
[72] Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 319–20. Narrative categories pervade Wright's treatment of the passage.
[73] Hays, 'Is Paul's Gospel Narratable?', 237. See also p. 218.
[74] *AdT*, 95; *RD*, 173.

but as various descriptions of the same reality.[75] Christ's *parousia*, the 'abolition of death generally', Christ's 'highest and at the same time his last act of sovereignty', God's supremacy as 'all in all': all these are a profusion of metaphors for the same act, which is itself not a second event following 'the resurrection of Christ', but is the perfection and fulfilment of this single event.[76]

Barth does use the language of temporal differentiation: Adam and Christ form the antithesis of present condition and future hope.[77] But this present and future are not to be understood as two discrete and successive states within a single temporal continuum; Barth understands 'present' and 'future' to mean something like provisionality and hiddenness.

> Christ's *parousia* is nothing *different*, second next to his resurrection, only the definitive coming-to-the-surface of the same subterranean stream which in revelation for the first time became perceptible in time, the *fulfilment* of that which in time can only be grasped as a *promise*.[78]

In attempting to articulate the relation of Christ's resurrection and *parousia* 'our concept of time loses all clarity'; 'the universal victory of Christ announced in the resurrection, […] once known in its absoluteness, although never and nowhere present, is yet always and everywhere to be conceived of as the crisis of everything human, material, and temporal [*die Krisis alles Menschlich-Dinglich-Zeitlichen*].'[79] 'Present' and 'future' do not indicate different portions of the temporal continuum in which distinct events will occur, but rather express the dialectical character of the singular divine activity.

Again, it will suffice to observe that things might have been different; Barth has made a deliberate decision to interpret this passage without reference to temporal sequence. This can be seen in Bultmann's comments on Barth's handling of this passage, which crackle with frustration. In 1 Cor 15.23-28, Bultmann sees Paul expounding the futurity of the resurrection life, in line with his Jewish-Christian worldview: the apostle's statements here 'describe the different dramatic events of the closing scene of history [*von den verschiedenen dramatischen Akten der endzeitlichen (=schlussgeschichtlichen) Ereignisse reden*].'[80] Paul's text speaks not of a single eschatological reality which is inconceivable in temporal terms, but rather of distinct events within history: 'it still cannot be denied that for Paul the *parousia* is a different, second event apart from the resurrection, since for him the resurrection and the coming are two

[75] *AdT*, 94. Here Stenning's translation (*RD*, 171) is inaccurate and misleading.
[76] *AdT*, 95; *RD*, 173.
[77] e.g. *AdT*, 96; *RD,* 175.
[78] *AdT*, 97; *RD,* 176.
[79] *AdT*, 97; *RD,* 176.
[80] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 84; Bultmann, 'Auferstehung', 55.

temporal occurrences, are objective, "historical" events [*zwei zeitliche Ereignisse, objektiv „historische" Vorgänge sind*].'[81] An 'eschatological mythology' is precisely what is communicated here. Yet Bultmann declares that 'Barth evades this by an impossible translation and interpretation', and mounts a detailed argument against the 'artificial and torturous experiments' of Barth's textual reorganisation and reinterpretation.[82] Ironically, Bultmann judges, Barth has accurately perceived the substance of what Paul wants to say, but fails to acknowledge that Paul's true meaning can only be reached by reading *against* the mythological *vestigia* preserved in the Pauline text. Yet, compounding the irony, Barth has in fact involuntarily admitted the necessity of *Sachkritik* by tacitly employing it in his own 'ingenious paraphrases'; Barth has 'explained away' an entire *Schlussgeschichte* which was clearly important for Paul.[83]

Without unreservedly endorsing Bultmann's interpretation and critique, we may conclude that there is at least a genuine possibility of understanding Paul's text in such a way that a temporal sequence of distinct events occupies a central place in it, and that Barth's exegesis constitutes a less-than-overwhelming argument against this possibility.[84] Barth perceives the epistle's *Sache* as a singular event which cannot belong to a temporal sequence. Temporal terms used to describe this singular divine action will be stretched to breaking point; a narrative depiction of this reality is impossible. Accordingly, he reads the activity depicted in this passage as a dialectical singularity rather than a sequence (even at the cost of an interpretative result that we may judge to be exegetically strained and ultimately unsuccessful).

c. 1 Corinthians 15.44b-49

In 1 Corinthians 15.44b-49 Paul explains the σῶμα ψυχικόν and σῶμα πνευματικόν of v. 44a by drawing on the Genesis narrative of the creation of humanity, setting the 'first man Adam' over against 'the last Adam' and exploring the theological significance of this sequence. This argument in affords us another opportunity to see how Barth treats the biblical text where temporal sequence is – at least potentially – important for its meaning.

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[81] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 84; Bultmann, 'Auferstehung', 55.
[82] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 84–85.
[83] Bultmann, 86; Bultmann, 'Auferstehung', 57.
[84] Further to the analysis above, we might also ask whether the various verbs (with their assorted grammatical tense-forms) in vv. 24-27 are really different ways of describing the singular occurrence of a singular event, and whether the varied activity of these verses is satisfactorily encompassed by a singular descriptor such as Christ's 'highest and at the same time his last act of sovereignty'.

In Barth's treatment of these verses, his concern is to show that, precisely as *bodily* resurrection, 'the expression "the resurrection of the dead" is indeed nothing other than a paraphrase of the expression "God"', bespeaking God's Lordship over the 'I' who am body.[85] In v. 45 Paul introduces a modified quotation of Gen 2.7 LXX: 'οὕτως καὶ γέγραπται· ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν'.[86] This is followed by Paul's own mirroring statement: 'ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζῳοποιοῦν'. According to Barth, the import of this juxtaposition is threefold. First, '*The* Adam, the man who really arose *through the divine breath of life* [durch den göttlichen Lebenshauch *entstanden ist*], is the *second* Adam: Christ'.[87] Paul sees in Genesis a reference to Christ as the archetypal human being, and to his life by the Spirit of God (Barth's use of the verb *enstanden* allows this life to be understood in two senses: both as origination and as resurrection).[88] This draws together human origins, human destiny, incarnation, and resurrection:

> It is an utterly immeasurable idea which Paul dares to think in v. 45b: the creation, the resurrection of Christ and the end of all things are here conceived as a single occurrence [*ein einziges Geschehen*]: God speaks and the result is his man, the originally finite [*ursprünglich-endliche*] creature, the Logos become flesh, the last Adam, who is veritably the first.[89]

In Barth's expansive theological reading the words 'first', 'second', and 'last' do not denote distinct members in a fixed temporal succession, but display very significant fluidity of meaning. Second is the insight, which is 'exegetically more obvious in that biblical text', that the first Adam, who 'originated [*entstanden ist*]' through the divine breath, is an animated natural body.[90] Third, Paul is indicating that both human origins (as God-*created* humanity or a body which lives by the soul) and human destiny (as *God*-created humanity or a body which lives by God's Spirit) are linked by corporeality, and that original humanity reaches its destiny in the body and not elsewhere. But this latter is something which 'must *happen* [*Aber das mussen* geschehen]'; it is not a Platonic atemporal relation.[91] This event, this change, is what Paul means to communicate by stating that Adam is 'first' and Christ is 'last'. 'Logically' we could equally understand 'the last Adam' as primordial man, and then secondly consider 'the

[85] *AdT*, 112; *RD,* 202.
[86] The words πρῶτος and Ἀδάμ are not included in the LXX text. For discussion, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1281. NB: Barth incorrectly cites Gen 2.2 as the quotation's source.
[87] *AdT*, 115; *RD,* 207.
[88] This second sense is not implied by the Greek verb ἐγένετο. Likewise, nothing in Paul's text supports taking πνεῦμα ζῳοποιοῦν in the instrumental or agential sense indicated by Barth's insertion of 'durch'.
[89] *AdT*, 115; *RD*, 207. In this context, the designation *endlich* conveys ultimacy as well as finitude.
[90] *AdT*, 115-16; *RD*, 207.
[91] *AdT*, 116; *RD*, 209. For Barth, Paul is obviously writing 'in opposition to the speculations of Philo' here.

first Adam' in this light.[92] This is the logic of the *Sache*, in which 'the last things' are, as such, 'the first things'. In Barth's *sachlich* interpretation of the text, 'first' and 'last' have shed their sequential meanings and become identical and interchangeable. Likewise, the singular transformative 'happening' in which the human creature attains its destiny (or, equally, returns to its origin) is 'event', not the kind of event that can be placed on a temporal continuum and understood in straightforward terms of 'before' and 'after'. The future-tense verb φορέσομεν in v. 49 indicates not an anticipated event which will be encountered further along the temporal continuum, but rather a certain kind of relationship based on the *lack* of continuity (temporal or otherwise) between our original state and our destiny: 'Between us and Christ exists no continuity. Only the relationship of hope. But the relationship of hope *exists*: φορέσομεν.'[93]

Here too, Barth has made a deliberate and contestable exegetical decision to interpret this passage without recourse to the concept of temporal sequence.[94] Barth uses the language of history – 'first', 'last', and 'occurrence' – but in his interpretation these terms do not have the kind of temporal signification which would allow them to be ranged in a sequence or story. For Barth there is not a temporal sequence in which a first Adam of dust is followed by those who bear his image, then followed by a second Adam, who then transforms 'those of the dust' into 'those who are of heaven.' Paul spoke of neither an atemporal relation nor of a chronological sequence of events: all these events are one.

> We thus stand in the connection of *salvation history*, which is a real history: the perishing of an old, the becoming of a new, a path and a step on this path, no mere relationship, but history which is not enacted in time, but between time and eternity – *the* history, in which the creation, the resurrection of Christ, and the end, as v. 48 indicates, are one day.[95]

Barth's non-sequential interpretation of the 'salvation history' on view in this passage results in a compression of all its constituent elements – creation, redemption, eschaton – into a singular event. This salvation history is 'real history' in that it has the character of 'event', but it cannot be understood as an unfolding story.

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[92] *AdT*, 116; *RD*, 209.
[93] *AdT*, 118; *RD*, 211. Similarly, 'The future tense tells us that we, the ἐπουράνιοι, are not to confuse ourselves with the ἐπουράνιος.'
[94] David E. Garland supplies one possible alternative interpretation: 'Paul argues in 15.45-46 that these opposites [the σῶμα ψυχικόν and σῶμα πνευματικόν of 15.44] are temporally successive.' *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 734.
[95] *AdT*, 118; *RD*, 211-12.

d. 1 Corinthians 15.50-58

Barth's exposition of these verses attempts to show that, first impressions notwithstanding, they do not describe the transition from history as we know it to its final chapter; that here is not in fact 'one of those end-of-histories which are precisely not the end-of-history, but only egregious continuations of history'.[96] For Barth, this final section of 1 Cor 15 does not advance Paul's argument, but is a calm testimony to the reality which he has already indicated. The only potential exception lies in vv. 51-52, in which Paul discloses 'a mystery'. However, Barth argues that these verses do not introduce a new thesis, but rather a further explanation of v. 50. Verse 50 reaffirms that 'flesh and blood', as they are, cannot inherit the kingdom, and vv. 51-52 clarify a potential misunderstanding by explaining that bodily death does not alter this situation. The living and the dead alike must be encountered by the miracle of God.

When Paul writes πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα (v. 51), he is not addressing the specific issue of the various states of believers at the time of a future crisis. The mystery of which he speaks is '*the contemporaneity* [Gleichzeitigkeit] *of the living and the dead in the resurrection*.'[97] To all human beings at every point on the temporal continuum – including those who are, from our perspective as presently living human beings, dead – the call of God rings out. The resurrection is 'the crisis which concerns all human beings in all ages' and 'which longitudinally ruptures all ages'.[98] The resurrection of the dead is not to be confined to one temporal location at or near the end of a temporal sequence, but rather relativises time and its unfolding: 'together he calls Abraham and us and our children's children.'[99]

In line with this reading, Barth must engage in a negotiation with the temporal information embedded in the verbs and prepositional phrases of the following verses. The phrase ἐν ἀτόμῳ is understood to mean that 'the dawning crisis' itself is instantaneous and not temporally extensive. It will happen 'in the *present*': that is, in every present.[100] Paul's expression ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ tells us that the resurrection is radically discontinuous with all other developments, permeating history without partaking of it:

> It does not come in gradual or catastrophic developments; if such happen, they have nothing to do with it: the resurrection occurs obliquely through the life and death of human beings [*die Auferstehung geschieht quer hindurch durch das Leben und*

[96] *AdT*, 62; *RD*, 117.
[97] *AdT*, 122; *RD*, 217.
[98] *AdT*, 122; *RD*, 218. Cf. *R2*, 102.
[99] *AdT*, 122; *RD*, 218. Barth asserts that 1 Thess 4.13-17 is to be read in the same way.
[100] *AdT*, 122; *RD*, 218.

> *Sterben der Menschen*], it is salvation-history which goes its own way through the other histories.[101]

The phrase ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι does not refer to a final eventuality, but rather marks the crisis as God's will. Barth stresses that the future-tense verbs of v. 52 (σαλπίσει, ἐγερθήσονται, ἀλλαγησόμεθα) indicate not the usual sense of an event to occur in an as-yet-unreached portion of the temporal continuum, but a special kind of 'futurity':

> When that shall happen, when the last trump 'shall' sound (do not for a moment forget to put this 'shall' in quotation marks, it relates to this quite special *Futurum resurrectionis* or *aeternum*!), then what belongs to each 'shall' befall them.[102]

The τότε of v. 54 is not to be understood temporally (e.g. 'at that time'), but rather circumstantially: '*then* (we interpret: *from this standpoint*, in this truth of God)'.[103] The 'all-changing *then*' of humanity's transformation refers to the '*Futurum resurrectionis* or *aeternum*', in which there is 'no more opposition of "this side" to "that side"; beginning and end of time intermingled like the waves of two streams, which, hastening from two sides to meet one another, fill a dry bed.'[104] At the climax of the section, the present participle διδόντι in Paul's thanksgiving to God 'who gives us the victory' (v. 57) suggests the dialectical 'presence' of God's victory 'in hope'. The victory is neither 'here' in the present nor 'there' in the future in any straightforward sense of these terms, but exists dialectically in the tension between them.[105]

> There is no presence of God fuller, more joyful and stronger than that in the *Futurum aeternum*; there is no having, possessing, and enjoying more real than in the words spoken with empty hands, τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις, in which *all* right and *all* glory is given to him with whom what belongs to *us* is abolished.[106]

For Bultmann, Barth is 'entirely right' in the way he has characterised the tension of human existence. But, in so doing, Barth has departed from Paul. 'Barth has set the eternal future (*futurum aeternum*) in place of the future expected by Paul as an impending cosmic event'.[107] Barth's attempt 'to exclude the expectation of "catastrophic development" from Paul's

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[101] *AdT*, 122; *RD*, 218. Here Barth expresses a similar thought to the intersection '*senkrecht von oben*' described in *Der Römerbrief*.
[102] *AdT*, 122; *RD*, 219.
[103] *AdT*, 123; *RD*, 219. Cf. BDAG, τότε, which lists only temporal usages of this term.
AdT, 123; *RD*, 219.
[104] *AdT*, 123. On p. 219, *RD* inexplicably and without acknowledgement omits 19 lines of the German text, of which the final quotation in this sentence forms part.
[105] 'It is not tension of a successive order [*in einem* Neben*einander*], but tension of an intertwining character [*in einem* In*eindander*]. Precisely because of this it is an irresolvable *real* tension'. *AdT*, 125; *RD*, 222.
[106] *AdT*, 125; *RD*, 221-22.
[107] Bultmann, 'Resurrection', 92.

eschatology' amounts to 'an arbitrary forcing of the meaning'.[108] According to Bultmann, Paul is invested in a story, a final sequence of events, in a way that Barth's exegesis explicitly denies but must tacitly acknowledge.

Barth's exegesis in this section makes it clear that the resurrection of the dead, while it has the character of *event*, cannot be understood as an event within a larger story. It grows no nearer or farther with the unfolding of time. This event belongs neither to the world's past nor the world's future, but to every present moment, as the eternal future which can never be assimilated into any present moment. Insofar, therefore, as the cumulative unfolding of events in temporal sequence is constitutive of a narrative, Barth's understanding of 'the resurrection of the dead' is simply not capable of being conceived or expressed in narrative terms. Elements in Paul's text which might be capable of a narrative interpretation must therefore be explained – or, one might well judge, explained away – in other terms.

3. Conclusion

In *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, Barth further pursues the methodological approach taken in *Der Römerbrief*, attempting to explain the words of a Pauline epistle with reference to their *Sache*. Barth's exposition of 1 Corinthians 15 in *AdT* more closely follows this epistle's verbal texture, making greater use of the text's particular vocabulary and concepts, and also hints at an increased awareness that the interpretative move from historically-conditioned textual particularity to the *Sache* – from words to Word – may not always be entirely straightforward. Nevertheless, Barth discerns the same *Sache* in both Romans and 1 Corinthians; Paul's epistles are concerned with God's relation to that which is not God. In both of Barth's expositions, the conceptual pair of time and eternity supplies the vocabulary for a theological articulation of this relationship between God and humanity. Barth's theological perception of this relationship is intensely focused on the singular event of the resurrection. God-in-relation-to-humanity has the character of an event (and thus can even occasionally be described with the term *Geschichte*), but this event can neither be depicted as a temporally extensive history nor located within the temporal sequence of history.

In *AdT*, as in *Römer*^{2}, the essential singularity of the *Sache* which Barth perceives in the text is matched by a stress on singularity, at the expense of sequence, in Barth's 'sachlich' interpretation of the text. Where Paul's text offers the choice of an interpretation in terms of

[108] Bultmann, 92.

temporal sequence and narrative, Barth persistently chooses otherwise, sometimes veering into blind exegetical alleys. Barth's exposition demonstrates that he does not consider narrative categories to be available for a *sachlich* understanding of the text, or for a secondary theological description of the text.

Until recently, Barth's early theological writings have seldom been investigated as works of biblical exegesis, and even more rarely has their interpretation of narrative elements in the biblical text been seriously examined. Yet the finding of the preceding analysis – that Barth deploys a theologically-motivated interpretative strategy which is *anti-narratival* – will not greatly surprise those who have already judged his understanding of the relationship between God and world in this early period to be deficient on other grounds. The crucial question for the next phase of our investigation will be whether, as Barth himself came to regard his early theological efforts as one-sided and sought to redress this imbalance, he also substantially modified his approach to biblical narrative. Our analysis in Part II will demonstrate that there is significant continuity, in both approach and results, between Barth's early and later theological interpretation of narrative elements in the biblical text.

Chapter 3. Salvation as event ('The Doctrine of Reconciliation')

The step from *Die Auferstehung der Toten* to 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation' (*CD* IV/1-3) might seem a long stride, and in many respects this is the case. It takes Barth from Göttingen, via Münster and the fracturing of the 'Dialectical Theologians', through Bonn and the turmoil of the *Kirchenkampf*, back to the city of his birth, Basel.[1] During this intervening period he had formed a partnership with Charlotte von Kirschbaum, and together, after several false starts, they were now thoroughly engaged in producing a major project in dogmatic theology, already stretching to colossal proportions and about to expand even further with the immensely ambitious (and ultimately unfinished) fourth volume.[2] The shortcomings of his earlier works and the rather different requirements of constructive dogmatic theology led Barth, in several stages, to a reconceived theological method, which was fully implemented after his revision of the doctrine of election in *CD* II/2.[3] Barth now perceived the need for a 'christological concentration': for theological statements to be exclusively and thoroughly 'grounded and unfolded from Christology'.[4] Through these many changes, Barth's commitment to biblical exegesis remained constant, but it now found expression in the literary context of a work of dogmatic theology, often in extended excursuses intercalated with dogmatic and historical exposition, rather than in works wholly given over to theologically-oriented expositions of Scripture. Where these earlier works were primarily treatments of New Testament epistles, Barth's mature theological writing includes direct and sustained exegesis of biblical narratives. It is here in the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*, in line with Barth's shifts in theological method, that Hans Frei and others have perceived the theological interpretation of biblical narrative coming to occupy a central place in Barth's theology.

Part II of this study aims to explore Barth's interpretation of biblical narrative in his mature theological writing, with reference to his concrete exegetical decisions, focusing especially on 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation'. Here, it will be argued, 'the later Barth' has not left the earlier so far behind as it might appear. At the outset of *CD* IV/1, in a section entitled 'The Work of

[1] For biographical details, see Busch, *Karl Barth*, 153–262.
[2] The precise nature and extent of von Kirschbaum's contribution to *Church Dogmatics* (acknowledged in the preface to *CD* IV/4) is not certain, but it is unlikely that she is responsible for its verbal formulations: see Heinrich Stoevesandt, 'Charlotte von Kirschbaum', in *Barth Handbuch*, ed. Michael Beintker (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 56; cf. however Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 75–87.
[3] For a developmental account, see McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*.
[4] Karl Barth, *How I Changed My Mind* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1969), 43; Karl Barth, 'The Humanity of God', in *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas (London: Collins, 1961), 43.

God the Reconciler', Barth articulates the coinherent and mutually sustaining complex of theological convictions and Scriptural perceptions which will serve as the theological and interpretative framework guiding his theological exegesis and dogmatic construction in his *Versöhnungslehre*.[5] He stresses the singularity of the reconciliation event at the heart of the church's proclamation, and minimises the relevance of this event's integration in a broader context for its proper understanding. Focusing on this material, the present chapter will trace a significant and underappreciated line of continuity in Barth's way of conceiving the divine action in Jesus Christ – namely, his continued emphasis on the basic singularity of this activity – and in the ongoing compressive tendency of his interpretation of biblical narrative.

1. Singularity in Barth's fundamental theological concepts

'Dogmatics is the self-examination of the Christian Church with regard to the content of its distinctive talk about God', and that talk has its heart in 'the covenant fulfilled in the work of reconciliation'.[6] For Barth, the biblical phrase 'God with us' offers a rough outline of this centre of the Christian message, and it is by explaining this phrase that he initially specifies what is meant by the concept of reconciliation. Above all, 'God with us' concretely means 'Jesus Christ'. Two features of this introductory exposition are suggestive for Barth's theological interpretation of Scripture in this dogmatic context: his stress on reconciliation as a *singular event*, and his insistence that this event does not draw its meaning from its integration in a broader context. Echoing Barth's earlier descriptions of the reality named 'Jesus Christ', these emphases raise the question of how adequately 'the covenant fulfilled in the work of reconciliation' can be depicted by the temporally extensive and sequential dimensions of a narrative, or integrated within the structure of an overarching biblical narrative.

a. Reconciliation as singular occurrence

From the outset, Barth is determined that reconciliation must not be conceived in static ontological terms, or identified with the world-process. The referent of the phrase 'God with us', the covenant-fulfilling reconciliation, is neither an object nor a state, nor even a general

[5] For the sake of clarity, we will focus first on Barth's development of his fundamental theological convictions before turning to his articulation of the accompanying interpretative perceptions and then finally to the concrete exegesis of biblical texts. This arrangement has the added benefit of roughly following the structure of Barth's own text, but should not be taken to imply a simple relationship between biblical exegesis and theological articulation in which one flows ineluctably from the other, nor to suggest that this relationship is unidirectional.
[6] *KD* I/1, 10; IV/1, 1; *CD* I/1, 11; IV/1, 3.

pattern of divine activity. This phrase is the report of an event; a particular divine act. Barth associates the particularity of the divine act with its *singularity*. The actuality of reconciliation is communicated by singular predications: reconciliation is 'an act [*Tat*]' and 'an event [*Ereignis*]'. The uniqueness of this act is communicated by stressing its singularity: 'For within and beyond this general activity, God himself in his being, life and act as Creator wills and works a special act. All his activity has its heart and apex in a single act [*sein ganzes Tun in einer einzigen Tat seine Mitte und Spitze hat*].'[7] 'God with us' means 'this single and unique occurrence […] which takes place in an unparalleled *hic et nunc* [*dieses… einzige und einzigartige, in einem* hic et nunc *sondergleichen sich ereignende Geschehen*].'[8] The singularity of the divine work of reconciliation is not offset but rather amplified by its identity with the figure of Jesus Christ: 'Again, it means *Jesus Christ* when the Christian message describes the "God with us" as *one* act of God, as a *particular*, unrepeatable, and unique occurrence amidst occurrence in general [*als* eine *Tat Gottes, inmitten des allgemeinen als ein* besonderes*, einmaliges und einzigartiges Geschehen*].'[9]

Here the dominant portrayal of reconciliation – of 'Jesus Christ' – is as a total, singular act. As the quotations above indicate, Barth's favoured term for the singular event of reconciliation or 'God with us' is 'occurrence' (*Geschehen*), sometimes further specified as 'salvation occurrence' (*Heilsgeschehen*): e.g., 'it means Jesus Christ when the Christian message describes the occurrence [*Geschehen*] of 'God with us' as *salvation*-occurrence [Heils*geschehen*].'[10] This language is not systematically and consistently imposed on Barth's exposition of the phrase 'God with us', and the term does not by itself constitute an argument for the basic singularity of 'Jesus Christ'; *Geschehen* can denote both a singular 'occurrence' and multiple 'events'. Barth's usage of *Geschehen*, however, indicates that he does intend this term to be understood in its singular sense. The paired description of the occurrence (*Geschehen*) of 'God with us' as '*einzige und einzigartige*' suggests that this is a singular event both in the sense of its qualitative uniqueness and also in the sense that it is perceived as a numerical unity rather than a multiplicity of events.[11]

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[7] *KD* IV/1, 6; *CD* IV/1, 8.
[8] *KD* IV/1, 6; *CD* IV/1, 8.
[9] *KD* IV/1, 18; *CD* IV/1, 18.
[10] *KD* IV/1, 18; *CD* IV/1, 18.
[11] *KD* IV/1, 6; *CD* IV/1, 8. This numerical unity is also indicated by the stress in the phrase '*eine* Tat Gottes' (*KD* IV/1, 18; *CD* IV/1, 18). Rather surprisingly, in light of the disagreements referenced below, there is a confluence between Barth's description here and that of Rudolf Bultmann in his exploration of 'humanity under faith' in the Pauline epistles, in which Bultmann emphasises grace as 'act [*Tat*]', 'event [*Ereignis*]', and 'occurrence [*Geschehen*]'. Moreover, the various moments of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection belong 'to the unity of one salvation-occurrence [*eines Heilsgeschehens*]'. Given that – on this score at least – Bultmann's exposition

What of Barth's descriptions, here and elsewhere, of 'God with us' as 'history' (*Geschichte*) or 'salvation history' (*Heilsgeschichte*)? Does this suggest a more expansive, cumulatively unfolding understanding of reconciliation – the kind of concept naturally suited to depiction in narrative? On close inspection, Barth's use of the terms 'history' and 'salvation-history' reveals that he attempts to equate the concepts denoted by these terms with the predominant concept of a singular 'act', 'event', or 'occurrence'. For example:

> A further point which we must now make in the characterisation of the event [*Ereignis*] designated by "God with us" is this: far from all contingency, precisely as salvation-occurrence [*als Heilsgeschehen*] it means the revelation and confirmation of the most primitive relationship between God and man, that which was freely determined in eternity by God himself before there was any created being. […] What happens in this particular history, the salvation history [*in jener besonderen, der Heilsgeschichte*] between God and humanity, is fulfilment to this extent too, that in it God – the eternal will of God with man – is justified as the eternal righteousness of his grace becomes effective and manifest […]. It belongs to the character of this event [*Ereignis*] and its particularity that with the end it reveals the basis and beginning of all things.[12]

In the space of a few sentences, Barth deploys 'occurrence', 'history', and 'event' as synonyms.[13] The result is not 'history' language conferring a sense of multiplicity on 'event' language, but rather the reverse: 'history' is compressed into the singularity of an 'event'. If reconciliation is history, then it is history-as-event. Already we can observe a certain tension here in the way Barth describes the divine activity of reconciliation. Can the inherently temporally-extensive concept of 'history' really be rendered equivalent to the temporally punctiliar concept of 'event' without jeopardising the intelligibility of the former? At any rate, Barth's willingness to equate these terms indicates, at the very least, the potential for the erosion of the plural, temporally extensive, and cumulative dimensions of 'history'.[14]

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accurately depicts the apostle's thought, this convergence exposes the subterranean linkage between Barth's description of the event of reconciliation and Paul's tendency to compress the divine action in Christ; not only is Basel closer to Marburg, but 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation' is nearer to the radical Paulinism of *Der Römerbrief* than may first appear. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953), viii, 288; Francis Watson, 'Bultmann and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture', in *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Mikeal C. Parsons (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 269.

[12] *KD* IV/1, 8-9; *CD* IV/1, 10.

[13] A similar interchangeability of *Heilsgeschichte* and *Heilsgeschehen* is observable at *KD* IV/1, 9; *CD* IV/1, 10-11.

[14] Even if the aforementioned conceptual tension is relieved by understanding Barth's references to 'event' as a summary of the interlinked events of a passage of history, in the way that one might describe the French Revolution as an 'event', the singular or total and not the plural or differentiated aspect of such an 'event' remains dominant.

Notwithstanding the very different context, and rather different theological motivations, we may nevertheless detect continuities with Barth's earlier understanding of God's activity in Jesus Christ. Materially, this later account does not reproduce the mathematical punctiliarity of the depiction in *Der Römerbrief*. Barth can now say plainly: 'The reconciliation is history [*Die Versöhnung ist Geschichte*].'[15] The temporally extensive dimension of this 'history', however, is obscured by Barth's stress on reconciliation as a singular occurrence. As the reconciliation which fulfils the covenant, 'Jesus Christ' is perceived and depicted in its totality as an event, an act, an occurrence, rather than a sequence of events unfolding in time – at least in this initial conceptual overview. This stress is further underlined, as we shall see, by his insistence that the act of reconciliation is the temporal fulfilment of the eternal covenant.

b. Reconciliation as fulfilment of the covenant

Reconciliation is a particular activity, a 'unique occurrence amidst occurrence in general'.[16] And yet reconciliation cannot simply be understood as one event among others. Rather, reconciliation is the one event which embraces all other events, the event for whose sake they occur.[17] All other events are regarded as internal to this singular event, and they draw their meaning from this event, rather than the reverse. That is, reconciliation is neither depicted as a story in itself, nor as a part of a wider story. This becomes clear as Barth moves from outlining reconciliation itself to expounding the covenant as the presupposition of reconciliation.

God's work of reconciliation, in its revelatory dimension as God's word, declares that what takes place here is the fulfilment of God's original and basic will (i.e. God's self-determination to be God with and for human beings), which Barth calls God's covenant (*Bund*).[18] Everything said in the Doctrine of Reconciliation depends on the recognition that reconciliation has its presupposition in this covenant. As Barth looks to the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, to fill out the content of the concept of 'covenant', two features of his exposition indicate that the covenant is to be understood as a singular divine act which is neither itself a

[15] *KD* IV/1, 171; *CD* IV/1, 157.
[16] *KD* IV/1, 18; *CD* IV/1, 18.
[17] A theological account of Barth's Christological and Trinitarian rationale for the suggested relationship between the Christ-event and temporality as such (i.e. Barth's mature doctrine of time and eternity, which differs substantially from that which underlies the exposition in *Der Römerbrief*) is beyond the scope of the present study. R. H. Roberts offers such an account, along with a critical assessment of its conceptual coherence and theological adequacy (notably whether the time God 'has' for us in Jesus Christ is truly the temporally extensive time of human experience): see 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications', in *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Methods* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 88–146. Cf. Webster, 'The Grand Narrative of Jesus Christ: Barth's Christology'.
[18] *KD* IV/1, 22; *CD* IV/1, 22.

sequence, nor an element within a sequence: his description of the covenant as 'inexhaustible event', and as a universal covenant.

'Covenant' indicates the basic fact of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. As a covenant of grace, this 'fact' has the character of an event. Nevertheless, while the Old Testament describes many covenant ceremonies, none can be pinpointed as the original event which others repeat; on this basis Barth concludes that the presupposition underlying all this varied activity 'is *always* to be understood as an *occurrence*, as the event of the mutual election of the God of Israel and his people.'[19] The covenant is not merely an event which occurred *illic et tunc* and now has now ceased to be event, receding ever further into the past, rather it is an act which 'cannot lose its actuality, but bears the character of an occurrence which is in itself inexhaustible [*kann […] ihre Aktualität nicht verlieren, sondern trägt den Charakter eines in sich unerschöpflichen Geschehens*].'[20] The covenant is 'fact' only insofar as it is 'event', that is, insofar as it *happens*, but it can never become a past event which *has happened*. The covenant remains 'event': inexhaustible occurrence. Obviously, the description 'pure event' could apply as well to this description of the covenant as to Barth's description of the resurrection in *Der Römerbrief*, or the 'last things' in *Die Auferstehung der Toten*. Moreover, this inexhaustible event is an '"eternal covenant"' which 'embraces all occurrence [*umfaßt alles Geschehen*] between these two partners.'[21] The entire history between God and Israel takes place within the context of this single, inexhaustible event.

Yet the eternal covenant, disclosed in the particular history between God and Israel as its presupposition, cannot be confined to this history: it is 'a description of the relationship and occurrence between God and all men'.[22] What we encounter here is in fact the secret of the relationship between God and every nation, and of the relationship between the Creator and all created reality. Barth stresses the essential continuity between the creation, the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Israel, and the 'new covenant'. He can speak of an ending in Israel's history and a new beginning, but this sequence (old-new) is overshadowed by a more fundamental unity.[23] The 'new' and 'old' covenant differ in form, but share the same basis. The 'final word' of Jeremiah 31 is also 'the first word in these matters'; it describes 'what the divine covenant with Israel had been in substance from the very first.'[24] Barth finds in the

[19] *KD* IV/1, 25; *CD* IV/1, 24.
[20] *KD* IV/1, 23; *CD* IV/1, 23.
[21] *KD* IV/1, 23; *CD* IV/1, 23.
[22] *KD* IV/1, 26; *CD* IV/1, 26.
[23] *KD* IV/1, 34; *CD* IV/1, 33.
[24] *KD* IV/1, 35; *CD* IV/1, 34.

Bible, then, a single universal covenant. The universality of this covenant derives from its primordiality. The institution of the covenant is God's original and basic act of self-determination with respect to that which is not God.

Reconciliation is the temporal enactment of this primal divine will; it is God's faithfulness to his own original self-determination to be 'God with us'. Thus reconciliation takes place in reaction against sin, to restore the broken covenant, but it does so in reaffirmation of God's basic will, 'as the successful continuation of an act in which God was *already* involved *from the beginning*.'[25] Reconciliation is not, therefore, to be understood as a distinct element in a sequence of divine and human activity – the responsive restoration of a creational *status quo ante* disrupted by sin, or a penultimate step followed by a subsequent moment of human 'decision' or 'faith' – but the temporal fulfilment of God's original and singular eternal decision.

> It is not something provisional but final that occurs in the reconciliation that is accomplished in him. […] But the final thing which occurs here – just as it cannot be something provisional – cannot be a second or later thing. It can only reveal a *first* thing.[26]

As the temporal fulfilment of the eternal covenant, reconciliation is first and last, the singular act embracing all occurrence between God and that which is not God.

The event of reconciliation, thus conceived, has a privileged place as the focal point of Christian understanding and speech. Taking place in fulfilment of God's original self-constitution as 'God with us', this historical event escapes the contingency, relativity, and theological ambiguity of historical occurrence in general: it is 'a *necessary* occurrence'.[27] Therefore, 'We only need to hear the word of his [i.e. Jesus'] historical existence and we shall hear *the* Word of God and look into the basis and essence of God and humanity and all things.'[28] Theological meaning is intensively concentrated within this focal point, the reality of 'Jesus Christ'.[29] In Barth's crusade against conceptual abstraction, he insists that, rather than drawing its meaning from its integration within a sequence and thus within a broader context, the singular event of reconciliation itself forms the total context for theological understanding.[30]

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[25] *KD* IV/1, 37; *CD* IV/1, 36.
[26] *KD* IV/1, 36; *CD* IV/1; 35-36.
[27] *KD* IV/1, 50; *CD* IV/1, 48.
[28] *KD* IV/1, 51; *CD* IV/1, 48.
[29] On the term 'intensive', see below.
[30] In the preface to *CD* IV/1, Barth explains that 'throughout I have found myself in an intense, although for the most part quiet, debate with Rudolf Bultmann' (*KD* IV/1, ix; *CD* IV/1, ix). Two years earlier, in the essay 'Rudolf Bultmann: Ein Versuch, ihn zu Verstehen', Barth traced his inability to 'understand' Bultmann (that is, to recognise Bultmann's theology as a genuine representation of the theological perspective articulated in the New

The entirety of the reconciliation event, and the history of all human beings, are included within the history which bears the name 'Jesus Christ'. 'Jesus Christ' is not to be defined or understood with reference to concepts gleaned from elsewhere; rather, all relevant concepts receive their definition from *within* this event: 'all the concepts and ideas used in this report [i.e. the history of Jesus Christ] (God, humanity, world, eternity, time, but also salvation, grace, covenant, transgression and reconciliation and whatever else is at issue there) can receive their meaning only from the bearer of this name and his history, and not the reverse.'[31] 'Jesus Christ' is not an event formed by inclusion in a context comprised of other elements, each with their own distinct significance; this event itself forms the context of meaningfulness embracing the entire reality with which theology is concerned. Barth has concentrated the full weight of Christian theological enquiry on this Jesus Christ, understood as a single decisive divine act, which supplies the context and content of all Christian knowledge. As the fulfilment of the covenant, reconciliation is not an element in a theological sequence, and thus is not to be interpreted in light of an unfolding story in which it forms one moment. Rather, reconciliation is a singular event which encloses within itself all activity between God and humanity, itself providing the interpretative context for that activity.

The fruit of this intensive approach is already apparent in Barth's own brief elucidation of the meaning of 'God with us': here we meet God in his act, the original and final purpose of creation, the humanity who has forsaken this creation, and the humanity who lives in faith, hope, and love. The singular salvation-occurrence 'Jesus Christ' is thus densely packed with theological meaning. Of course, no genuinely Christian theology can form a concept of God, sin, or redemption in abstraction from Jesus Christ. One might ask, however, whether Barth's intensive 'Christological concentration', if taken as a rule for biblical interpretation, must inevitably involve some degree of compressive distortion.[32] Can all the breadth and texture of

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Testament) to the latter's conceptual location of the 'Heilsgeschehen' within a three-step soteriological sequence: man before faith–salvation occurrence–man under faith. As Barth lays the foundations of his Doctrine of Reconciliation, he annuls the theological significance of this sequence, turning Bultmann's conceptual arrangement inside-out. The *Heilsgeschehen* is not comprehended within humanity's journey from false to true existence as the mysterious transition point (with God as the numinous fringe of this journey), but rather it is the utterly prior event which comprehends all true human understanding of self and of God within itself and thus in itself supplies the determinative interpretative context within which theological concepts of God and humanity must be formed. See Karl Barth, 'Rudolf Bultmann: An Attempt to Understand Him', in *Kerygma and Myth, Volume 2*, ed. Hans-Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1962), 95–102; cf. Watson, 'Bultmann and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture', 270.

[31] *KD* IV/1, 16; *CD* IV/1, 16.

[32] Along with a distinction between 'principial' and 'soteriological' dogmatic christocentrism (drawn from the work of Richard Muller), David Gibson offers a corresponding distinction between 'intensive' and 'extensive' christocentrism in the theological interpretation of Scripture. This distinction, reformulated in more purely interpretative terms, helps to clarify the distinctive character of Barth's theological exegesis. In an extensively christocentric approach to biblical interpretation, Jesus Christ stands at the centre of Scripture, and Christology

the biblical witness to God, sin, and redemption be furled within the personal work of Christ, especially when this is perceived as a singular totality?[33] For instance, what can the Old Testament's narrative, prophetic and poetic accounts of the history between God and humanity mean, if human sin and the divine wrath is 'first' apparent, as Barth seems to suggest, in Jesus Christ?[34] This question regarding the role of the Old Testament in Christian theology will be a major focus in Part II of this study.

We have seen that Barth finds at the heart of the Christian message an event: the salvation-occurrence (*Heilsgeschehen*) of Jesus Christ. He emphasises the unity of this event rather than its differentiation. This *Heilsgeschehen* is not the definitive central event in a broader context of activity, but is the singular event which comprehends all other activity and provides its context of meaning. In Barth's exposition of reconciliation as the *Heilsgeschehen* whose presupposition is God's original self-determination we can detect strong echoes of the Bible's *Sache* as presented in Barth's exegetical works of the *Römerbrief* period. The rather abstract term *Sache* is not present here, and Barth does not explicitly frame his discussion of reconciliation in hermeneutical terms. Nevertheless, there are unmistakeable formal and material points of continuity. If Barth tells us explicitly that this *Heilsgeschehen* lies at the heart of the Christian message and of the Church's dogmatics, it must surely lie also at the heart of Scripture. That this is indeed the case will become clear as we move on to our next section. Materially, the *Heilsgeschehen* of *CD* IV/1, like the *Sache* of the *Römerbrief* period, is the point at which the eternal – the original and ultimate – becomes visible in the sphere of temporality. This revelation has the character of an event, but this event cannot be assimilated within a sequence of actions. While the 'pure event' of *Der Römerbrief* never quite entered temporality, occurring at multiple points in the spatio-temporal fabric, the *Heilsgeschehen* of 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation' occurs once in a definite place and time. Nevertheless, as the fulfilment of the eternal covenant, reconciliation is not understood with reference to a broader

(i.e., one's perception of the person and work of Jesus Christ) clearly defines the interpreter's approach to every part of Scripture, and yet biblical texts may attest diverse aspects of the divine economy in such a way that they 'have space and scope to exist in themselves at a measure of distance from Christology and from each other.' In an intensively christocentric approach to biblical interpretation, 'the christological centre defines all else within its circumference'; Jesus Christ permeates the Bible in such a way that no part of Scripture may be theologically interpreted 'apart from explicit christological reference'. Barth's interpretative christocentrism is intensive rather than extensive. See David Gibson, *Reading the Decree: Exegesis, Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth*, T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 15–16.

[33] Hans Urs von Balthasar expresses different but related concerns about the adequacy of Barth's ecclesiology and theological ethics in terms of a 'narrowing' (*Engführung*) to the single point of Christology: von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 242; cf. KD IV/1, 859; CD IV/1, 768. See discussion in John Webster, 'Balthasar and Karl Barth', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 252–53.

[34] *KD* IV/1, 19; *CD* IV/1, 19.

context of activity, but provides the interpretative context for all other activity. While the punctiliarity of the *Sache*-event is diminished in Barth's later account of the *Heilsgeschehen*, he retains a stress on the unity of this event: if reconciliation is history, then it is history perceived in its totality, history-as-event. This event has a singular, twofold meaning: the primary 'God with us', and its reflex 'We with God'.

In Barth's earlier efforts at *sachlich* exegesis, his punctiliar conception of the Bible's *Sache* lead to an exegesis which struggled to accommodate the temporally extensive and cumulative dimensions of biblical narratives. Barth's conceptual exposition of reconciliation, with its stress on singularity and continued minimisation of sequence, raises the questions of how adequately reconciliation could be depicted by the temporally extensive and cumulative dimension of a narrative, and of how the event 'Jesus Christ' might be understood in relation to the breadth of Scripture. Will the compressive tendencies of Barth's earlier exegesis be paralleled as he reads biblical narratives in 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation'?

2. Singularity in Barth's construal of Scripture and accompanying interpretative approach

The theological concepts which underlie Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, as articulated above, are not the result of a fit of sheer theological creativity; they arise from a reading of the Bible, and exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship with a basic construal of what Scripture is and how it should therefore be interpreted for theological purposes.[35] Far more clearly than in his earlier work, Barth is attempting to draw both his terminology and its conceptual content from the Bible. But the dynamic of Biblical interpretation and theological concepts is not unidirectional; exegesis and dogmatics form a recursive spiral. Barth's way of conceiving reconciliation, as a single act which is the fulfilment of God's covenant, is tightly bound to a strategy for reading the Bible. As Barth outlines his perception of Scripture's basic content, therefore, he also explains how he understands the nature of the biblical text in relation to this

[35] The concept of a 'construal' is drawn from David Kelsey's work, in which he argues that 'there is in actual theological practice no one standard concept "scripture",' and therefore sets out to explore the 'irreducibly different ways' in which theologians construe Scripture – *i.e.* which determinate biblical patterns they treat as authoritative with respect to theological proposals (see *Uses of Scripture*, 2, 163.) To say that Barth operates with a 'construal' of Scripture is to stress that he *decides* to approach the Bible a certain way. This decision is rooted in both determinate patterns identifiable in Scripture and in less tangible factors such as his imaginative judgement about the mode of God's presence (and Barth's formation by his location within specific exegetical, theological, and ecclesial traditions, which is not stressed by Kelsey but ought not to be forgotten). As such, Barth's construal of Scripture may be compelling for those who share a similar judgment about the essence of Christianity, without necessarily commanding universal assent. While the concept of a construal is a helpful one, it is argued below that Kelsey's description of the way in which Barth construes Scripture is significantly misleading.

content and indicates the appropriate reading strategy. At its heart, the Church's message proclaims a singular act: the covenant fulfilled in the reconciliation. This same event is at the heart of the Church's Scripture, which Barth construes as a pluriform *witness* to this singular event. This fundamental perception of *what the Bible is* and how it therefore ought to be read emerges clearly in the context of Barth's effort to differentiate his own position from that of the older Reformed federal or covenantal theology.

'Federal theology' or 'covenant theology' (from Latin *foedus*: 'covenant') had its origins in the Reformation (especially with Zwingli), but saw significant development by Reformed theologians in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Germany, Holland, Scotland, and England.[36] These theologians employed 'covenant' as the key theological concept for describing the basic form of God's relationship with humanity. Beginning with an interest in the historically varying modes of administration of the single gracious covenant between God and humanity, federal theologians came to distinguish between a prelapsarian 'covenant of nature' or 'covenant of works' and a postlapsarian 'covenant of grace', later speaking also of a pretemporal 'covenant of redemption' or *pactum salutis*.[37] The covenants of works and of grace are sequential in that God enters into the covenant of grace with the elect only after Adam's failure to keep the covenant of works, but also overlapping in that the covenant of works remains the basis upon which God relates to non-elect human beings.[38]

Having given a central place to the term and concept of 'covenant' in his own doctrine of reconciliation, Barth feels compelled to draw a sharp distinction between 'covenant theology' and his own approach. Thus Barth's presentation and critique of federal theology serves as a foil against which the contours of his own construal of Scripture emerge clearly. Unlike Barth, the federal theologians conceptualise God's work not as a singular event, but as an unfolding

[36] For a brief historical overview see Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 50–53. See also David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). A form of covenant theology is inscribed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter VII (1647). The systematic theologies of Charles Hodge and Louis Berkhof contributed to the influence of covenant theology in the USA; for a relatively recent restatement, see Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

[37] Despite general agreement on key points, expressions of covenant theology vary widely in matters of detail. Broadly speaking, covenant theologians hold that God entered into a covenant of works (*foedus operum*) with Adam (and thus with the entire race) according to which eternal life was conditional upon compliance with natural law. After Adam's disobedience, God entered into a covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*) with the elect according to which they are saved through faith. This covenant of grace, though one in substance, is variously administered in different historical periods. The covenant of redemption (*foedus redemptionis* or *pactum salutis*), decisively formulated by the Dutch theologian Johannes Cocceius in his work *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testament Dei* (1648), is the pretemporal intratrinitarian agreement between Father and Son in which the covenant of grace has its origin. See the relevant entries in Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985).

[38] As Barth observes, Cocceius' five 'abrogations' of the covenant of works further develop the basic bifurcation of human history into a graduated series: *KD* IV/1, 63-64; *CD* IV/1, 59-60.

history. Paired with this perception is an attempt to discern in the Bible the unfolding story of God's activity. This represents one instance of a more widespread tendency to assume that the Bible relates a series of events, whose sequence must be taken seriously. Barth's strong negative reaction to the highly developed form which this tendency takes in the federal theologians is symptomatic of his more general resistance to attributing theological significance to apparent developmental sequence in the Bible.[39]

Barth approves of the federal theologians' effort to understand God's work dynamically, 'as an *occurrence* [*als ein* Geschehen]', in contrast to the static medieval system of *loci*.[40] But federal theology conceives this dynamism as a history of the covenant (*Bundesgeschichte*) or, to use later terminology, a history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*). 'This theology is concerned with the bold review of a *history* of God and humanity which unfolds itself from creation to the day of judgement.'[41] For the federal theologians, Christian doctrine is a description of the movement of this history; the *loci* 'now become the different stages in a sequence of events, the individual moments in a *movement*.'[42] Barth finds all this unacceptable:

> What happens if the work – the word – of God, disjointed and then recombined pragmatically-theologically, becomes a series of events [*wird zu einer Serie von… Ereignissen*] which are meaningfully strung together and intertwined? Does that really correspond to the subject-matter (*Sache*) of the theology given in Scripture? Can one *historicise* [historisieren] God's activity and revelation?[43]

[39] This stance is also evident in Barth's critical remarks on the work of his Basel colleague, Oscar Cullmann. Cullmann argued that, in the perspective of the New Testament, 'salvation is bound to a *continuous time process* which embraces past, present, and future', taking place 'along the course of an ascending time line', and that 'all points of this redemptive line are related to the *one historical fact* at the mid-point, a fact which precisely in its unrepeatable character, which marks all historical events, is decisive for salvation': *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: SCM, 1951), 32–33 (emphasis original); originally published as *Christus und die Zeit* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946). Barth is in full agreement with Cullmann that salvation, 'Jesus Christ', is a matter of history, and that in this sense the New Testament 'proclaims salvation *history* [*Heils*geschichte]' (*KD* III/2, 529; *CD* III/2, 441). Yet he takes issue with Cullman's 'geometrical figure' of time as an ascending (*i.e.* forward-moving) line subdivided into a series of aeons, with 'the Christ-occurrence [*Christusgeschehen*] as the true centre of this line' (*KD* III/2, 532; *CD* III/2, 443; cf. also *CD* I/2, 12). Barth concedes that a linear concept of time may be present in the New Testament, but disputes its decisive significance. For him, the resurrection and the 'particular time' of the forty days (which he understands to *decisively reshape* a linear and progressive view of history), and not a presupposed and overly neat geometric conception of time, are the formative influence on the way that the New Testament authors conceive of time. Barth's critique is not entirely fair to Cullman, but the latter's further development and clarification of his position appeared too late to elicit further engagement from Barth. See Oscar Cullmann, *Heil als Geschichte: Heilsgeschichtliche Existenz im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965); ET Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, trans. Sidney G. Sowers, New Testament Library (London: SCM, 1967). Nevertheless, Barth's hostility to a salvation-historical construal of Scripture is evident. Cf. Darian Lockett, 'Limitations of a Purely Salvation-Historical Approach to Biblical Theology', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 39, no. 2 (2017): 225.

[40] *KD* IV/1, 58; *CD* IV/1, 55.

[41] *KD* IV/1, 58; *CD* IV/1, 55.

[42] *KD* IV/1, 58; *CD* IV/1, 55.

[43] *KD* IV/1, 58; *CD* IV/1, 55.

Barth's complaints here reinforce what we have already observed: his identification of God's act in Jesus Christ as the *Heilsgeschehen* which fulfils the covenant entails a fundamental singularity which is not compatible with an extensive understanding of God's activity as an internally differentiated and progressively unfolding drama or *Heilsgeschichte*. The term *Sache* resurfaces atavistically at this crucial juncture: as far as Barth is concerned, the approach of the federal theologians is simply not an adequate way to conceptualise what the Bible is basically *about*.[44]

The federal theologians' perception of what Scripture is about goes hand in hand with a basic reading strategy for Scripture. To Barth's mind, both are mistaken. What he considers to be the federal theologians' innovative theological historicism was paired with a similarly innovative attitude toward the Bible:

> The Federal theologians were the first […] to read the Bible as a *source document* inspired by God himself, through the study of which the drama of the relationships between God and humanity, act by act, becomes for the attentive and faithful reader as transparent and lucid as any other historical field becomes through the study of another source document.[45]

The federal theologians treated Scripture as written history: as if it inscribed and thus gave its reader access to the patterns of an unfolding sequence of action between God and humanity. For Barth, this is a fundamentally mistaken way to understand and approach the Bible.

In a key passage, Barth defines his own reading strategy over against that of the federal theologians. Just as their perception of the essential content of Scripture is paired with a corresponding reading strategy, so too Barth's basic perception of *what the Bible is about* is accompanied by a basic conviction concerning *how to read the Bible*.

> They admirably understood that the Bible gives an account of an *occurrence* [*von einem* Geschehen *berichtet*], but not that this account [*Bericht*] has, in all its forms, the character of *witness*, *proclamation*, and *announcement*, and has a *singular occurrence* for its content and subject-matter [*zu seinem Inhalt und* Gegenstand *ein* einziges Geschehen *hat*]. That occurrence, whatever the form of its attestation – in that each attestation still refers to its entirety – is the *single, total* decision of *God*, which as such calls for the *single, total* decision of *humanity*. They have failed to see that this one total occurrence, in every particular form in which it is attested, is surely to be understood as a particular occurrence and therefore in its particularity; that it cannot, on account of the diversity of its attestation, be broken up into a series of different, graduated covenant-acts or salvation-acts following after one another – or rather covenant-revelations or salvation-revelations – and then pieced together. The federal theologians did not notice that, first with their analysis and

[44] By 'the subject-matter [*Sache*] of the theology which is given in Scripture' Barth can mean nothing other than the *Sache* of Scripture itself.
[45] *KD* IV/1, 59; *CD* IV/1, 55-56.

> then with their synthesis of this occurrence between God and humanity, despite all the receptivity with which they have read Scripture, they failed to read [*vorbeilasen*] the real Scripture and failed to see [*vorbeisahen*] its real content. He who considers it possible to deal thus with the work and Word of God places himself over Scripture and its content – in his dynamic way – just as the older orthodoxy did with its predominantly static conceptuality.[46]

The federal theologians conceived God's activity as an unfolding history comprised of differentiated moments, and accordingly read Scripture as a written record of this history. Barth conceives God's activity as a singular, all-embracing occurrence, and accordingly reads Scripture as a witness to this occurrence. The singular occurrence to which Scripture testifies is complex: it is a divine decision which evokes a human decision. But this event itself is singular, complete, and indivisible. The apparent plurality of the forms in which the Bible attests this singular occurrence must not distract the reader from the singularity of the object of the Scriptural testimony. The sense in which Barth intends the language of *Bericht* and *berichten* here is clear: we are to treat the Bible *not* as the narration of an unfolding history, but as the report of a singular occurrence.

As far as Barth is concerned, this difference is utterly crucial, and he is severe – even a little wild – in his judgements. The federal theologians' perception of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation fulfilled in him as part of a larger story, '*one* biblical history, a stage in a greater context of history, before which and after which there are also other such stages', betrays the fatal decision not to attend directly to the object of the biblical witness, and instead to stand in sovereign independence over Scripture.[47] To Barth's mind, this approach has overlooked the essential content of the Bible; to read Scripture in this way is to fail to read it at all. Once the federal theologians had made Jesus Christ a part of a story, Barth regards it as inevitable that their successors would plunge headlong into 'a philosophy of religious history in general' and focus on 'a graduated "education of the human race"'.[48] There is no prelapsarian paradise in the sad tale of federal theology: even in Calvin the 'historical dynamic [*Geschichtsdynamik*]' is already present.[49] Barth therefore lays the theological wreckage of the nineteenth century at the feet of federal theology – not excluding the Reformers – and repudiates this approach 'even in its first and formal statement.'[50] On one side is a construal of Scripture as witness to a

[46] *KD* IV/1, 59; *CD* IV/1, 56. Barth's non-inclusive language has been retained for the sake of clarity.
[47] *KD* IV/1, 59; *CD* IV/1, 56.
[48] *KD* IV/1, 59; *CD* IV/1, 56. Barth is referring to Lessing's account of the perfectibility of the human race, *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1780).
[49] *KD* IV/1, 58; *CD* IV/1, 55. The possible translation 'narrative dynamic' hints at the interpretative consequences of Barth's opposition to this way of understanding the reconciliation in Jesus Christ.
[50] *KD* IV/1, 59; *CD* IV/1, 56. Barth is motivated by a theological need to strongly differentiate God's activity from the kind of activity discernible 'in any other historical field'; his opposition to conceiving the divine activity

singular occurrence, on the other a construal of Scripture as the record of a history unfolding between God and humanity. For Barth, this divergence is so basic that it entails sheer incommensurability.

In Barth's discussion of federal theology, the connection between his theological convictions and his fundamental perceptions of and strategies for reading the Bible comes into sharp focus. The essential content of Scripture is not an unfolding history, and the Bible must not therefore be read as the record of this history. Having outlined Barth's position, we may now offer some reflections along theological, historical, biblical, and hermeneutical lines.

Barth's theological concerns are not groundless: his critique of the diachronic development of Reformed covenant theology correctly diagnoses the destructive bilateralism which seeped into the covenant-concept and the theological shortcomings of the supposed inter-trinitarian *pactum salutis*.[51] Likewise, efforts to emphasise the sequential unfolding of God's works risk implying disjunctions in the basis of God's relation to the world and ultimately threatening the integrity of theology's testimony to the one author of salvation.[52] But what of the claim that the Reformed attempt to read Scripture as the historical record of God's saving dealings with humanity was a strange new phenomenon?[53] Is post-Enlightenment liberal Protestantism simply the child or grandchild of the Reformation's salvation-historical biblical interpretation, such that a straight line can be drawn from Calvin to Lessing? Most sharply: is a concern with

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as a sequence of distinct events is a strategy intended to ensure that salvation-history cannot become a department of history in general, lest God's activity eventually be made identical with history as such and thus be perceived, conceived, and embraced in purely immanent terms. As so often, Barth's chief historical interest is in isolating the 'patient zero' responsible for the epidemic of natural theology in liberal Protestantism, rather than in offering a balanced portrayal of theological development.

[51] Where the covenant was understood both as bilateral and as a legal contract, faith (and especially repentance) came to be seen as the condition to be fulfilled by humanity in the covenant of grace, impelling self-examination and imperilling the assurance of salvation. See James B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland', *SJT* 23, no. 1 (1970): 51–76. As for the *pactum salutis*, it fails theologically not in the effort to ground the temporal work of redemption in the eternal life of the triune God, but to the extent that it depicts the eternal ground of salvation as a negotiated settlement between the persons of the Trinity (or more commonly, the Father and Son alone) who are understood as independent centres of volition which must be brought into agreement.

[52] In an insightful treatment of the related issue of the relationship between creation and redemption, G. C. Berkouwer resists the '*historicizing* of the works of God', but nevertheless questions 'whether the unity of God's work *may ever be presented in antithesis to what Barth has called the "step-wise" character of God's works and against which he directs his sharp protest*.' See *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Harry R. Boer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 250–55. Emphasis original.

[53] Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas are among those interpreters who have been taken to approach Scripture as an unfolding story: see e.g. Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, 28; Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xii; J. V. Fesko, 'On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology', in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in the Service of the Church. Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008), 443–77; Iain W. Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 200.

'the history of the covenant (a history which is naturally initiated and governed and guided to its goal by God)' so foreign to Scripture and so dangerous that it must be immediately repudiated wholesale?[54] However reasonable Barth's concerns here might be, his historical and theological judgements are, at the very least, open to question.

Hermeneutically, at this point it becomes clear that the description of Scripture as 'one vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel' is at odds in important ways with Barth's fundamental perceptions about Scripture.[55] Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that such a formulation could escape Barth's sweeping indictments of the federal theologians. For Barth, the Bible is not the unfolding story of the twists and turns of the divine-human drama – it is not a narrative composed of distinct events in a cumulative temporal sequence – but a pluriform witness to a singular event between God and humanity, the fulfilment in the world's history of God's eternal will with respect to humanity. The unity of the Scriptures is not the unity of a single narrative integrating multiple distinct events, but the unity of a single object of witness, which is a single event. *The biblical narratives are not links in a chain, joined one to another in sequence, but rather more like spokes in a wheel, independently converging at a single centre*.

As a result, the kind of figural interpretation described by Hans Frei as 'an instrument for unifying the canon' cannot function in this way for Barth.[56] For Frei,

> Figural interpretation, then, sets forth the unity of the canon as a single cumulative and complex pattern of meaning. This pattern is ingredient in the unitary temporal sequence and its stages, and it depends on the successive narrative rendering of the sequence. Once again, given the reality and cumulative unity of that temporal sequence, literal and figural readings, each indispensable to the other, form its appropriate narrative rendering. Only by their joint operation is the sequence accessible. Figural interpretation […] is a grasp of a common pattern of occurrence and meaning together, the pattern being dependent on the reality of the unitary temporal sequence which allows all the single narrations within it to become parts of a single narration.[57]

From our analysis, it is clear that this kind of story-mediated figural interpretation, with its dependence on the single temporal sequence embedded in a cumulative narrative, does not and

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[54] *KD* IV/1, 58; *CD* IV/1, 55. In recent decades, some Reformed theologians have endeavoured to articulate a narrative spanning Scripture and unfolding in distinct 'epochs', which nevertheless finds its centre, *archē* and *telos* in Christ, avoiding the disjunctive errors displayed in some sequential construals of Scripture (most floridly in the 'dispensationalism' which originated with John Nelson Darby). For an expression of the theological and hermeneutical commitments underlying such an approach, see the essays comprising Part One of T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, IVP Reference Collection (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000). For a worked example, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 1991).
[55] Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture*, 48.
[56] Frei, *Eclipse*, 7.
[57] Frei, 33–34.

cannot play the same role for Barth as it plays, according to Frei, in Calvin's theology.[58] As in Barth's account, Cocceius' federal theology also stands at a fateful juncture in Frei's historical survey of the interpretation of biblical narrative: here it becomes clear that '[t]o view Christ as the subject matter of both testaments is quite a different matter from discerning this unity in the temporally distinct and ordered stages of the history of salvation.'[59] According to Frei, Calvin had been able to hold these views together by deploying figural interpretation, 'by which the literal, narrative reading of single stories was extended into one overarching story', such that 'the literary unity of the two Testaments in a common theme such as that of salvation through Jesus Christ is not a contradiction of the *sequential, temporally differentiated* character of the events they render.'[60] Where Cocceius (in Barth's estimation) jeopardised the unity of Scripture's subject-matter by his emphasis on a biblical salvation history unfolding in temporally sequential stages, Barth does the inverse: he jettisons the notion of a 'sequential, temporally differentiated' series of events rendered in the Bible in favour of a stress on a single salvation event which is Scripture's one subject-matter. Barth does not deploy the cumulative unity of a single overarching scriptural story in order to secure the unity of Scripture's various parts.

Kelsey's claim that Barth locates the Bible's unity in 'the fact that all of it renders the one selfsame agent' is nearer to the truth, but it must be carefully specified that this 'rendering' of a single agent is not associated with the Bible's narrative character, *per se*.[61] Barth does not see Scriptural unity inhering in the single agent rendered by a single overarching biblical narrative, but rather in the singularity of the act to which all the various forms of Scripture bear witness, the act which is the primal origin of all God's ways with the world and therefore constitutive of the identity of *Deus quoad nos*.

In fact, Barth's construal of the Bible as a pluriform witness to the singular event of reconciliation appears to problematise both narrative conceptions of biblical unity and key literary features of the Bible's narrative texts. The fact that Bible 'has a *singular occurrence* for its content [*Inhalt*] and subject-matter', but the Bible's report concerning this singular event takes many forms (*Gestalten*) suggests a certain tension between form and content. Theological interpretation of the Bible, it seems, must look past apparent suggestions of temporal

[58] David E. Demson notes that, in Frei's depiction, the Reformer's mode of figural interpretation is (conveniently) the same as 'Frei's own position': *Hans Frei and Karl Barth: Different Ways of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 64.
[59] Frei, *Eclipse*, 47.
[60] Frei, 47–48. Emphasis original.
[61] Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture*, 46.

differentiation and sequential progression in the relationship between God and humanity to the single and total salvation-occurrence which is the object of the Scriptural witness. At the level of individual biblical narratives, a degree of interpretative subordination of Scripture's form to its content seems inevitable. Though narratives can display strong coherence, narrative unity nevertheless emerges from a basic multiplicity of agents and temporally-differentiated events. Frei, following Auerbach, stressed 'the indispensability of the narrative shape, including chronological sequence, to the meaning, theme, or subject matter' of the Bible's 'realistic' narratives.[62] After Frei, Kelsey and Ford argued that Barth had recognised and attended carefully to this aspect of the biblical text.[63] Yet Barth's comments here suggest that 'narrative shape', and especially chronological sequence and cumulative development, *is* incidental to the singular divine-human event which every biblical story ultimately attests. As we go on to examine Barth's theological exegesis of biblical narratives, we will find him straining against precisely these literary features.

In sum: along with Barth's perception concerning the basic matter attested in Scripture comes a fundamental construal of what the Bible is and how it should therefore be interpreted. The Bible is about Jesus Christ, by which Barth means the singular occurrence of the covenant fulfilled in the reconciliation. The Bible has the character of a witness to or proclamation of this occurrence. This witness takes various forms, but its object is always the occurrence of reconciliation in its entirety. History – space and time – is the venue of this occurrence, but this occurrence is not itself a history in the sense of having a beginning, middle, and end, nor is this one occurrence (even the central and decisive event) within a larger history. This paired perception of the Bible's essential content and the requisite Scriptural reading strategy serves admirably to ward off undesirable theological outcomes, but involves its own problems, especially for the 'narrative' aspect of scripture. 'Narrative' is hereby rendered a very dubious description of the overall shape of the biblical canon; we can speak of 'the biblical narrative' only if we suppress the notion of cumulation in a differentiated temporal sequence. As a whole, that is, the Bible 'tells a story' in the sense that it 'proclaims an occurrence'. Of course, the Bible *contains* various narratives. But these are not to be interwoven into an overarching metanarrative; they each singly proclaim a singular occurrence. Even at the level of individual narrative texts, the inherent temporal extension and cumulative development of the narrative

[62] Frei, *Eclipse*, 13.
[63] See Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture*, 39, 45; Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 47–51.

form would seem to pose a threat to the object of the text's witness, which is always the one, total occurrence of reconciliation.

3. Singularity in Barth's exegesis of key texts

In a third subsection entitled 'The Fulfilment of the Broken Covenant', Barth demonstrates how his Scriptural construal and reading strategy plays out in concrete instances of biblical exegesis. Here he treats two texts which 'classically encompass the entire field' of what is meant by reconciliation as the fulfilment of the covenant: John 3.16 and 2 Corinthians 5.19.[64] Both verses narrate, in brief outline, the divine action with respect to Christ, in the context of an argumentative discourse.[65] Barth's exegesis offers only a very limited acknowledgement of the narrative dimension of both texts, downplaying suggestions of differentiated sequential activities and effectively compressing these miniature narratives into reports of a single act.

Barth's exegesis has three main emphases. First, he stresses that reconciliation, as fulfilment of the covenant, has the character of 'event' and is a matter of history. Here God makes the covenant 'true and actual within human history'; it becomes 'historical event [*geschichtliches Ereignis*] in the person of Jesus Christ'.[66] Second, the fulfilment of the covenant has the character of reconciliation. Here God's grace and faithfulness take the form of a 'yet' and 'nevertheless' in the face of human sin. Third, God's action in fulfilment of the covenant includes a reciprocal human activity. In all of these emphases, Barth is anxious to avoid conceptualising reconciliation in terms of sequence. That the fulfilment of the covenant is a matter of history fundamentally means singular event and not sequence; that it is reconciliation fundamentally means God's faithfulness and not a subsequent divine activity in response to a previous event (*i.e.* human sin). Similarly, human faith and apostolic mission are not a subsequent event in response to the previous event of reconciliation, but are rather themselves the scope of the reconciliation-event.

[64] *KD* IV/1, 75; *CD* IV/1, 70.
[65] In the case of John 3.16, this argument (regardless of whether it is voiced by Jesus or the evangelist – see below) is embedded within John's larger written 'testimony' (20.30-31; 21.24) to Jesus, which as a whole takes the form of a narrative. The Pauline text, more straightforwardly, belongs to his epistolary *apologia* for his apostolic ministry.
[66] *KD* IV/1, 71; *CD* IV/1, 67.

a. John 3.16

The ἠγάπησεν of John 3.16 'tells a definite story, reports a unique event [*erzählt eine bestimmte Geschichte, berichtet von einem einmaligen Ereignis*]: the event of God's loving.'[67] Speaking of reconciliation involves narrating a story. But Barth immediately equates this narration with a report on a singular event. If this verse tells a story, we must understand it as one of the forms in which the Bible reports on the singular decisive event between God and humanity. This means that, while the venue of this event is history (i.e. it takes place on earth, in the realm of the tangible and perceptible), it is not itself a history comprised of differentiated moments. The 'storytelling' of this verse, then, is more like an expanded description of a singular event: 'John 3.16 describes the performance [*Vollzug*] and scope [*Tragweite*]' of the 'act [*Tat*]' of the divine love.[68]

The singular act or event denoted by ἠγάπησεν comprehensively enfolds all the activity indicated in this verse (and beyond). For Barth, the 'giving' (ἔδωκεν) of the Son refers not so much to either the incarnation or the crucifixion *per se*, but to the total existence of the Son in the hostile world: this is the action (*Handeln*) of God which is the occurrence of reconciliation.[69] This 'giving' is the mode of the diving loving. Barth allows that the construction οὕτως… ὥστε communicates the degree (*i.e.* 'so much') as well as the mode (*i.e.* 'in such a way') of the divine loving; there is no suggestion, however, of a differentiated sequence of activity (*i.e.* 'God loved, so God gave').[70] The giving of the Son, itself enfolding both incarnation and death, belongs to the event of the divine loving.[71]

Creation is also included in the scope of this event. The word κόσμος prompts Barth to bring John 3.16 into close interpretative connection with the Johannine prologue.[72] From the beginning the world was illuminated by 'the life-promising light of the covenant' (this is Barth's gloss of John 1.9); the 'event' of John 3.16 brings about ζωὴ αἰώνιος, which is 'the *particular* promise of the light of the *covenant* which God has made between himself and humanity, which illuminates humanity from the beginning.'[73] The meaning of both passages converges on the concept of covenant: the reaffirmation of God's covenant will in spite of

[67] *KD* IV/1, 75; *CD* IV/1, 70.
[68] *KD* IV/1, 76; *CD* IV/1, 71.
[69] *KD* IV/1, 76; *CD* IV/1, 72.
[70] On the possibility of such a reading, see below.
[71] Twice Barth offers the formulation 'er, indem er den Kosmos liebte, gab', and once 'liebte Gott die Welt in jener seiner Tat': *KD* IV/1, 76; *CD* IV/1, 71.
[72] The linguistic similarities between John 3.16-21 and John 1.1-18 (e.g. μονογενής) are widely recognised and constitute one argument for discerning the authorial voice speaking directly in the former passage.
[73] *KD* IV/1, 75, 77; *CD* IV/1, 70, 72.

human sin.[74] The meaning of reconciliation, therefore, cannot be distinguished from the meaning of creation: 'It is God's free will and free act of that he willed to be the basis of the world's existence and its light. Therefore the meaning of this event is from the very first a free loving.'[75] That is, the 'event' attested in John 3.16 has a singular definitive meaning which embraces both creation and reconciliation.

Along with creation and the giving of the Son, the singular event (ἠγάπησεν) of John 3.16 includes the human response of faith. The ἵνα-clause in this verse introduces a new grammatical subject (ὁ πιστεύων) and new verbs (μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ᾽ ἔχῃ), but does not indicate a further action distinct from and subsequent to the action denoted by ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεός. Barth tells us that the conjunction ἵνα 'is both *finale* and *consecutivum*' (i.e. it indicates both purpose and result), but the thrust of his exposition is better captured by the word 'scope [*Tragweite*]': this clause speaks of 'the actual scope of his thus-performed act of love.'[76] Again, believers' existence as such 'is the scope of this event, that is its promise for the *entire* cosmos.'[77] To be a believer, to have eternal life and not perish, belongs to the giving of the Son, which itself belongs to the event of God's love. This event is complex in nature and wide-reaching (indeed, universal) in effect, but it remains a fundamentally singular activity rather than the initiation of a differentiated sequence of action.

Barth equates the 'narrative' of John 3.16 with a singular 'event', and this is borne out by his exposition. It is not that God's love is the singular origin or unifying theme of the unfolding salvation story summarised in this verse. Rather, creation, incarnation, crucifixion, faith, and mission are all understood as internal to the singular event of the divine love. Some of the idiosyncrasies of Barth's exegesis emerge more clearly if we consider a possible alternative exegesis of John 3.16. Through attention to its context in the Gospel of John, this verse can be expounded in such a way that the various activities described appear in their distinctness, without losing their close relationship.

The γάρ of v. 16 indicates that here the evangelist is offering an explanation of Jesus' words in v. 15.[78] This is reinforced by the near-repetition of the phrase ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ

[74] Neither passage, of course, makes direct and explicit reference to the concept of covenant.
[75] *KD* IV/1, 75; *CD* IV/1, 71. Emphasis removed.
[76] *KD* IV/1, 77; *CD* IV/1, 72.
[77] *KD* IV/1, 78; *CD* IV/1, 73. Here we see Barth's understanding of that which might be more traditionally termed the church's mission. This mission, too, is enfolded in the act of the divine love: the event of God's love makes saved human beings – 'believers' – who are in their existence as such a witness to God's salvific purpose for the entire world.
[78] Barth's exegesis entirely omits discussion of this explanatory connective and the relationship between John 3.16 and what immediately precedes it. Regarding the voice heard in v. 16, the difficulty of determining the terminus of the speech commencing at v. 10 has long been recognised. An interpretative consensus obtains that

ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.[79] In vv. 14 and 15, by likening the 'lifting up' of the Son of Man to the bronze snake incident in Num 21.4-9, Jesus is referring to his crucifixion.[80] The divine action denoted by τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν (John 3.16), then, refers specifically to the crucifixion, as the Son is given (over) to death.[81] The necessity (δεῖ) of the Son of Man's glorification through crucifixion in order to secure eternal life for every believer derives not from Jesus' nascent conflict with 'the Jews' (2.13-22; 3.1ff; cf. 10.18), but from the divine gift, itself originating in God's love for the sinful world.

The verbs ἠγάπησεν, ἔδωκεν, and ἀπέστειλεν are not simply different ways of speaking about a singular act. It is at least possible to argue that the correlative construction οὕτως… ὥστε…(indic.), found only here in the New Testament, describes two distinct actions, the first occurring in such a way as to elicit the second.[82] If this is the case, God's 'giving' is both the consequence and the illustration of his profound love for the hostile cosmos. Thus the actions described by the verbs ἠγάπησεν and ἔδωκεν, while existing in the closest possible connection, are nevertheless distinct; the latter is not simply the form of the former. Furthermore, the crucifixion cannot be separated from the incarnation, as the seamless transition to 'sending the Son into the world' (3.17) indicates. Nevertheless, the very fact that John offers these two closely related yet clearly distinct descriptions of the divine activity, τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν and ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον, suggests that the single unified work of salvation *can* be conceived in terms of distinct moments.[83]

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vv. 16-21 contains the evangelist's own explanatory comments. For an argument that v. 16 is Jesus' direct speech, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 149.

[79] John 3.16 has εἰς αὐτόν for ἐν αὐτῷ and includes μὴ ἀπόληται as the negative correlate of ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

[80] This is made clear by the parallel uses of the verb ὑψόω in John 8.28; 12.32-34, ignored by too many interpreters but correctly perceived by Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 1st ed., NICNT (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971), 224–26. Lincoln suggests further that John's threefold use of ὑψόω with this meaning may mirror the Synoptic Gospels' threefold passion prediction: Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 69.

[81] This specificity of reference is strengthened if one sees, with many commentators, allusions to the sacrifice of Isaac (see Gen 22.2, 12, 16 MT; however, LXX has τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν and does not employ μονογενής) or to Isa 52.13-53.12 (cf. John 3.14-15 with Isa. 52.13; cf. also John 3.16 with Isa 53.6 LXX – though John has δίδωμι rather than παραδίδωμι); Isa 53.1 is cited at John 12.37 in close proximity to the related passage John 12.32-34).

[82] See *BDAG*, ὥστε, 2.a.α., where, among an number of classical examples, Josephus (*Ant.* 8.206) is cited: 'And he [i.e. Jeroboam] took care of the works in such a way that the king acknowledged him and gave to him the command of the tribe of Joseph as a reward [οὕτως δὲ τῶν ἔργων προενόησεν, ὥστε ὁ βασιλεὺς αὐτὸν ἀπεδέξατο καὶ γέρας αὐτῷ στρατηγίαν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἰωσήπου φυλῆς ἔδωκεν].' Here the king's acknowledgement can hardly represent the *form* of Jeroboam's discharge of his administrative duties.

[83] As Jörg Frey observes in his comments on the verb ἔδωκεν in John 3.16, 'the concern here is not with the mere sending of the Son into the world (thus John 3.17) but at the same time with giving him over unto death. This is supported in the context by the fact that the motif of the death of Jesus was already sounded in John 3.14-15 in the motif of the "exaltation"': *The Glory of the Crucified One: Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig, BMSSEC (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 331 n.89.

Likewise, the context of John 3.16 demonstrates that 'faith' is both intimately related to and distinct from the divine loving and giving. As in v. 16, the γάρ of v. 17 indicates that we have an explanation of the preceding thought. The death of the Son is aimed not at perishing but at eternal life for everyone who believes, because the mission of which this death forms part is directed to the purpose not of judgement but salvation.[84] As John 3.17-21 makes clear, the 'faith' which results in eternal life is a matter of decision, i.e. a matter of response to the incarnate Son. These verses summarise and interpret the broader narrative context of John 3.16. Already the evangelist's narrative is rendering the mixed and ambiguous responses of human beings to God's salvation: some exhibit the 'faith' which means eternal life (2.11), some a dubious faith whose true character will only become clear as it is further tested by exposure to Jesus (2.23-25), and some the misunderstanding and hostility which leads to 'perishing' (2.18-20; 3.1-2).[85] Ironically, salvation thus becomes judgement, in that those who respond to God's great and gratuitous love in the Son with senseless hostility are divided from those who respond in faith and finally condemned; hence the Johannine Jesus can also say, 'For judgement I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.'[86] Thus the narrative subdivision to which John 3.16 belongs concludes with the words 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.'[87] Eternal life is the purpose and result of the divine decision, but John also stresses the human decision of belief or unbelief, and eternal life or enduring wrath as the genuinely possible consequences of that decision.

It is possible, then, to read John 3.16 as a narrative rendered in barest outline: its beginning, middle, and end are the love of God for the sinful world, the sacrificial gift of the Son, and the decision of faith unto eternal life (or a perverse unbelief unto destruction). As we have shown, such a reading can claim support from the immediate and broader context of the verse in John's Gospel. The context of this miniature narrative is the entirety of the Fourth Gospel; John 3.16

[84] Often the nuances of purpose and result can scarcely be distinguished in the New Testament's use of ἵνα (especially where a sovereign divine agent is concerned). However, as described below, in this case we can distinguish (in a strictly limited sense) between the divine purpose for the world (salvation) and its actual result in the case of some human beings (judgement).

[85] The figure of Nicodemus perfectly illustrates the way that John's narrative depicts faith as a human decision taking shape in the temporal realm: he initially appears to belong in this final camp (cf. John 3.2 with 3.19-20), but his response to Jesus takes on a fuller and rather different shape as the narrative's events unfold over time (see 7.50-52; 19.39).

[86] John 9.39.

[87] John 3.36. Berkouwer has an insightful discussion of the constrained role such biblical material plays in *CD* IV/1, in which he refers to Lekkerkerker's vain search for this verse in Barth's exegesis. *Pace* Lekkerkerker, the verse does appear at *CD* IV/1, 218, in service of an argument not dissimilar to that offered here. However, tellingly, Barth's overall point is that *the Christ-event* bears the character of judgement. See Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 267–75, esp. 271 n.33.

represents one way to summarise the narrative of John's Gospel as a whole. The statement made here is not freestanding; its intelligibility depends on its entire narrative context (and, conversely, this statement helps to make sense of the Gospel story in its totality).

Barth's exegesis, however, treats John 3.16 as a free-standing piece of Christian *kerygma*.[88] The verse is thematically related to John 1.1-18 – both passages describe the same event – but isolated from both its immediate context in the Nicodemus episode and its broader context in the unfolding narrative of the Fourth Gospel. Barth reads John 3.16 as the report and expanded description of a single event: this report does not have a beginning, middle, and end, nor does it draw its meaning from its integration in the narrative of John's Gospel, but rather describes a singular event (God's love), the form of that event (the total historical existence of Christ) and the scope of that event (believers as a token for the whole world).[89]

b. 2 Corinthians 5.19

The second classic passage Barth treats (2 Cor 5.19), like the first, is a 'narrative [*Erzählung*]'; here a story is being told ('wird […] eine Geschichte erzählt').[90] But again in this story we have to do with a singular event: 'the occurrence described as reconciliation [*dem als Versöhnung beschriebenen Geschehen*]'.[91] Barth is impressed by the 'compactness' of this 'narration of the divine reconciling'; here we simply have a description of God's 'act [*Tat*]'.[92] Once again, God is the agent, the sinful world is the object, and the occurrence or act on view is God's special activity in Christ. 'Therefore, with his ἦν καταλλάσσων, Paul too reports on the concrete, uniquely occurring history of Christ [*einmal geschehenen Christusgeschichte*].'[93] Barth uses the vocabulary of story or history here (*Christusgeschichte*), but his exposition makes clear that he has a singular occurrence in mind. Barth answers his own question, 'What

[88] Without offering similar claims about the Gospel's compositional history, Barth's interpretation effectively approximates Rudolf Schnackenburg's judgement (clearly influenced by Bultmann) that John 3.13-21 is part of a 'kerygmatic exposition of the evangelist which was originally independent' and has been incorporated into the narrative in the process of redaction (*The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth, vol. 1 (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 361.)

[89] By treating John 3.16 as a concise and free-standing kerygmatic statement, effectively shorn of its narrative context, Barth's reading calls to mind the minimalist 'world-historical *nota bene*' that Kierkegaard (who played an influential role in Barth's thinking at the time of *Der Römerbrief*) proposed as sufficient for Christian faith: 'Even if the contemporary generation had not left anything behind except these words, "We have believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died" – this is more than enough.' Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard′s Writings 7 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 103–4.

[90] *KD* IV/1, 78; *CD* IV/1, 73.

[91] *KD* IV/1, 79; *CD* IV/1, 74.

[92] *KD* IV/1, 79; *CD* IV/1, 74.

[93] *KD* IV/1, 79-80; *CD* IV/1, 75.

took place in this history [*Was geschah in dieser Geschichte?*]' by pointing to a singular event. This is the event of 'exchange' (*Austausch*). The 'history of Christ' (*Christusgeschichte*) can be equally well described as the 'Christ-occurrence' (*Christusgeschehen*): 'That – this exchange – is the Christ-occurrence [*Christusgeschehen*], according to v. 21. And Paul says in v. 19 of the Christ-occurrence [*Christusgeschehen*], thus understood: it is the *reconciliation*'.[94]

'Reconciliation', as a concept, might be taken to presuppose temporality and sequence (e.g., harmony–estrangement–*rapprochement*). Barth, however elucidates the character of the Christ-event by drawing on the etymology of the verb καταλλάσσω: the term's basic meaning is 'exchange', or *Austausch*. Where the English word 'exchange' primarily denotes an interpersonal transaction, the German word can also suggest 'transposition' or 'replacement'.[95] These spatial connotations are dominant in Barth's exposition of the expression ἦν καταλλάσσων in 2 Cor 5.19. As indicated in the quotation above, v. 21 (τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν) provides the essential interpretative context for the verbal construction in v. 19. *Austausch* means that Christ steps into our place, thereby displacing us from that place and making it impossible for us to continue to occupy it, and thus we are put into a place in which we are right with God.

> Where are we as sinners when our sin has been done away in him? Where can we stand when our former place and status has been made impossible as such? There is obviously no other place or status than that of the one who expatriated us by becoming our portion: the place and status of the faithful covenant-partner who is pleasing and acceptable to God and who has already been accepted by him; the place and status of Christ himself, yes, of the God present and active in him. In that he set himself in our place – was made sin for us – we become the righteousness of God in him, because we are set in his place.[96]

Thus the event of reconciliation, as καταλλάσσειν or *Austausch*, is conceived and depicted in spatial terms. As such, reconciliation is not a history in the sense of a series of distinct events carried out by plural agents, but a single complex event. This single action has one subject and a twofold outcome. The ἵνα of 2 Cor 5.21 is again 'simultaneously final and consecutive': that is, the verse's final clause speaks of the divine purpose realised with the action depicted in the main clause.[97] That we 'become the righteousness of God in him' is not a distinct event consequent upon the prior event of God 'making' the one who knew no sin to be sin for us; this 'becoming' is internal to the singular event depicted by ἐποίησεν and simply occurs with

[94] *KD* IV/1, 80; *CD* IV/1, 75-76.
[95] Barth also glosses καταλλάσσειν as *Platzwechsel* ('switching places'): *KD* IV/1, 80.
[96] *KD* IV/1, 80; *CD* IV/1, 75. Emphasis modified.
[97] *KD* IV/1, 80; *CD* IV/1, 75.

it. The 'story which Paul has to tell' is the event of this exchange, in which the sin of the world is 'objectively removed once and for all' and the turning of humanity to God is 'objectively secured once and for all'.[98] 'In Christ this reconciliation of the world with God *happened*.'[99]

Paul's 'story' of reconciliation, then, is the report of 'a definitive and self-contained occurrence [*ein abschließendes und auch in sich abgeschlossenes Geschehen*]'.[100] Reconciliation is wholly enclosed by this occurrence. Barth is adamant that the appeal to 'be reconciled to God [καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ]' (2 Cor 5.20) must not be understood to point to a more extensive understanding of reconciliation, such that reconciliation involves an ongoing history in which distinct events of proclamation and human decision follow the Christ-occurrence. What takes place in the 'ministry of reconciliation' (v. 18) is not a second, distinct event (or complex of events), rather it is internal to the singular and self-contained occurrence of reconciliation: 'The ministry of reconciliation, which consists in this appeal, is not self-contained, however, but only arises with this occurrence which is self-contained and complete in itself. This ministry is its chief concrete outcome.'[101] By his stress on reconciliation as singular event, Barth does not simply insist that the apostolic proclamation and the human decision undertaken in relation to it must be grounded in the objective work of atonement; here the bond between atonement, proclamation, and faith is drawn so tight that any distinction disappears, and the subjective dimension of reconciliation collapses into the objective. The ministry of reconciliation is indispensable,

> But the reconciliation itself and as such is not a process which has to be kept in motion towards some distant goal. It requires no repetitions, and no prolongations and completions. It is, precisely as unique history [*einmalige Geschichte*] – because God in Christ was its subject – also present to every time in its entire fullness, but to each and every time it is also the future which is imminent and finally conclusive of all time. It rules and determines all the dimensions of the time in whose limits the world and humanity have their existence.[102]

The temporal event of reconciliation is unlike any other temporal event. As a divine act, this singular event, uniquely, is not bound to a single temporal location. Here the echoes of *Der Römerbrief* and *Die Auferstehung der Toten* are strong. Barth describes reconciliation as an eschatological event, a pure event which is never past but always 'present' and 'future' and as such pervasively conditions all temporal existence. This event 'is the basis of all occurrence in

[98] *KD* IV/1, 81; *CD* IV/1, 76.
[99] *KD* IV/1, 81; *CD* IV/1, 76.
[100] *KD* IV/1, 81; *CD* IV/1, 76.
[101] *KD* IV/1, 81; *CD* IV/1, 76.
[102] *KD* IV/1, 81; *CD* IV/1, 76.

the world, and in a hidden but supremely true sense the meaning and measure of all contemporary world-occurrence, and also its goal, enclosing it on every side in order to direct it and set it right.'[103] The ministry of reconciliation is an implication arising with the completed event of reconciliation, it is the 'concrete scope [*Tragweite*]' of this event, but it is not itself a distinct and subsequent event in an extensive history.[104] The single and self-contained event of reconciliation does not merely stand at the defining centre of world history; it embraces all history within itself.

Barth's stress on reconciliation as a once-for-all pure event threatens to swallow up the extensive and sequential implications of his equal stress on reconciliation as an event that takes place 'not in heaven but on earth'.[105] Though Barth's meditation on reconciliation can speak with passages like Rom 5.6f of what was 'formerly' the case with human beings, this sequence of before and after disappears in light of the singular reconciliation-event: 'What applies and counts now, what is "reckoned" to men, is the "righteousness of God" which they have become in Jesus Christ. That and that alone is in reality their yesterday and today and tomorrow.'[106] Such a thought, if consistently pursued, seems difficult to square with New Testament passages which, without prejudice to the objective and once-for-all character of Christ's work, nevertheless speak of a definite sequence of before and after in the lives of believers, with response to the proclaimed gospel in repentance and faith as the decisive turning point.[107] In the ministry of the Spirit, as Christ is proclaimed and grace extends to more and more people, it is when one turns to the Lord that the veil is removed, and the God who said 'Let light shine out of darkness' brings about 'new creation', shining in human hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.[108]

As with John 3.16, in Barth's exposition the 'narrative' of 2 Corinthians 5.19 turns out to be the report of a singular, densely packed event. This event is conceptualised spatially rather than sequentially, and encloses within itself both the divine and the human side of salvation, including atonement, repentance, faith, mission, and ultimately the entirety of world history.

It is clear, then, that the tendency toward interpretative compression which we observed in Barth's earlier theological exegesis has not disappeared at this late stage in *Church Dogmatics*. The problematisation of narrative sequence which we observed in Barth's account of the

[103] *KD* IV/1, 81-82; *CD* IV/1, 76-77.
[104] *KD* IV/1, 83; *CD* IV/1, 77.
[105] *KD* IV/1, 75; *CD* IV/1, 70.
[106] *KD* IV/1, 79, 82; *CD* IV/1, 74, 77.
[107] See e.g. 1 Thess 1.9-10.
[108] 2 Cor 3.8, 16; 4.5-6, 15; 5.17.

fundamental theological conceptualities and biblical construal governing his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation' plays out in a concrete exegesis of biblical texts which minimises their narrative dimension, even when an exegesis which sees the text as a narrative summary of a broader narrative is a legitimate option. In Barth's exposition the language of narrative is present, but the narrative dimensions of the text – namely, the unfolding of meaning through a cumulative temporal sequence – are suppressed.

4. Conclusion

At the outset of his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation', Barth specifies the basic theological conceptions and biblical perceptions which guide his theological construction and his interpretation of Scripture in this dogmatic sphere. This introductory material illustrates both the shifts and the persistent lines of continuity in Barth's thinking. Reconciliation is now described as 'history', and located more securely within the fabric of space and time, yet the temporally extensive dimension of this 'history' is firmly subordinated to its unity: reconciliation is a complex but singular 'event'. This event does not draw its meaning from its integration in a sequence of activity; this historical event, as the unique fulfilment of God's eternal electing will, embraces all other activity within its own scope, and thus itself supplies the context within which all historical occurrence becomes genuinely theologically intelligible.

Notwithstanding significant shifts in the substructure of Barth's theology, his exposition of 'reconciliation' in 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation' displays substantial continuity with his efforts to articulate Scripture's *Sache* in his earlier works – not only in the continuing use of terminology reflecting the influence of the apostle Paul's compact expressions of the divine activity in Jesus Christ, but especially in the depiction of 'Jesus Christ' as the central matter of Scripture, as the nexus of time and eternity which conditions all historical occurrence, and as an event whose theological meaningfulness is associated with its singular aspect rather than its temporal extension or its inclusion in an unfolding history between God and humanity.

Paired with Barth's fundamental theological concepts is a perception of the basic nature and content of Christian Scripture, and therefore the appropriate strategy by which this Scripture is to be read. Scripture is not a record of an unfolding salvation history, but rather a pluriform witness to the singular salvation event. In Barth's view, this construal of Scripture is critical: one who attempts to read the Bible as a sequence of events between God and humanity will fail to understand it at all. Yet Barth's construal introduces a gap between the form of Scripture and the object of its testimony, problematising those aspects of Scripture which might appear

to depict a series of events integrated in an unfolding temporal sequence – a beginning, middle, and end – and challenging the notion that Barth sees an indissoluble connection between the narrative form and the theological meaning of the biblical text. Appropriate theological construction in this dogmatic field must bear in mind the essential singularity of the divine action of reconciliation, which will involve a delicate negotiation with the biblical narration of a sequentially unfolding history between God and humanity.

Barth offers a glimpse of just such a negotiation in his exegesis of a pair of key texts for the doctrine of reconciliation: John 3.16 and 2 Corinthians 5.19. Here Barth's fundamental theological convictions and construal of how Scripture ought to be read guide him into a mode of engagement which recognises narratives implicit in these texts, but which heavily emphasises the unity of these narratives, minimising their character as an interconnected series of discrete events in temporal sequence, and compressing their meaning into a singularity. Barth attempts to equate narrated history with the report of a singular event, thoroughly subordinating the texts' plurality of agency and actions to their attestation of a singular, complex, and all-embracing divine action. Once again, he eschews an explanation in terms of sequential action in favour of a spatial conceptuality (*Austausch*).

This preliminary examination of Barth's conceptual and hermeneutical outline for his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation' and its initial exegetical outworking has revealed continuity between the anti-narratival tendencies of Barth's earlier theology and his theological interpretation in his mature dogmatic period. A more sustained look at Barth's interpretative practice in his theological exegesis of biblical narratives is now required. The next chapter of this study, therefore, focuses on Barth's interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son, which remains underexamined given the key role it plays in giving shape and content to Barth's extended presentation of the meaning of 'Jesus Christ' in his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation'. This exposition also offers important insights regarding Barth's christological interpretation of the Old Testament. Subsequent chapters analysing Barth's 'parabolic' interpretation of the Old Testament will afford the opportunity not only to explore more of Barth's theological expositions of biblical narratives which have thus far drawn less attention, relatively speaking, than others, but also to assess the extent to which Barth's christological exegesis of Old Testament texts draws upon a temporally extensive canonical 'narrative' or metanarrative.

Chapter 4. Parable as paradigm for christological interpretation

At the heart of Scripture Barth finds a singular, complex event to which the biblical texts, in their plurality, bear witness. What will this construal of Scripture mean for his concrete interpretation of biblical narratives? We have already observed Barth's interpretative tendency to compress the narratives implied by texts which do not, strictly speaking, take narrative form. In what follows, Barth's idiosyncratic deployment of a familiar category – parable – suggests that his exposition of the parable of the Prodigal Son not only affords an opportunity to examine his theological exegesis of a key narrative text, but also offers a paradigm for the interpretation of Old Testament narratives as Christian Scripture, illuminating in particular the minimal role played by an overarching biblical metanarrative in Barth's effort to read biblical narratives as witnesses to the singular event of Jesus Christ. Whereas in traditional typological interpretation the structured relationship between textual 'type' and christological 'antitype' emerges from the linear canonical sequence of 'Old' and 'New' embracing both, in Barth's *parabolic* version of 'typology' the text is effectively detached from a broader narrative context, and the relationship between the text and the object of its witness is mediated instead by shared structural characteristics discerned within the theological context of Barth's own dogmatic proposal.

1. Anonymous Christology

At the time of the confrontation presented in the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to John, the man Jesus of Nazareth is, as his opponents point out, not yet fifty years old (v. 57). Simple chronology would appear to invalidate his pronouncement that 'Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad' (v. 56). Indeed, one could 'search the Scriptures' (John 5.39) with the utmost diligence and find no indication that Jesus, a figure belonging to Abraham's distant future, ever passed before the patriarch's eyes or even through his mind. Jesus' interpretative claim regarding the relationship between Abraham and himself stands or falls with his christological claim about the relationship between the God of Abraham and himself: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am' (John 8.58). If Jesus does speak 'truly' here, then he also speaks 'truly' in saying that '[the Scriptures] bear witness about me' (John 5.39).

The expression 'reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture' is tautologous. The characterisation of that collection of books which constitutes the Jewish community's

Scriptures as 'Old Testament' already reflects the decision to incorporate these writings into a new two-part collection, the canon of Christian Scripture.[1] This decision itself reflects a christological commitment. The collection of books which forms the first part of the Christian canon is not 'Old' simply by virtue of its chronological relationship to the second part, the 'New' Testament, as if there could also be another, 'newer' testament.[2] For the Christian community, the oldness of the Old Testament and the newness of the New Testament are constituted – retrospectively, in the case of the Old – by a historical event, perceived in faith as the definitive self-revelation of the Creator God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel, as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the Old-New polarity *does* inscribe a linear progression from that which preceded to that which follows the definitive historical event of Jesus Christ. For Christian faith, the emergence of a qualitatively 'new' Testament, in constituting the Old Testament as qualitatively 'old', also relativises the Old Testament.[3] Augustine's description of the Christian reader of the Psalms as one who sees '*Vetus Testamentum in Novo revelatum, in Vetere Novum velatum*' ('the Old Testament in the New revealed, the New in the Old veiled') – expresses one dimension of the dynamic of this linear procession: the obscurity in the Old Testament, relative to the New, of the one with whom all Christian Scripture is concerned.[4] Jesus' words in Matt 13.17 present the same situation as the Johannine sayings, with the emphasis reversed: in Jesus, that which 'many prophets and righteous people' longed for is visible and audible, and yet he insists that what his contemporaries' blessed eyes and ears see and hear was *not* seen nor heard by their predecessors. The reader of Christian Scripture is irrevocably committed, then, to an interpretative dynamic in which those texts which constitute the Jewish Scriptures – in their

[1] For instructive reflections on the theological claims implicit in the language of 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament', see Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 179–85; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 155–66.

[2] If the descriptors 'Old' and 'New' were to be regarded as merely equivalent to 'first' and 'second', then there would in principle be no reason that the textual collections so described could not be supplemented by a 'third' (and so on).

[3] In light of the complicity of Christian interpreters in the historic marginalisation, oppression, and persecution of Jewish people, great care must be taken in articulating what is and is not implied by the 'relativising' of the Old Testament by the New. The New does not simply supplant the Old (this would be incoherent, given that 'old' and 'new' are mutually constitutive; the 'new' is what it is only in relation to the 'old'): 'In being designated "old", the Old Testament is assigned its proper, honoured, and authoritative place within the Christian canon, precisely as that which prepares the way for the moment that divides the old from the new' (Watson, *Text and Truth*, 180.) Moberly's nuanced discussion of the terms 'Old' and 'New' (cited above) is oriented toward the sensitive sociopolitical dimensions of this issue. With specific regard to Barth's theology, the question of supersessionism is addressed in Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*; Mark R. Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[4] Commenting on Ps. 105.46 Vg. (=106.46 MT): *Ennarrationes in Psalmos* 105.36, ed. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, CCSL 40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956). Cf. *De catechizandis rudibus* 4; *Quaestiones in Exodum* 73.

textual integrity, without a 'Christianising' rewriting, and thus devoid of direct, explicit reference to the historical figure of Jesus Christ, who remains in the undisclosed future of the texts' characters, authors, and redactors alike: in short, as *Old* Testament – are nevertheless rightly understood only with reference to Jesus Christ.

This dynamic means that the path of the Christian interpreter of the Old Testament is beset on the one side by the danger of reading the texts in abstraction from Jesus Christ – and therefore not as 'Old Testament' at all – and on the other by the danger of a 'christomonistic' reading which would eliminate 'both the heterogeneity of Old Testament discourse and its distance from Christ.'[5] The 'typological' reading of the Old Testament constitutes an effort to satisfactorily negotiate this difficult terrain. Arising out of the interplay of promise and fulfilment observable within the canonical texts, and especially out of the New Testament writers' appeals to the Old Testament, a typological reading strategy finds in the events, characters, and institutions of the Old Testament partial and anticipatory prefigurations of the divine activity in Jesus Christ, the supreme reality who is the 'antitype' which 'fulfils' the preceding 'types'.[6] Thus, along with Christology, typological interpretation also embeds a theological commitment to the divine superintendence of history: it is 'the hermeneutical implication of a salvation-historical understanding of the relationship of the testaments.'[7] The relationship of type and antitype proceeds from the dynamic of salvation history. The typological interpreter, perceiving the hand of one God guiding the entire sweep of redemptive history, sees the newness of the selfsame God's activity in Jesus Christ as a climax rather than a *caesura*. Thus the eventual appearance of the antitype does not entail a break with the

[5] Watson, *Text and Truth*, 185.

[6] This typological approach is to the predominant and characteristic mode of scriptural interpretation in the NT itself. Typological interpretation depends on the literal interpretation of the OT text, discerning a relationship of correspondence and heightening between elements within a divinely ordained salvation-history attested by the biblical texts: 'The things that are compared are related to each other in redemptive history […] The relationship in redemptive history is taken for granted by the evangelists and the rest of the NT because they are convinced that there is a continuity between OT history and Jesus Christ in the sense of preparation and fulfilment' (Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 199.) Drawing on NT usage (e.g. Rom 5.14; 1 Cor 10.6; 1 Pet 5.3), 'type' and 'antitype' respectively designate prefiguration and fulfilment – though NT typology is by no means limited to instances in which τύπος or ἀντίτυπος are employed. In Hebrews the relevant terms designate heavenly pattern and earthly copy respectively (see Heb 8.5; 9.24), but even in Hebrews an anticipatory relation between OT and NT is the dominant perspective (e.g. in the phrase 'a shadow of the good things to come [Σκιὰν… τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν]': Heb 10.1; cf. Rom 5.14).

[7] Douglas J. Moo, 'Paul's Universalizing Hermeneutic in Romans', *SBJT* 11, no. 3 (2007): 81. For an account of typology focused on the issue of biblical unity and diversity and stressing the lines of theological-thematic continuity and development between salvation-historical epochs (or 'stages') as the basis for typological relationships between Old Testament figures and Christ ('macro-typology'), see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-Theological Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006), 234–57; *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 184–89.

preceding types, rendering them forgettable and dispensable; on the contrary, Old Testament types offer the irreplaceable pattern by which the appearance of Jesus Christ is rightly understood. The Old Testament is the indispensable hermeneutical key to the New: Jesus is not clearly seen as 'the Christ' unless this perception is appropriately formed by the 'necessity' of his suffering, death, and resurrection, as 'written' in the Old Testament.[8] Yet the relationship of type and antitype is equally shaped by the unidirectional linearity of the salvation-historical timeline, such that the move from type to antitype is the move from the preliminary and preparatory to the perfect, and regression is unthinkable.[9] In this way the Old Testament, precisely as *Old* Testament, bears witness to Christ.

In *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth is concerned with Christian Scripture: Old and New Testaments, constituted as such by Jesus Christ. For Barth, Scripture's basic content and subject-matter is 'the reconciliation which occurs in Jesus Christ'. This means that, as an interpreter, Barth must wrestle with the christologically anonymous quality of the Old Testament, the textual witness to 'the reconciliation which occurs in Jesus Christ' which knows a יְהוֹשׁוּעַ/Ἰησοῦς and a מָשִׁיחַ/Χριστός, but never speaks the name 'Jesus Christ'. However, Barth's basic perception of what the Bible is about and how the Bible is to be read would appear to seriously problematise the interpretative practice of typology, in the sense just outlined, as a strategy for negotiating this christological anonymity. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Barth understands 'the reconciliation which occurs in Christ' as a fundamentally singular occurrence. Thus the Bible is not to be read as the record of an unfolding history, but as an account, in many different forms, of this singular occurrence. Can Barth's construal of Scripture, with its heavy emphasis on singularity, make room for a sequence of Old and New? If Barth rejects the notion of an unfolding salvation-history, how effectively will he be able to maintain the integrity of the Old Testament, in its heterogeneity and distance from Christ, alongside his commitment to Scripture's unity in the object of its witness? If, in every attestation, the Old Testament bears witness to the singular event of God's grace in its entirety, is the Old Testament 'old' in any meaningful sense? Can Old Testament

[8] Both Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8.27-38) and the post-resurrection encounter on the Emmaus road (Luke 24.13-49) make this same point in different ways.

[9] Thus the book of Hebrews: it is the words that 'God spoke our fathers', 'long ago, at many times and in many ways', that enable the perception of Jesus as 'our' 'great high priest', yet 'in these last days' God has spoken his ultimate Word by his Son; the 'perfect' has come, and there can be no turning away from the substance back to the foreshadowing. This unidirectionality between type and antitype need not imply, however, that there is a simple linear-progressive relationship between the types themselves. The mixed weeping and joy over the foundation of the second temple (Ezra 3.12), for example, ought to warn the interpreter against discerning in the biblical texts a neat salvation-historical programme in which each successive type ever more nearly approximates the antitype at the end of the series.

'type' be differentiated from christological 'antitype', such that the antitype is seen to meaningfully succeed, excel, and thus relativise the type, and the type nevertheless continues to genuinely inform and enrich the interpreter's understanding of the antitype?

These questions are not settled by Barth's programmatic comments on the Old Testament in *CD* I/2 (in the section entitled 'The Time of Expectation [*Die Zeit der Erwartung*]'), for all that this section appears to outline a sequential and typological relationship between Old and New Testament.[10] Here Barth explains that revelation, the historical event of Jesus Christ, is 'fulfilled time', and generates a temporal schema of 'pre-time [*Vorzeit*]' (expectation of revelation) and 'subsequent time [*Folgezeit*]' (recollection of revelation).[11] Old and New Testament bear witness, respectively, to this expectation and recollection. In the 'pre-time' of the Old Testament, revelation is not merely future, but present as future.[12] Thus, 'Jesus Christ is manifest in the Old Testament as the expected one [*der Erwartete*]'.[13] This is apparent in the way that various characteristics of revelation, as Barth has been expounding the concept in the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* ('The Doctrine of the Word of God'), are discernible in the Old Testament. For example, God's self-relation to and claim on humanity, in which a divine-human mediator is a necessary factor, is visible in the Old Testament covenants and their mediators. In this way both the great individuals of Old Testament history (Moses, Abraham, David, etc.) and the regular kings, priests, and prophets are 'significant as types [*Typen*]'.[14] Thus certain features of the Old Testament are set in 'typological' relationship to Jesus Christ, via Barth's concept of revelation.[15] There is also the 'eschatological thread in the Old Testament', its 'explicit expectation', according to which the present reality of various Old

[10] *KD* I/2, 77-111; *CD* I/2, 70-101. For outline and discussion of this section, see Mark S. Gignilliat, *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's Theological Exegesis of Isaiah* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); Roger R. Keller, 'Karl Barth's Treatment of the Old Testament as Expectation', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35, no. 2 (1997): 165–79.

[11] *KD* I/2, 77, 111; *CD* I/2, 70, 101. Paul McGlasson lists this 'narrative of revelation' as evidence for a narrative approach in Barth's exegesis. However, Barth's derogatory comments about von Hofmann's conception of prophecy and fulfilment make it clear that even the qualified 'before' and 'after' of Barth's 'expected revelation'–revelation–'recollected revelation' schema are not to be understood in terms of a linearly unfolding salvation-history (*KD* I/2, 103-104; *CD* I/2, 94; see also *CD* I/2 12-13, 484-85). These comments, coupled with the applicability of this schema to not only the relationship between the Testaments but also 'the life-story of innumerable biblical characters' and also 'the life-story of the reader of the Bible', suggest that, *pace* McGlasson, we ought not to take the schema as evidence that Barth perceives in the Bible an overall unfolding story. See McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas*, 124–25.

[12] *KD* I/2, 77; *CD* I/2, 70.

[13] *KD* I/2, 79; *CD* I/2, 72.

[14] *KD* I/2, 91; *CD* I/2, 83. Barth also finds the dialectic of hiddenness and revealedness in the Old Testament, and the Isaianic servant, who exemplifies this dialectic is '*not* Christ' and yet 'prefigures [*vorbildet*] the suffering and crucified Christ' (*KD* I/2, 97-98; *CD* I/2, 89).

[15] This is the Old Testament's 'factual' presentation of its expectation of revelation in its 'concrete historical contexts' (i.e. narrated history), 'apart from formal "prophecy"' (*KD* I/2, 104; *CD* I/2, 94).

Testament ideas is seen to belong to their future.[16] In the most important case, that of the Messianic expectation connected with the phenomenon of Davidic kingship, there is an 'analogy between present type [*Vorbild*] and coming reality' – but in such a way that 'the functions of an earthly king obviously fall very far behind, having now really become merely a parable.'[17] In retrospect (and only in retrospect), it is apparent that 'the people of the Old Testament really expected Jesus Christ and in this expectation was given grace.'[18]

Yet we must not assume that, with these hermeneutical comments about the Old Testament in hand, we will be able to predict the shape of Barth's christological interpretation of Old Testament narratives, especially in the later parts of *Church Dogmatics*. First, there is the issue of theological and hermeneutical development. Barth's treatment of the relationship between the testaments is heavily dependent on the concept of revelation as he has developed it in *CD* I/1-2,[19] down to the level of providing the shape of the most important typological connections between Old and New Testament figures. As this concept recedes in prominence in the course of the *Church Dogmatics* and is replaced by a focus on God's self-determination as 'God with us', it is not clear that this general account of typology will remain unaffected in either broad outline or specific contours. Second, there is the issue of the relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis. Though Barth sets various concrete features of the Old Testament in typological relationship to Jesus Christ, he nowhere does so in connection with a detailed exegetical argument. Hermeneutical claims do not necessarily translate directly into exegetical outcomes; it is not yet clear what Barth's statements about the Old Testament's relationship to the New Testament will mean for his interpretation of specific Old Testament texts. We observe, thirdly, that the dialectic of present-as-future displays signs of instability. Though Barth works to offset statements of presence (or 'revelation') with statements of futurity (or 'expectation'), his treatment tends to give the impression that in the features of the Old Testament the 'future' is simply present, and therefore not in fact present as 'future'.[20] To combine our second and third observations, it is easier to say that the prophets 'already receive God's revelation in the full

[16] *KD* I/2, 104, 110; *CD* I/2, 95, 100.
[17] *KD* I/2, 109; *CD* I/2, 99.
[18] *KD* I/2, 111; *CD* I/2, 101.
[19] As the titles of the relevant sections make clear, Barth's direct treatment of the relationship between Old and New Testaments ('Die Zeit der Erwartung') is subordinated to a discussion of time ('Die Zeit der Offenbarung') which is itself subordinated to his doctrine of revelation.
[20] E.g., 'How could God's future not be the most intensive presence [*Gegenwart*], incomparably more intensive than anything we regard as present [*Gegenwart*]?' (*KD* I/2, 104; *CD* I/2, 95). See also Barth's comments at *KD* I/2, 13-14; *CD* I/2, 12: 'There is a 'before' of prophecy about Christ and an 'after' of witness to him only relation to the name of Jesus Christ as the centre of time. Both the real temporal pre-existence of Jesus Christ in prophecy and his real temporal post-existence in witness are identical with his once-for-all existence as the centre of time.'

sense of the term' and yet 'receive the revelation of the coming Yahweh as those who wait for it and hasten towards it' in the relatively abstract context of a hermeneutical programme; it is far from clear that, under the constraint of the concrete exegesis of specific texts, this dialectic can be maintained without collapsing in such a way that the futurity of Jesus Christ is functionally elided, becoming sheer presence, and the Old Testament thus ceases to be meaningfully *old*.[21] To gain a clear picture of Barth's interpretation of Old Testament narrative and answer the questions posed for this task by his construal of Scripture, with its heavy emphasis on singularity, we must investigate Barth's actual exegetical practice.

Drawing on other hermeneutically suggestive comments made in the context of Barth's 'Doctrine of Reconciliation', and through a close examination of his christological interpretation of specific biblical narratives, we will argue that, notwithstanding Barth's willingness to deploy the terminology associated with typological interpretation, his interpretative approach does not fit within the group of approaches usually so described. The hermeneutic functioning implicitly in Barth's christological exegesis of Old Testament narratives is best characterised not as *typological* but as *parabolic*. That is, Barth treats Old Testament narratives as a collection of parables whose subject is Jesus Christ.[22]

For Barth, 'parable' can name not only a specific textual genre, but certain human words in relation to the one Word of God. In the subsection of *CD* IV/3 entitled 'The Light of Life', he famously raises the question of whether there may be 'other lights': 'other true words' alongside the one Word of God, Jesus Christ.[23] Might the church hear a true word 'in a secular parable' – that is, are there extrabiblical and extraecclesial 'parables of the kingdom' in the secular sphere?[24] In the course of affirming this possibility, Barth makes it clear that the concept of 'parable' can suitably express the relationship of secular 'words' to the one Word of God because this is in fact how *biblical* (and ecclesial) words stand in relation to this one Word. After a brief discussion of how Jesus' parables function, Barth concludes: 'thus the New Testament parables are something like the prototype of the order in which there can be *other*,

[21] *KD* I/2, 104; *CD* I/2, 95. Gignilliat's repeated insistence that Barth does not 'flatten out the Old Testament' but rather affirms 'the necessity of wrestling with the Old Testament texts in all their historical particularity' cannot be substantiated on the basis of his programmatic comments in 'Die Zeit der Erwartung' alone (as Gignilliat does tacitly admit). Moreover, the mere fact of this denial suggests – indirectly – that Barth's hermeneutical comments *do* raise the possibility of just such a 'flattening'. Gignilliat, *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel*, 50, 57 (see also 51, 53-54).

[22] Cf. Barth's suggestion (quoted above) that the concrete, observable earthly king of the Old Testament is 'merely a parable' of 'the expected one' (*KD* I/2, 109; *CD* I/2, 99).

[23] *KD* IV/3, 107, 126; *CD* IV/3, 97, 113; the theme is also foreshadowed in 'The Humanity of God', 54–55. For a more comprehensive discussion of the theological issues at play, see George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 234–80.

[24] *KD* IV/3, 128; *CD* IV/3, 115.

true words of God alongside the *one* Word of God'.[25] The human words of the Bible – 'the proclamation of the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New' – are words of this kind.[26] 'The biblical witnesses are – and to all the witnesses of the Christian community it is promised and assigned to be – *parables* of the kingdom of God.'[27]

Along with Barth's affirmation that he conceives the various words of the biblical text as standing in a parabolic relationship to the one Word of God, there are also hints here of what this might mean for biblical interpretation. Though discerning the meaning of a parable depends on its coordination with other discourses, the world of the parabolic text is self-enclosed: even if the parable is embedded within the literary context of another narrative, the world rendered by the parabolic narrative is not identical or contiguous with the world rendered by that primary narrative, or with the world of another parable, or with the 'real' world of the reader. Barth's extension of the category of 'parable' beyond the literary bounds of the biblical canon and beyond the biblical history confirms that a 'parable' does not depend on integration in this literary and historical context for its intelligibility as the declaration of the one Word of God; in this sense parabolic witness is timeless.[28] A narrative understood as a 'parable' of this kind may be approached as a self-contained episode for the purposes of christological interpretation, with little reference to the literary context in which it is embedded or its situation within an unfolding biblical history.

Moreover, 'other words' or parables derive from and are subordinated to Jesus Christ, the one Word of God. Using a favourite image, Barth describes their relationship to Jesus Christ as the relationship of a circumference to the centre; again this applies to both 'secular parables' and the parabolic biblical witnesses. Here the issue of unity and diversity emerges once more:

> Therefore they will express no mere partial truths – the one truth of Jesus Christ is indivisible! But they will bring the *one* and *entire* truth to expression from a *particular* angle, and to that extent only implicitly and not explicitly in its unity and entirety. As, indeed, it also happens in the different elements of the biblical witness and may happen in every individual act of Christian proclamation and instruction, they will show the *one light* of the *one truth*, according to any specified location [*Seite*], in any particular *refraction*, which as such reflects it *truly* as the one light.[29]

[25] *KD* IV/3, 126; *CD* IV/3, 113.
[26] *KD* IV/3, 126; *CD* IV/3, 113.
[27] *KD* IV/3, 128; *CD* IV/3, 114. Emphasis modified.
[28] When it comes to identifying instances of extrabiblical and extraecclesial parables, Barth demurs, but his comments on the music of Mozart, for example, make it clear enough that he detects here another 'true word' for 'those who have ears to hear': *KD* IV/3, 152-53; *CD* IV/3, 135; *KD* III/3, 337-339; *CD* III/3, 297-299; cf. 'Mozarts Freiheit', in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), 43.
[29] *KD* IV/3, 137-38; *CD* IV/3, 123.

This suggests a dialectic between the indivisible totality of the one light and the particularity – according its specific location (*Seite*), whether historical and cultural or textual (*i.e.* 'page' in the biblical text) – of any individual refraction of that light. But the positing of this dialectic does not yet tell us how Barth will negotiate the relationship between the particular shape of any given text and the Word of God which is the object of every biblical text's witness. George Hunsinger suggests a stable Chalcedonian pattern for the dialectical relationship between centre and periphery[30] – but will Barth's actual biblical exegesis be able to resist veering into a kind of docetism by relinquishing the contingent particularity of the texts at the periphery under the centripetal pressure of the event of Jesus Christ to which they testify?

Our exploration of Barth's parabolic approach to Old Testament narrative will show that, regarded as parables of Jesus Christ, Old Testament stories are self-contained narrative episodes; their interpretation does not depend on their integration within a broader narrative. Their testimony to Jesus Christ, though it is rendered in the temporal-spatial specificity of the biblical history of Israel, nevertheless floats free of time and place in the sense that the connection between any particular narrative and Jesus Christ is not mediated by a larger salvation story of which the particular narrative forms a part and Christ forms the climax. Rather, this connection is mediated by the structural features of Barth's dogmatic Christology. The resultant parabolic christological interpretation of the Old Testament is atemporal, in the sense that it is not meaningfully shaped by the linear temporal sequence implied by the terms 'Old' and 'New' Testament. Rather than a linear and unidirectional temporal relationship between type and antitype, we may imagine a disparate circumference of parabolic stories, each independently oriented to a christological centre.

Thus our exploration of Barth's interpretation of the Old Testament in the context of his Doctrine of Reconciliation begins with his interpretation of the New Testament text known to English speakers as the parable of the Prodigal Son.[31] Barth's christological exposition of this text gives a concrete demonstration of the exegetical procedures and outcomes involved in approaching a text understood as 'parable'. Furthermore, Barth's explicit sensitivity in this context to the methodological questions raised by the effort to christologically interpret christologically anonymous texts means that this exposition offers a striking and illuminating parallel for his parabolic christological interpretation of Old Testament narratives. For Barth,

[30] *How to Read Karl Barth*, 260–64.

[31] The inadequacy of this conventional English title, and the difficulty of selecting a title which adequately captures the parable's themes, has been widely observed by commentators, e.g. Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 1st ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 172–75.

Jesus Christ cannot be found within the parable of the Prodigal Son in any simple, explicit, or direct sense – and yet this text's powerful testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ places it firmly at the heart of the doctrine of reconciliation'.[32] As we explore Barth's interpretation of this text, and go on to trace the parallels between this parabolic christological interpretation and his treatment of other christologically anonymous Old Testament texts, we will retain our interest in the difficulty that Barth's essentially singular conception of the event of Jesus Christ creates for the testimony of narratives, *as narratives*, to that event. We will focus predominantly, however, on the issue of the role (or lack thereof) played by an overarching salvation-historical metanarrative in the christological interpretation of specific narrative texts.

2. Barth's christological exposition of the parable of the Prodigal Son

The uniqueness of Barth's interpretation is telegraphed at the outset.[33] As he embarks on his exposition of the parable, he notes that the interpretative tradition is marked equally by consensus in the prominence given to this parable and by diversity in interpretative approaches toward it, allowing him to adopt a critical stance towards elements of the interpretative tradition and subtly preparing the way for his own distinctive approach: a 'christological exposition' which he describes as 'indirect, not allegorical but typological'.[34] We will approach our main interest – what Barth means by positively characterising his exposition as 'typological' – by way of his first two descriptors, beginning with the negative characterisation 'not allegorical.'

Allegorical interpretation offers a classic strategy for finding a deeper (or higher) spiritual meaning in a text whose surface meaning is not considered germane to an interpreter's purposes. Forming a strand within the interpretative tradition, interpreters who deployed this approach were capable of finding christological content where it might not immediately be apparent on the surface of the parable: a reference to the incarnation in the father's running out to meet the younger son, or to the sacrificial death of Christ in the slaughter of the fattened

[32] 'When we have this subject [*i.e.* the doctrine of reconciliation] before us as a whole, we can hardly *not* consider […] the parable of the son who was lost and found again' (*KD* IV/2, 21; *CD* IV/2, 21; emphasis modified). The parable's importance for Barth's 'Doctrine of Reconciliation' (i.e. *CD* IV/1-3) is reflected in the names given to the key christological subsections out of which the immense structure of his treatment develops: 'The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country' and 'The Homecoming of the Son of Man'.

[33] For an insightful treatment emphasising the distinctive features of Barth's exposition but also arguing for similarities between the approaches of Barth and Julian of Norwich, see Kendall Cox, 'Parabolic Retelling and Christological Discourse: Julian of Norwich and Karl Barth on the Parable of the Lost Son', in *Reading the Gospels with Karl Barth*, ed. Daniel L. Migliore (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 106–23.

[34] *KD* IV/2, 25; *CD* IV/2, 25.

calf.[35] Barth wants to make it clear that his own Christological exposition has nothing to do with patristic allegorical interpretation: 'the parable's lost son is certainly not to be simply [*einfach*] equated with Jesus Christ. And still less, of course [*natürlich*], as Ambrose once [*einst*] thought, with the flesh of the fattened calf which was slaughtered for his welcome!!'[36] Ambrose's opinion is thus consigned to the hoary past, obviously untenable. Referring approvingly to Helmut Gollwitzer's interpretation of the parable, Barth deems it 'certainly not allegorical, but legitimate'.[37] The implication is clear: if allegorical, then illegitimate.

Barth's rather performative abjuration of allegory indicates a respectful deference on his part to the interpretative paradigm established by Adolf Jülicher's epochal jeremiad against allegorical interpretation in *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*.[38] This respect, however, is tempered by resistance, because there is also a dimension to the reigning interpretative consensus which Barth cannot accept. He flatly ignores the critical task of reconstructing the parable's originating *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, simply addressing himself to the text in its canonical form and context. But he takes express issue with those 'neo-Protestant' exegetes who endorse the traditional designation of this parable as the *evangelium in evangelio*, but find here an *Urevangelium* devoid of a Christ-figure and an atonement.[39] Barth is willing to concede that

[35] Ambrose sees in the sacrifice of the fattened calf a reference to the eucharistic sacrifice whose richness nourishes the church (*Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 7.232-233). For Jerome, who offers similar comments regarding the fattened calf, the father running out and falling upon his son's neck speaks of the Word taking on human form (*Epistulae* 21.19-20, 26-27). Augustine sees here both a command to preach the Lord's sacrificial death, and a reference to the eucharistic feeding of the Church (*Quaestiones evangeliorum* 2.33.3).

[36] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 23. The German text's rather crude double exclamation point has been softened in the English translation. Barth's dismissive approach to the tradition of patristic exegesis falls short of his aspirational posture of 'respectful freedom in relation to tradition' (*KD* IV/2, 119; *CD* IV/2, 108) and precludes an appreciation of this tradition's strengths. The decades following Barth's work have been marked by a more appreciative reception of patristic exegesis in general, and allegorical interpretation in particular: see e.g. David C. Steinmetz, 'The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis', *Theology Today* 37, no. 1 (1980): 27–38.

[37] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 22.

[38] Jülicher's work was to set a new interpretative paradigm for Jesus' parables up to and beyond Barth's time. Two elements of this legacy are relevant: first, the interpretative axiom that parables function rhetorically and didactically to make a single, simple point (see *e.g. DGJ*, 1:113-114). Second, and closely related, the canonical setting given to Jesus' parables misrepresented them as mysterious sayings in need of allegorical interpretation: thus the critical task was to excise the parables from their present literary contexts in the Gospels, relating them instead to a reconstructed originating historical context, and to strip away canonical accretions in order that the authentic words of Jesus might be accessed and studied (*DGJ*, 1:64). Barth's qualified respect for the results of critical scholarship recalls the stance adopted in a much earlier altercation with Jülicher (see *R2*, x-xiii).

[39] In this connection, Barth refers to Adolf von Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Lecture 8, where Harnack makes only the briefest passing reference to the parable of the Prodigal Son (ET *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas B. Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), esp. 142-144.) This interpretative line, however, is wholly anticipated and more fully articulated in Jülicher's exposition of the parable, for whom the religion of Jesus has in this parable 'its most complete, simplest, and most profound creed'. The parable is about the fatherly love of God, who joyfully welcomes the wayward without a diminution of his benevolence toward the righteous. Any reference to a Christ-figure in this parable is not only unsupported, but unsupportable: 'No place whatsoever remains for a mediator between God and the sinner in the application of our parable; Jesus did not conceive of regarding himself as such a figure. It is not for the sake of Christ, the crucified, that the God of Luke 15.11ff.

'the parable speaks not a word of Jesus Christ himself and of the reconciliation of humanity with God in him', but refuses the conclusion that the gospel speaks only of a boundlessly loving Father and not of the person and work of the Son.[40] Christological exegesis is legitimate and necessary, because the parable *does* have an implicit christological content.

This brings us to Barth's second description of his christological exposition, 'indirect', which indicates his strategy for accessing the parable's christological content without resorting to the kind of allegorical interpretation which has already been ruled out of bounds. To articulate the difference between the parable's explicit and implicit content, and to justify attention to the latter, Barth develops the metaphor of direct and indirect speech. The parable 'speaks' (*reden*, *sagen*), and what it says (*das Ausgesagte*), its direct speech (*direkt Gesagtes*), can be accessed by direct exegesis (*in direkter Exegese*).[41] But there is also what the parable does not say (*das Nichtausgesagte*), that which is not in the text (*nichts davon da steht*), and yet is implied (*impliziert*) by the text: its indirect speech (*indirekt Gesagtes*) which can be accessed by indirect exegesis (*in indirekter Exegese*).[42] The comment on the relationship between intransigent Israel and the receptive Gentiles furnished by the contrast between the parable's older and younger sons supplies an example of implicit parabolic content which boasts support from interpreters as diverse as Augustine and F. C. Baur.[43] Referring to this relationship, Barth asks,

> Do we insert [*hineinlegen*] it in this text, or is it impossible to interpret [*auslegen*] the text without – in indirect exegesis, because nothing of it is in the text [*nichts davon da steht*] – also having this relationship in view, in, with, and under what is said directly [*in, mit und unter dem direkt Gesagten*]? Would an interpretation which overlooked and passed over this relationship not simply be *under*-interpretation?[44]

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accepts the sinner, but because he can hardly do otherwise than forgive, because it is a poor, dear child who draws near to him' (*DGJ*, 2:365-66).

[40] *KD* IV/2, 22; *CD* IV/2, 22.

[41] *KD* IV/2, 21-22. The parable's 'direct speech' actually exceeds its explicit content, embracing both the figurative language of the text and that which is figured by this language (*Bild* and *Sache* in Jülicher's terms, or vehicle and tenor in I. A. Richards' terms). On its textual surface, the parable is 'about' a father and his two sons; in and with the construction of this textual surface, the parable is 'about' (i.e. figuratively addresses the theme of) human sin and divine forgiveness and restoration (this is the parable's 'Hauptaussage'). Both narrative articulation and thematic implication are 'directly' expressed in the text and accessed by the interpreter through direct exegesis. It seems that, for Barth, the problem with attempts at allegorical christological interpretation is that these are perversions of direct exegesis; the error lies in the attempt to proceed as if the person and work of Christ were part of the surface of the text or its immediate thematic concerns where this is not in fact the case.

[42] *KD* IV/2, 22.

[43] This is the so-called 'ethnic' interpretation: see François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, trans. Donald S. Deer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 431.

[44] *KD* IV/2, 22, *CD* IV/2, 22.

Thus the explication of a passage's implicit content is not eisegesis, but a mode of exegesis which is both defensible and actually necessary.

Armed with this distinction between direct and indirect speech, Barth is ready to counterattack against the modern exegetes. If directly christological interpretation is 'over-interpretation', a hermeneutical Charybdis, then non- or anti-christological interpretation is 'under-interpretation', a veritable Scylla, and both must be avoided:

> But now, besides every possible over-interpretation, there could also be *under*-interpretation of this text: a failure to hear what is not stated, but is implied in what is stated [*ein Überhören von Nichtausgesagtem, das aber in dem Ausgesagten impliziert ist*], and in order to understand it must be listened to as *indirect* speech.[45]

As with the parable's implicit comment on the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles, 'we must ask whether one indeed has, in a similarly indirect way, to gather from this text a *christological* content, because – without explicating it – the text does in fact *have* that content?'[46] In Barth's judgement, the lack of explicit christological reference in the parable does not necessitate that 'a consideration of that which is not said but implicitly contained in the parable along these lines [*eine Überlegung des im Gleichnis in dieser Richtung nicht Gesagten, aber implizit Enthaltenen*] […] be forbidden or even avoidable'.[47] Barth has argued that attention to a text's implicit content by means of indirect exegesis is legitimate and even necessary. He endeavours to vindicate these claims as he pursues his own christological exegesis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

We are now ready to explore Barth's positive characterisation of his christological exposition as 'typological'. His startling application of this term to the interpretation of a *New Testament* text should be sufficient to warn us against the casual assumption that Barth's 'typological' interpretation will follow the conventional approach outlined above. On the contrary, Barth's exposition differs substantially from a standard typological approach grounded in an unfolding salvation history. In Barth's christological interpretation, the role usually played by the literary-historical canonical context in mediating a typological connection between textual 'type' and christological 'antitype' is taken over by the dogmatic context of *Church Dogmatics* itself. This will become clear as we trace the three distinct stages in which Barth constructs his christological interpretation.

[45] *KD* IV/2, 22; *CD* IV/2, 21-22.
[46] *KD* IV/2, 22; *CD* IV/2, 22.
[47] *KD* IV/2, 22; *CD* IV/2, 22.

His first step is to create space for a new reading by demonstrating that the 'modern' reading of the parable, though seemingly capable of generating an interpretative consensus, is in fact inadequate. Barth argues, by appeal to the exposition of his student Helmut Gollwitzer, that if the interaction between the younger son and the father depicts an event between humanity and God – as these quantities are rendered by the parable's broader canonical context in Luke's Gospel and the New Testament – then the gospel according to the 'neoprotestants' cannot adequately explain *why* God should act toward humanity and humanity should act toward God in this way:

> The unspoken but crucial premise of the occurrence [*Geschehen*] between God and humanity which is on view in the behaviour of this son and this father depicted in the parable is not the theory of a Father-God who always forgives as a matter of course, but the miraculous reality of this divine act [*i.e.* the messianic work of salvation which consists in the pardon of sinful Israel].[48]

This argument depends on both the parable's connection with its literary context and its own literary integrity.

Barth's insistence on setting the text in relation to its literary context has already begun with his preliminary description of what the parable 'says directly'.[49] As part of a complex unit including the parables of the lost sheep (Luke 15.3-7) and lost coin (Luke 15.8-10), this parable refers to human sin, and to God's gracious reception of repentant sinners. The immediate context of this entire parabolic discourse within Luke's narrative (*i.e.* the setting supplied in 15.1-2) helps to further specify these referents: the younger son corresponds to the 'tax-collectors and sinners' who draw near to Jesus and with whom he eats; the older son corresponds to the Pharisees who react with resentment rather than joy. The father corresponds to God.[50]

The parable's broader literary and canonical context also plays an important role at this stage. This role has already been suggested by the example of indirect exegesis already offered (the 'ethnic' interpretation of the parable), which appeals to broader currents in Luke's Gospel and the New Testament as a whole. The action of the father is not to be referred to 'God' in some abstract sense, but to the God rendered in the New Testament (and similarly with the

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[48] *KD* IV/2, 22-23; *CD* IV/2, 22; cf. Helmut Gollwitzer, *Die Freude Gottes: Einführung in das Lukasevangelium*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Burckhardthaus, 1952), 176–77. Barth borrows from Gollwitzer for the negative task of opposing the 'neoprotestant' consensus, but explicitly departs from him in his own christological exposition.

[49] *KD* IV/2, 21; *CD* IV/2, 21.

[50] This is already a departure from the strictures of Jülicher, for whom all the excesses of allegorical interpretation are already inevitable as soon as the father and sons are taken to represent something beyond themselves. See *DGJ*, 2:334-35, 352.

referential relationship between the younger son and sinful humanity). The interaction between father and younger son in the parable cannot be securely referred to God and sinful humanity unless the Christ-event is taken into account. Thus Gollwitzer's exegesis proves its superiority:

> That is indirect exegesis, and therefore certainly not allegorical but legitimate, if the text is to be interpreted in the context of the entire third Gospel and the entire New Testament message; exegesis which also does justice to the text's content [*was dasteht*] in relation to its setting, i.e. which expounds its content in relation to that context.[51]

Though Barth's judgements are framed in literary terms, it is clear that they also depend on a theological judgement, which is inseparable but distinct from exegetical questions. The 'unspoken but crucial premise' which *does* render intelligible the interaction of the parabolic father and younger son as a depiction of God and sinful humanity is not simply a matter of a specific datum in the literary or canonical context which has been neglected, but concerns a fundamental intuition of the overall import of this literary and canonical context: the Subject with which (or rather, with whom) the Bible is concerned. Barth is appealing to the *theological* context within which the parable must be interpreted: God's irreducibly particular redemptive self-disclosure to humanity in Jesus Christ. This divine activity is rendered (or attested) by the parable's literary and canonical context, i.e. Scripture. As such this theological context, which is indispensable for the correct interpretation of the parable, is inextricably linked with the parable's literary and canonical context, but is not finally identical with this literary and canonical context. The *Versöhnung* which Barth perceives at the heart of the biblical witness functions as his equivalent to the Rule of Faith, articulating the central meaning of Scripture as a whole, and excluding those interpretations which cannot be made to cohere with this meaning.

The other essential element in Barth's riposte to the 'neoprotestant' exegesis is the parable's own narrative integrity, the coherence of the world of the text. Barth's theological objection is presented as a literary-critical verdict: the modern interpretation fails to understand the logic of the parable's plot. He also argues further that an interpretation focusing on the action of the father is not correct because it 'shifts the proportions of the parable in a way that is not insignificant'.[52] The protagonist (*Hauptfigur*) of the narrative is not the father but the younger son; the older son is merely a foil (*Kontrastfigur*).[53] Once again, this line of argumentation

[51] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 23.
[52] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 22. This charge applies to both Gollwitzer and the 'neoprotestant' exegetes, and provides for the movement of Barth's own exegesis beyond that of Gollwitzer.
[53] *KD* IV/2, 22-23; *CD* IV/2, 21-22.

depends on the text's integrity as a genuine work of literary art. There would be little point in appealing to the balance of the story if it were merely a rhetorical figure of speech, or a thin allegorical veneer for something else. Barth's argument assumes that the story makes sense, and demands that an adequate interpretation make sense of the story.

Having cleared the ground, Barth is now prepared to take his second step and to establish the shape of his own reading. Acknowledging that no 'direct' relationship between the parable's protagonist and the Son of God can be established – 'the parable's lost son is certainly not to be simply [*einfach*] equated with Jesus Christ' – Barth nevertheless insists that we must see in the action of this character a parallel with the event of Jesus Christ.

> But one would have to describe as '*under*-interpretation' an explanation which did not see and say that in the departure and return of the lost son in relation to his father we have to do with an extraordinarily luminous *parallel* to the way of Jesus Christ trodden in the work of reconciliation, to his humiliation and exaltation. Put better: that the going-out and coming-in [*Aus- und Eingang*] of the lost son and therefore the fall and pardon of human beings plays out within the *horizon* of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ and thus of the reconciliation which occurs in him; it has in this reconciliation its higher principle, from this reconciliation it is illuminated, so that in this way it is also clear, meaningful and important in itself.[54]

This parallel is suggested by a structural resonance between the shape of the lost son's activity – departure and return – and the shape of the Christ-event as described in the Philippian Hymn (Phil 2.6-11) – humiliation and exaltation. In this way, the hymn acts as a canonical intertext, helping to mediate a connection between textual *Bild* and christological *Sache*. The Pauline text can function in this way because it is a privileged text in Barth's construal of Scripture: all Scripture bears witness to the reconciliation which occurs in Christ, but in this place the nature of that reconciliation may be apprehended especially clearly.[55]

Thus, while there is certainly enough dissimilarity between the younger son's disgraceful and self-destructive conduct (which refers directly to 'the way of humanity in breach of its covenant with God') and the obedience of the Son of God to prevent a direct equation of the two, Barth nevertheless stresses that the way of Jesus Christ in his incarnation and death is similarly a journey into the 'far country' of human sin and misery.[56] The sorry story of the son's departure

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[54] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 23. Emphasis original.
[55] This is reflected in the way that Barth draws on this passage's vocabulary to name the two material aspects from which 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation' is to be displayed ('Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant' and 'Jesus Christ, the Servant as Lord'), and the key sections in which the christological basis of the doctrine is developed ('The Obedience of the Son of God' and 'The Exaltation of the Son of Man').
[56] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 23.

> is the way of humanity in breach of his covenant with God […] – and therefore certainly not simply [*einfach*] the way of the Son of God who is obedient to the Father, the way of Jesus Christ! Except that the way of Jesus Christ is precisely – this also cannot be denied – the way into the far country of just this lost human existence: the way upon which he makes himself equal to and in solidarity with just this lost son, making his way entirely and unreservedly into his place, taking upon himself his sin and shame, his transgression – as though he had committed it – and his misery – as if he had earned it – leaving his own proper existence.[57]

The same relationship of similarity and dissimilarity obtains, *mutatis mutandis*, between the son's homecoming and the exaltation of humanity to fellowship with God in Jesus Christ.[58]

Barth's third and final step is to specify the nature and direction of the referential relationship between Jesus Christ and the parabolic figure of the younger son. For Barth, there is a clear hierarchical relationship between the theological quantities on view: the misery of human sin is not knowable outside of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, and the 'being, act, and experience' of redeemed humanity is entirely 'carried and capacitated' by that of Jesus Christ.[59] This theological priority of Christology over anthropology and soteriology also functions *hermeneutically* in Barth's interpretation of the parable: the parable only speaks of human sin and forgiveness secondarily and derivatively, insofar as it speaks primarily and originally of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ.

> What is the fatal departure of the lost son from this perspective? Surely only the pitiful *caricature* of the going out [*Ausgang*] of the one Son of God into the world which took place in Jesus Christ, therefore of his humiliation, in which he, without ceasing to be who he is, indeed in the highest exercise of his sonship and divinity, became poor for our sake (2 Cor 8.9) – but still clearly its caricature, as a way from the height to the depth, from the homeland into the far country still *analogous* to it, similar for all its dissimilarity, like Adam's being in relation to that of Christ: τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος (Rom 5.14).
>
> […]
>
> What is the restorative [*heilsam*] return of the lost son from this perspective? Certainly only a faint *afterimage* of the entrance [*Eingang*] which occurs in Jesus Christ of the one Son of Man into fellowship with God, therefore of his elevation, in which he without ceasing to be true man, therefore not deified, rather in our nature, in our flesh is at the side of the Father in heaven, sharing as man in his power and lordship, in the exercise of his grace and mercy. The way of the son who is found again in the parable and therefore of the man reconciled with God cannot

[57] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 23.
[58] See *KD* IV/2, 24; *CD* IV/2, 23-24.
[59] For explicit statements of this relationship, see *KD* IV/1, 19-20; *CD* IV/1, 19-20.

> be more than afterimage, analogy, type of this his entrance, but it also cannot be less.[60]

Barth's exegesis has arrived at Jesus Christ indirectly, because what the parable says directly about the sin and return of humanity is only intelligible if it is understood as an image derived from an original standing beyond the text. The reality described in the text has its reality from elsewhere. Yet at this final stage it appears that the supposedly 'indirect' Christological interpretation has gained priority over the 'direct' interpretation relating to human sin and forgiveness, amounting to a hermeneutical inversion.

This inversion was already adumbrated in Barth's earlier comments that the action of the parable plays out 'within the *horizon*' of the reconciliation event, and only becomes 'clear, meaningful and important in itself' insofar as it is illuminated by the event of reconciliation.[61] It is further affirmed by Barth's treatment of the parable's older son and of the father's closing speech to him. 'Primarily, properly, and originally', the older son rejects not an offensive hamartiology and soteriology, but the reconciliation which occurs in Jesus Christ.[62] As for the father, Barth finds his description of the younger son – as 'my son' and 'your brother' who 'was dead, and is alive again', and who 'was lost, and is found' (Luke 15.24, 32) – especially striking. For Barth, these expressions are ill-fitted as either a description of the narrative's surface features (i.e. the journey of the younger son) or its direct thematic reference (i.e. the sin, repentance, and forgiveness of human beings); they *must* be a description of Jesus Christ.[63] In Barth's exposition, textual features acquire their sense primarily in relation to the event of Jesus Christ; the intra-narratival and soteriological-referential sense is secondary and

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[60] *KD* IV/2, 23-24; *CD* IV/2, 23-24. Emphasis original. The intertextual reference to 2 Cor 8.9 here has an equivalent function to that of Phil 2.6-11 as described above, acting as a virtual paraphrase for vv. 6-8 of that passage. Barth's explicit use of the 'type' language of Rom 5.14 will be addressed below.

[61] *KD* IV/2, 23, *CD* IV/2, 23. On Barth's language of 'horizon', Cox comments, 'The way of Jesus Christ is "like" that of the lost son only in the sense that it "is" the way of the lost son. It becomes it; it overtakes it, rewriting it from within. The fictional trajectory of the lost son, then, must be situated within Jesus's history, embedded in the encompassing trajectory of his life.' 'Parabolic Retelling and Christological Discourse', 109. The final sentence captures the inversion that has taken place.

[62] *KD* IV/2, 25, *CD* IV/2, 24. If all humanity is implicated in the twofold 'way' of the younger brother, who could be indicated by the older brother? This is precisely Barth's point: the insubstantiality of the older brother in literary terms (he is only a *Kontrastfigur*, and 'die Kontrastrolle spielt') reflects a deeper theological unreality. This shadowy figure is 'the personified dispute against the divine-human reality', and as such exists only in contradiction of his own christologically grounded existence.

[63] *KD* IV/2, 25; *CD* IV/2, 24-25. Other interpreters for whom this language is extraordinary and points (in different ways) beyond the confines of the narrative are: John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 786; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 241; Bovon, *Luke*, 428–30. The force of the expression 'your brother' on Barth may be due to its resonance with his christological concept of *Mitmenschlichkeit* (see e.g. *KD* III/2, 159-60; *CD* III/2, 133-34). A comparison of the use of ἀδελφός in Luke and John (in which the term is reserved until the after resurrection: John 20.17; cf. 15.15) suggests that this language carries relatively little theological weight in the third Gospel.

derivative – described as 'a pitiful caricature', a 'faint afterimage', 'not the original [*Original*]' but 'only the copy [*Bild*]'.[64] This mimetic pattern of originality and derivation, rather than a temporal pattern of anticipation and fulfilment, is the characteristic feature of the 'typological' relationship Barth discerns between Jesus Christ and the younger son.

Before moving on, we must parenthetically note that Barth's comments on the father's speech make it clear that he has not closed the door on allegorical interpretation quite so firmly as it might at first appear. With ironic tentativeness he calls attention to the aforementioned verses and raises the possibility of their *direct* christological interpretation:

> Now this, at least, is also in the text [*Das steht nun immerhin auch da*]. And if one might perhaps enquire whether the text might not, at long last, in fact also *directly* speak christologically and therefore be susceptible of being read christologically in a direct fashion, then it would be in light of this pair of verses, in light of this 'my son' and this 'your brother', this one who was dead who lives again, this one who was lost who was found again, in light of the rejoicing which rings out of these words. Who is the one to whom all this applies? Aren't the expressions almost too strong to be applied to and appropriate for the lost son of the parable and that which is seen in him?[65]

The textual element Barth which finds so striking is the *incongruity* of the description of the wayward son as 'lost', 'dead'. Barth's observations here are redolent of the suggestion from Origen – often regarded as the allegorist *par excellence* – that 'certain impossibilities and incongruities' alert the reader to Scripture's 'spiritual sense'.[66] Barth refrains from pursuing the possibility of developing an allegorical interpretation along these lines, but nevertheless deploys this possibility as a premise in an argument *a fortiori*: if direct christological reading is possible here, then surely 'in this pair of verses one finds oneself invited, and now indeed by the text itself, to the exposition sought here – indirect, not allegorical but typological – *in concreto*: the *christological* exposition'.[67] Barth insists that he has not offered an allegorical interpretation himself, but he does not finally exclude this kind of reading from the field of interpretative possibilities.[68] If Barth's interpretation of this parable is found to offer an

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[64] *KD* IV/2, 23-24; *CD* IV/2, 23-24.
[65] *KD* IV/2, 25; *CD* IV/2, 24-25.
[66] *De Principii*, 4.2.9. Text and translation in *Origen: On First Principles*, ed. and trans. John Behr, 2 vols, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[67] *KD* IV/2, 25; *CD* IV/2, 25.
[68] Upon close examination, the interpretative distance between Barth and Ambrose is in fact smaller than the rhetorical posturing of the former might suggest. Ambrose' perception of a parallel between the slaughter of the calf and the eucharist functions within an overall conception of the parable as part of a tripartite parabolic unit depicting God's restorative grace toward the sinner (see *Ex. ev. sec. Luc.* 7.207-209). Ambrose is less cautious than Barth in connecting various parabolic details with concrete aspects of the divine grace: *e.g.*, the provision of the robe is equated with spiritual wisdom, which is the fitting garment for participation in a celebratory feast (here Ambrose draws explicitly on Gen 49.11 Vg. and implicitly on Matt 22.11-12). In the final analysis, however, the

illuminating parallel to his interpretation of other texts whose relation to Jesus Christ is not immediately clear, then one should be attentive to the possibility that his interpretative treatment of these texts may be – at least to some extent – allegorical.

3. A type of the one to come?

Having traced the contours of Barth's 'indirect, not allegorical but typological' exposition of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we must now probe the distinctive features of the 'typology' he has presented, and what these might imply for the role played by narrative in Barth's christological interpretation of scriptural texts which do not refer directly and explicitly to Jesus Christ. As Barth's exposition makes clear, he has borrowed the term 'typological' from Paul's meditation on the likeness and unlikeness of Adam and Christ in Rom 5.12-21. The narrated activity of the younger son, according to Barth, is 'analogous' to the reconciliation which occurs in Jesus Christ: 'similar for all its dissimilarity, like Adam's being in relation to that of Christ: τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος (Rom 5.14).'[69] Though Barth appropriates Paul's terminology, there are important differences between Barth's interpretation of the parable and the apostolic interpretative strategy encapsulated in the expression τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος. As Barth observes, a typological relationship must always involve the perception of an analogical relationship between two entities, comprehending both similarity and difference. Without similarity, there are simply two disparate figures; without difference, there is but one figure. Typology must also entail a *structured* analogous relationship in which antitype excels and relativises type. For Paul, this is the temporal structure of anticipation and fulfilment arising from the temporal structure of Old and New. Where Paul's Adam-Christ typology emphasises dissimilarity ('But the free gift is not like the trespass'; Rom 5.15), Barth lays his stress on similarity: for Barth the structure of the 'typological' relationship between Jesus Christ and the textual figure of the younger son, along with that which this figure represents 'directly', is the hierarchical

shape of their interpretative results is not wholly dissimilar. For Ambrose, feasting on the slain calf recalls restoration to eucharistic fellowship; Barth sees in the younger son's twofold journey a parallel with the twofold divine act in Jesus Christ. The decisive interpretative difference lies not so much in hermeneutical method, for both find analogies between narrative features and aspects of the divine grace (and in both cases these analogies are mediated by canonical intertexts), as in an overall perception of the character of that grace. Whereas for Ambrose this grace is understood more expansively in trinitarian and ecclesial terms (with a central place for the eucharistic 'sacrifice'), Barth understands the divine grace in strictly christological terms (and his conception of the personal work of Christ is not significantly shaped by the notion of sacrifice); this tighter focus is what constrains the number of possible connections between narrative features and the divine grace.

[69] *KD* IV/2, 24; *CD* IV/2, 23.

relationship of the original to a derivative. Rather than a temporal pattern of anticipation and fulfilment, Barth relates type and antitype in a mimetic pattern of originality and derivation.[70]

At the outset, we declared two areas of special interest for our examination of Barth's christological interpretation: the testimony of narrative, *as narrative*, to Jesus Christ, and the role played by an overarching scriptural metanarrative. We will address the first of these before turning to the second, more salient, area of interest. The mimetic relationship outlined above is the hermeneutical equivalent of Barth's *analogia fidei*.[71] As human knowledge and action is grounded in and answers to divine knowledge and action, so the 'direct' narratival and soteriological sense of the text is grounded in its 'indirect' christological reference. Just as concerns about the integrity of the human *analogatum* have shadowed Barth's *analogia fidei*, his typological reading strategy is not without risks for the text which presents the 'type', and this is especially clear with respect to those features which are characteristic of the text's narrative form.[72]

As we have seen, the narrative form of the parable itself has a role to play in Barth's exposition. By attending to the 'proportions' of the story, Barth is able to assign the role of *Hauptfigur* to the parable's younger son, and thus to clear away 'neo-protestant' approaches focusing on the action of the father. But, once again, important aspects of the narrative are either ignored or suppressed, notably its temporal sequence. The focus of Barth's attention is the younger son's '*Hin- und Rückweg*' or '*Aus- und Eingang*'.[73] For Barth these are ultimately not the two temporally successive movements depicted by the expressions 'he departed' (ἀπεδήμησεν; Luke 15.13) and 'he went to his father' (ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ; v. 20) – with a crucial third event interposing: the son's moment of 'coming to himself' (εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθών…; v. 17) – but a single 'twofold movement'.[74] In Barth's christological interpretation, the unfolding temporal sequence of events which constitutes the narrative is compressed into a singular action.

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[70] As such, Barth's version of 'typology' is closer to the vertical, mimetic typology found in Hebrews (*e.g.* Heb 9.23-24, in which the relationship between types and antitype – terms inverted – is the relationship between 'the copies [ὑποδείγματα] of things in the heavens' and 'the heavenly things themselves') than the horizontal, salvation-historical typology of Paul's epistles and 1 Peter (which is also the dominant approach in Hebrews itself).

[71] See *KD* I/1, 258; *CD* I/1, 244-245.

[72] For a theologically oriented discussion of these issues in relation to Barth's exposition of the parable, see Daniel L. Migliore, 'The Journey of God's Son: Barth and Balthasar on the Parable of the Lost Son', in *Reading the Gospels with Karl Barth*, ed. Daniel L. Migliore (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

[73] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 23.

[74] *KD* IV/2, 24; *CD* IV/2, 24.

In this compression of narrative sequence into singularity we can observe the interplay between Barth's dogmatic and interpretative concerns. The dogmatic context for Barth's interpretation of the parable is his doctrine of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*). As we have seen, the character of *Versöhnung* is both complex and singular, a dynamic which belongs to Barth's basically Chalcedonian Christology.[75]

> The history of Jesus Christ with which the history of reconciliation is identical is the simultaneous but opposing course of two great movements, the one from above downwards and the other from below upwards, both grounded in His person in the union of its true deity *and* its true humanity.[76]

This history is a single event; these are not two successive movements but a simultaneous, twofold movement.[77] In his christological interpretation of the parable, Barth perceives a parallel between the younger son's action and 'the way trodden by the Son of God in the work of reconciliation [*im Werk der Versöhnung*]'.[78] The journey of the younger son, compressed into a singular action, corresponds to the singular work of reconciliation, the *Heilsgeschehen*. The twofold aspect of the younger son's singular action corresponds to the twofold complexity of the single person Jesus Christ, which is identical with the twofold reconciling movement of humiliation and exaltation.[79] The shape of Barth's actualist Chalcedonian Christology matches the shape he discerns in the parable.[80]

One interpretative result of this correspondence is the downplaying of textual features which do not easily fit the christological pattern. To borrow a phrase from von Balthasar's critique of Barth's theological *analogia fidei* and redeploy it in hermeneutical territory, we might speak of a Christological 'narrowing' here.[81] Along with the compression of the narrative's plural events into a singular event comes a constriction of the parable's meaning. As noted at the outset, interpreters have found it difficult to adequately name this parable. Is the parable about

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[75] For this phrase and a description of Barth's dialectical christological strategy in *Church Dogmatics*, see George Hunsinger, 'Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character', in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 131–47.
[76] *KD* IV/3, 4; *CD* IV/3, 2.
[77] See *KD* IV/2, 116-122; *CD* IV/2, 105-110.
[78] *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/2, 23.
[79] The christological language of humiliation and exaltation, derived from the ἐταπείνωσεν and ὑπερύψωσεν of the Philippian Hymn, expresses status by means of a spatial metaphor operating on the vertical axis. In the parable, the relationship between father and son is expressed in terms of proximity on the horizontal plane. Barth assimilates the pairs low/high and far/near by using the pair out/in (*Aus- und Eingang*) as a synonym for both, overcoming any potential dissonance between the vertical journey of Jesus Christ in the hymn and the horizontal journey of the parable's younger son.
[80] We need not conclude that Barth has simply moulded the parable to fit his Christology, as if theological presuppositions could be neatly distinguished from exegetical decisions. We should rather see here the outworking of a recursive process in which dogmatic commitments and exegetical decisions are mutually reinforcing.
[81] von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 242.

a prodigal son? Or about two lost sons? Or about a father's love? Barth's straightforward insistence that this is 'the parable of the son who was lost and found again' constitutes a decision not only about nomenclature, but about hermeneutical scope.[82] Barth's assignations of the roles of *Hauptfigur* and *Kontrastfigur*, which are open to dispute on textual grounds, play an outsized role in his interpretation.[83] Compared to the younger son, the father and older son have only a minimal place in Barth's exposition; they are evanescent figures, and Barth's comments on them are wholly derivative of what he has to say about the parable's *Hauptfigur*. Even the dramatic moment in which the father hastens to welcome his wayward son, with its profusion of narrative detail, cannot emerge into clear view because of the focus on the action of the son.[84] Barth's christological interpretation, with its intense focus on the textual feature which he takes to mirror the reconciliation event (i.e. the journey of the younger son), tends toward hermeneutical reduction. There is a striking parallel here with the interpretative paradigm for Jesus' parables which insists that each parable makes a single point. For Jülicher, in accordance with his Aristotelian assumptions, each parable presented a single, simple proposition; for Barth, in accordance with his construal of Scriptures' theological *Sache*, the parable presents a single, complex person.[85] We may also detect continuity with Barth's deployment of the concept of 'parable' in *Der Römerbrief*, where he portrayed Jesus' life as a parable indirectly communicating a singular, negative meaning. The elements of indirectness and negativity are gone; singularity remains. Barth's parabolic christological interpretation, with its tendency to focus on a singular event and meaning, neglects the prime distinguishing feature of narrative as literary *poiesis*: the irreducible rendering of meaning through the discursive interaction of multiple characters and events in an unfolding temporal context.

We now turn to address our more second and more significant interest in Barth's exposition of this parable: the role played by a broader historical and literary context in mediating his

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[82] *KD* IV/2, 21; *CD* IV/2, 21.

[83] That the role of the father should not be downplayed is clear from the fact that the parable is introduced with the words ἄνθρωπός τις εἶχεν δύο υἱούς (Luke 15.11; 'there was a man who had two sons'), and that this man is the only character to appear in each of the parable's three sections. For Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'the father remains the central figure in the parable even to the end': *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1092. As for the older son, the parable's suspended ending, in which he remains outside the feast with the father's words ringing in his ears, in combination with the parable's canonical setting in Luke's Gospel, suggests that the rhetorical force of the parable hinges on the hearer's choice of whether or not to identify herself with this figure.

[84] Interpreters who find the key to the meaning of the parable (or at least of its first half) in this extraordinary turn of events include Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 176; Bovon, *Luke*, 423; Paul Ricoeur, 'Listening to the Parables of Jesus', in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 244.

[85] The judgement of later parable scholars that Jülicher's one-point approach is 'artificially restrictive' might also be applied to Barth's treatment of this parable. Dan Otto Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 3.

christological interpretation. Barth's 'typological' interpretation downplays not only the narrative character of the parable itself, but also the significance of the parable's broader narrative context. In order to appropriate the expression τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος, Barth prises it from its Pauline narrative framework. Paul's 'Adam' is the figure of the Old Testament book of Genesis, whose 'one trespass' was the occasion for sin's original entry into the world and its fatal spreading to all human beings. Adam and Christ are joined and separated by the span of the biblical narrative, to which the biblical figure of Moses also belongs, who marks an epochal shift from the time 'until the law' (ἄχρι νόμου), the period 'from Adam to Moses' (Rom 5.13-14).[86] This narrative context sustains Paul's Adam-Christ typology. The man Adam is a 'type' (τύπος) of the man Jesus Christ because they inhabit the same story. With respect to Adam, Christ is 'the coming one' (ὁ μέλλων) because this shared story unfolds in temporal sequence, with antitype succeeding and excelling the type through reversal. As Barth transplants the concept of τύπος from the *heilsgeschichtlich* soil in which it grew, however, the temporal and sequential aspect denoted by τοῦ μέλλοντος withers and dies.

The new habitat for 'typology' is the parable, where narrative and sequence function very differently. Because Jesus' parables are not extracts from a single overarching story, the question of sequence within a temporal context is irrelevant in their interpretation: it makes no sense to ask whether the man who gave a great banquet (Luke 14.16) did so before or after the man with two sons was approached by the younger one (Luke 15.11-32), and any answer ventured would make no difference to one's understanding of either parable. Nor is the reader to ask when these parabolic events occurred relative to the occasion on which Jesus told the parables. The *mise en scène* of Jesus' parables is, undeniably, largely modelled on the world of rural Palestine in the first century AD, but it is equally undeniable that the events of the parables take place in a temporally nonspecific 'once upon a time'.[87] Each parable is a narrative world entire unto itself; no parabolic narrative needs to be ranged with any other – or the

[86] This period is bounded by Adam the transgressor and Moses the mediator of the Law. These are literary (i.e. biblical) figures, rendered by the Genesis and Exodus narratives and belonging to the single narrative context created by the collection of these narratives in the canonical Pentateuch. The reign of death in the period 'from Adam to Moses' (Rom 5.14) represents not a logical extrapolation from Paul's empirical experience, but Paul's readerly perception of an important feature of the Pentateuchal narrative (see *e.g.* the recurrent 'and he died' of Gen 5 – with the non-death of Enoch in v. 24 as the exception that proves the rule – and the narrative's close interest in the death of the patriarchs).

[87] The standard introductory expression 'a certain man' (ἄνθρωπός τις; Luke 10.30; 12.16; 14.16; 15.11; 16.1, 19 etc.; cf. Job 1.1) functions similarly to the formulaic opening of a fairy-tale: 'once upon a time…' (or '*es war einmal…*'). This temporal nonspecificity is not absolute, however, in the sense that the events of the Parable of the Tenants (Luke 20.9-16), for example, though they themselves may be said to occur 'once upon a time', are nevertheless to be (allegorically) related to Jerusalem's present and future (and, perhaps, past: cf. Matthew's version, which is more clearly oriented to salvation-historical concerns). Nevertheless, Barth's christological interpretation does not proceed along this trajectory.

narrative in which Jesus Christ is the central figure – in a single metanarrative. Though the parabolic narratives are embedded in Luke's literary presentation of the narrative about Jesus, these narrative worlds and their timelines are not contiguous.[88] The one who speaks the parable of the Prodigal Son, therefore, cannot be described as 'the coming one' with respect to the parable's younger son in any temporal sense. Jesus does not belong to the younger son's future, nor the younger son to Jesus' past. These figures inhabit different narrative worlds whose timelines cannot be ranged into one.

For Barth, the term τύπος usefully communicates a hierarchically structured relationship of similarity and dissimilarity between narrative sense and christological reference, but – unlike salvation-historical 'typology' – this relationship is not mediated by a metanarrative (and therefore a temporal sequence) enfolding both type and antitype. This means that the mimetic or parabolic relationship Barth perceives between parabolic 'type' and christological 'antitype' is understood *atemporally*, in that the action of the parabolic figure in no sense anticipates the action of Jesus Christ, and the dissimilarity between these similar figures is not to be explained temporally in terms of the preliminary and preparatory versus the final and perfect. A further consequence is that the relationship discerned between a parabolic 'type' and its christological 'antitype' will be independent of any similar relationship between another parabolic figure and Jesus Christ. Barth's christological reading strategy – self-described as 'typological' but better characterised as 'parabolic' – envisages Christ standing not at the end of an unfolding linear series of anticipatory types, but rather at the centre of a constellation of figures which are linked radially to him, but not azimuthally or laterally to one another.

That Barth's christological interpretation, though he describes it as 'typological', operates independently of a narrative context embracing type and antitype is apparent in the limited interpretative role played by the literary context in which the parable of the Prodigal Son is embedded (i.e. the narrative about Jesus presented in the third Gospel). Barth makes virtually no reference to any part of Luke's narrative about Jesus, despite the resources it might afford for linking the person and ministry of Jesus to the action of the parable he tells in Luke 15.11-32.[89] The chapter's initial verses help Barth to determine that the relationship and activity

[88] Even though the Jerusalem temple is a location belonging to both the world of Luke's main narrative and to the world of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18.9-14) – as well as to the world of the reader – we cannot conceive of an encounter between Jesus and either parabolic figure in this location, any more than the reader could conceive of herself encountering the parable's Pharisee on a visit to the temple – or meeting the parable of the Good Samaritan's eponymous figure on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho.

[89] Barth notes that the parable is the third of a trio in Luke 15, but this contextual arrangement makes little contribution to his final exegetical results, and the parable's situation in the macro-structure of Luke-Acts plays virtually no role at all. Barth makes a reference to 'the context of the entire third Gospel', but only in a generalised

between father and sons in the parable has its correlate in the relationship between God and human beings. But Barth finally declares this contextually determined reference to be only a secondary interest for the parable; its ultimate (or rather, original) reference is to Christ's humiliation and exaltation. In the end, it scarcely matters who tells the parable, or when, or why.[90] The parable's literary context acts rather like the booster rockets to get Barth's christological interpretation off the ground. At the final stage it is jettisoned and falls back to earth. Barth's interpretation is left floating in space.[91]

The 'typological' link between younger son and Jesus Christ is actually sustained by the total *theological* context within which Barth's interpretation takes place, his 'Rule of Faith'. The truly decisive literary context for Barth's interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son, then, is not the narrative of the third Gospel, or even the Bible as a literary object, but the context in which Barth's effort to discern and re-present the theological reality at the heart of the Scriptures – the reconciliation which occurs in Christ Jesus – receives its literary articulation: *Church Dogmatics* itself. Barth's typological reading of the parable is sustained by his Christology as articulated in *Church Dogmatics*, and could not be reproduced in another context.

This decisive theological context has a particularly Pauline shape. Though the Christology which serves as Barth's 'Rule of Faith' arises in his perception of the theological import of Scripture considered as a whole, this does not mean that the Scriptural testimony to the reconciliation which occurs in Christ is wholly undifferentiated. There are privileged biblical

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connection with 'the entire New Testament message'. *KD* IV/2, 23; *CD* IV/1, 22. The one minor exception here is the cameo role played by 'the pharisee' who 'will finally bring him to the cross' (*KD* IV/2, 25; *CD* IV/2, 24).

[90] In his discussion of Jesus' parables, Barth insists that the identity of the speaker is the crucial factor in the parables' status as true parables of the kingdom. It is clear, however, that this is not meant in a specific literary or historical sense, but in the more generalised theological sense that 'the one true Word of God makes these other words true.' (*KD* IV/3, 125; *CD* IV/3, 112) The same dynamic underpins Barth's exposition of the parable of the Prodigal Son. The parable is not a parable of Jesus in the sense that it is *Jesus* who tells the parable (Barth's christological exposition does not even mention, let alone depend on this fact); but rather in the sense that it attests the work of God which is the Word of God, the reconciliation which occurs in Jesus Christ. For an study highlighting the way that the interplay between a synoptic parable and its literary context in which Jesus' identity is narrated exerts a hermeneutical pressure enabling the parable's christological interpretation, see Todd Brewer, 'For and Against Narrative: The Hermeneutics of the Parable in Early Christian Gospels' (Durham, University of Durham, 2015).

[91] There is an ironic affinity here between Barth's interpretative method and Jülicher's interpretative paradigm, for which the emancipation of the parables from their (mis)interpretation by the authors of the canonical Gospels is paramount. The object of Barth's interpretation is the parable in its canonical literary context, and not a conjectural text in a conjectural *Sitz im Leben*. Yet Barth proceeds to treat the parable in virtual isolation from its literary setting in Luke's Gospel, and so the evangelist's interpretation of the parable through its narrative contextualisation carries little interpretative weight. Redaction-critical studies have stressed the extent to which the evangelists have shaped the parables according to their own literary and theological purposes, problematising any attempt to downplay the interpretative significance of the parables' present literary context; on John Drury's reckoning, approximately one tenth of the words in the parable of the Prodigal Son are characteristically Lucan expressions (*The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory* (London: SPCK, 1985), 142.)

texts in which the theological matter at the heart of Scripture may be more clearly apprehended. It is significant that, in Barth's exposition of the parable of the Prodigal Son, the determinative theological context becomes visible, takes shape, and gives life and form to his christological interpretation in the appeal to the apostle Paul's compressed statements about Jesus Christ in in Phil 2.6-11 and 2 Cor 8.9.[92] When the crucial theological context is ushered onto the scene to play its definitive role, it is decked out in Pauline garb.

4. Conclusion

Barth's christological exposition of the parable of the Prodigal Son demonstrates his ongoing creative use of concepts derived from the apostle Paul in his interpretation of biblical narrative – what we have previously called his radical Paulinism. On the workbench in Barth's hermeneutical *atelier*, alongside his actualist Christology with its (radically) Pauline shape, lies another item appropriated from the apostle and put to interpretative work: the term τύπος. This vocabulary belongs to Paul's attempt to read the book of Genesis in light of his belief that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has definitively and redemptively revealed himself in Jesus Christ – that is, to read Genesis as Old Testament, as Christian Scripture. Barth's use of the term 'typological' to describe his own christological interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son, therefore, suggests that we may find a parallel between his interpretative practice here and his efforts to discern the christological testimony of other scriptural texts in which no direct word of Jesus Christ is spoken. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Barth significantly transforms the meaning of this Pauline term. Paul's 'typology' draws on the temporal structure of a biblical metanarrative, emphasizing the *oldness* of the Old Testament; Barth's application of this term to the interpretation of a parable constructs a mimetic 'typology' without appealing to the temporal sequence of a narrative context embracing 'type' and 'antitype'. If Barth's 'indirect, not allegorical but typological' christological exposition of this parable exemplifies a reading strategy for the christological exposition of Old Testament narratives, as we have suggested, then we may anticipate that difficult negotiations with the narrative qualities of the biblical text (and especially its temporal sequence) – both at the level of individual biblical narratives and of the total canonical context – will continue to mark Barth's theological exegesis of the Old Testament. Our task in the following chapters is to explore this suggestion

[92] *Pace* Cox, whose suggestion that Barth's interpretation is generated by a broader 'intertextual nexus of references' comprised of 'a certain set of biblical stories and figures' underplays the importance of this Pauline material. ('Parabolic Retelling and Christological Discourse', 116.)

in relation to concrete examples of Barth's christological interpretation of Old Testament narratives.

Chapter 5. The Parable of David, Abigail, and Nabal (1 Samuel 25)

One of Barth's remarkable interpretative treatments of the Old Testament in his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation' is his christological exposition of the story of David, Abigail, and Nabal (1 Sam 25) in *CD* IV/2.[1] For Barth, this Old Testament narrative speaks of God's elect man, of God's wisdom, and of the foolishness of 'the man of sin'. Tracing Barth's interpretative footsteps here reveals close parallels with his treatment of the parable of the Prodigal Son: this christological interpretation is not typological but parabolic in character. Here another christologically anonymous text yields up an implicit christological content not by way of its inclusion in a broader narrative context, but through an appeal to structural resonances between certain features of the narrative and Barth's dogmatic articulation of Christology in 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation'. Once again, the temporal structure of the narrative and the logic of its plot – along with its cumulative rendering of irreducibly particular characters – is thoroughly subordinated to the theo-logic of Barth's dogmatic account. Barth's theological interpretation of this narrative text suggests further parallels with allegorical approaches to the interpretation of Jesus' parables, and more fully illustrates his ambivalent relationship with the form of biblical narratives even in his mature theological writing.

1. Outlining the proportions of Barth's christological interpretation

1 Sam 25.2-42 relates the story of David's encounter with a husband and wife respectively named Nabal (*i.e.* 'fool')[2] and Abigail. The narrator informs the reader at the outset that 'the woman was clever and beautiful, but the man was surly and mean'.[3] David, Yahweh's anointed one, is on the run from the murderous Saul. Having protected the herdsmen of the wealthy Nabal, David requests food in return, but is rejected and insulted. Upon hearing of this, Nabal's wife Abigail takes swift and successful action, meeting David and averting his wrath. When Nabal is finally informed of these events, he receives a mortal shock, whereupon David takes Abigail as his own wife.

The dogmatic context for Barth's interpretation of this biblical narrative is the second part of a threefold, christologically determined account of hamartiology.[4] The fulfilment of the

[1] For the excursus containing this exposition, see *KD* IV/2, 478-86; *CD* IV/2, 424-32.
[2] The Hebrew word נָבָל (*nābāl*), which is also the name of this character, means 'fool' (for more detailed and precise discussion of this term, see below).
[3] 1 Sam 25.3 (NRSV).
[4] These three perspectives are distributed throughout Barth's 'Doctrine of Reconciliation': sin appears as pride (*CD* IV/1), as sloth (*CD* IV/2), and as falsehood (*CD* IV/3), corresponding respectively and negatively to 'The

covenant in Jesus Christ means that God exalts humanity to fellowship with himself. As a refusal of this movement, sin is revealed as indolence or 'sloth [*Trägheit*]', as 'evil inaction'.[5] The basic dimension of this sloth is 'stupidity [*Dummheit*]'; sin is stupidity and the sinner is the fool.[6] This figure does not lack education or intellectual endowment, rather he is a 'fool' because he culpably refuses to understand God and himself in Jesus Christ, instead thinking and willing the impossible. In Jesus Christ, human knowledge of and fellowship with God is objectively established. For a human being, to persist in ignorance of God, to pretend that one is alone without God, is the stupid and futile attempt to create and live in one's own reality. All this can achieve is 'mortal self-contradiction'; all that the fool can do is 'make himself impossible'.[7] In the light of God's fulfilment of the covenant in Jesus Christ, we can see that 'the man of sin' is 'a stupid fool.'[8]

Along with this dogmatic articulation, Barth offers a general overview of the figure of the 'fool' as presented in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.[9] Characteristically, Barth insists that, although the authors of the wisdom literature had specific people in mind as they described 'the fool', nevertheless this description characterises all Israel and all humanity. Wisdom and folly are dialectically related in face of the Word of God:

> Who is the wise person, if not the fool of yesterday, who without a fresh issue of and obedience to this summons must also be the fool of today and tomorrow? And who is the fool, if not the one who is summoned by the Word of God to be the wise person of today and tomorrow? […] God is also the God of the fool, and only as such the God of the wise'.[10]

The prohibition of Matt 5.22 against pronouncing one's brother a 'fool' reflects this state of affairs. This judgement can only be rendered by God; any human presuming to pronounce it only condemns him- or herself. This leads Barth to the biblical account of one who *is* expressly declared to be a 'fool': 1 Sam 25.

Obedience of the Son of God' (*CD* IV/1), 'The Exaltation of the Son of Man' (*CD* IV/2), and 'The Glory of the Mediator' (*CD* IV/3). If 'sloth' is a somewhat less-than-obvious way to characterise sin (compared to the prominence of 'pride' and 'falsehood' in the Bible and in Christian tradition), this only demonstrates the controlling influence of Barth's christological presentation on the entire 'Doctrine of Reconciliation'.

[5] *KD* IV/2, 452; *CD* IV/2, 403.

[6] *KD* IV/2, 462; *CD* IV/2, 411. The four dimensions of sloth – as stupidity in relation to God, inhumanity in relation to others, dissipation in relation to self, and anxiety in relation to time – correspond to the four aspects of Barth's theological anthropology as developed in *CD* III/2.

[7] *KD* IV/2, 462; *CD* IV/2, 411.

[8] *KD* IV/2, 462; *CD* IV/2, 411. 'Er lebt nicht als ein Weiser, sondern als *Tor*, als ein Dummer.'

[9] This figure can be denoted by נָבָל , but the terms פֶּתִי, כְּסִיל, and אֱוִיל are more commonly used. See Trevor Donald, 'The Semantic Field of "Folly" in Proverbs, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes', *Vetus Testamentum* 13, no. 3 (1963): 285–92.

[10] *KD* IV/2, 479-480; *CD* IV/2, 426. Emphasis removed.

Barth identifies and rejects three possible ways of reading this story. A moralistic reading is dismissed out of hand. A purely historical approach is inadequate; while Kittel is right to observe ancient desert customs at play in this text, its presentation of these customs is not a sufficient explanation for its inclusion in this collection of 'dynastic records'.[11] Nor can the narrative unit be properly accounted for in solely literary terms: Barth offers his judgement that the detailed rendering of this episode surpasses the mere narrative exigencies of explaining how one of David's marriages came about. It is for another reason, according to Barth, that this brief narrative repays careful consideration:

> Rather, there is obviously supposed to be something of *material* importance [etwas *sachlich* Bedeutsames] in the account of the strange events between these three persons, and the emphases with which they, especially Nabal and Abigail, are portrayed show unambiguously: it is about the encounter of David, the promise-bearer κατ' ἐξοχήν, with a person explicitly designated as foolish and a person explicitly designated as clever person, about his dismissal by the former, who is named and is 'Nabal', and about his acknowledgement and humble acceptance by the latter – by Abigail.[12]

The story of David, Abigail, and Nabal speaks to the matter at hand, the *Sache* under consideration, namely the exposure and overcoming, in Jesus Christ, of human sin as sloth, and especially as stupidity or foolishness. With this initial statement, Barth has already begun to adumbrate the lines along which the text may be read in light of this theological interest. The narrative's three central characters, in their structured interrelation, are regarded as typical representations of certain elements in Barth's christological anthropology.

The narrative's characters exceed themselves: Nabal, Abigal, and David are respectively understood to typify foolishness, wisdom, and the humanity God elects. By sheer virtue of nominative determinism, the character of Nabal is an obvious candidate for a typifying reading: his name means 'fool', and he is characterised as precisely that.[13] Abigail is described as 'clever [*klug*]', and thus is taken to be 'the representative of wisdom [*Weisheit*]' in contrast to the foolish Nabal.[14] The figure of David is taken to transcend the bounds of his narrative

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[11] *KD* IV/2, 481; *CD* IV/2, 427. Not to mention its inclusion in a text regarded as Holy Scripture, though Barth does not press the point. Likewise, Barth's reading bears no trace of the concern to reconstruct the suppressed or covert historical and political perspectives reflected in a hypothetical 'History of David's Rise': cf. e.g. Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Similarly, despite his attentiveness to the narrative's literary artistry, Jon D. Levenson declares that this kind of reading is only a preparatory step: the biblical critic must 'pierce the artistry' to access 'the historical raw materials on which the artist's genius worked.' 'I Samuel 25 as Literature and as History', *CBQ* 40, no. 1 (1978): 12, 24.

[12] *KD* IV/2, 481; *CD* IV/2, 427.

[13] See 1 Sam 25.25.

[14] *KD* IV/2, 481; *CD* IV/2, 427. The biblical narrator initially characterises Abigail as טוֹבַת־שֶׂכֶל, literally 'good of understanding' (1 Sam 25.3). שֵׂכֶל/שָׂכַל is a wisdom term, suggesting not only understanding and insight but also the prudent and judicious temperament required to achieve success in 'practical matters and interpersonal

characterisation. He is not merely the character who, in the wider narrative context, has been marked as Yahweh's chosen leader for his people Israel: he is 'the promise-bearer κατ' ἐξοχήν', *par excellence*. David is 'the elect of God [*der Erwählte Gottes*]', and not merely in a partial or anticipatory sense: in this character's actions, the story simply becomes entirely transparent such that the reader can see directly through it to God's elect man, who remains anonymous throughout Barth's interpretative comments, but is nevertheless well known to the reader of *Church Dogmatics*.[15]

Even more important than the types represented by the characters is their arrangement into a schematic configuration. David, the elect of God, stands at the centre, and the other narrative figures have their identity and meaning derivatively from him. The contrast between wisdom and folly does not simply arise from a bi-polar opposition between the figures of Abigail and Nabal, but in a more complex contrast between the differing relations of these figures to the central figure, David.

Nabal is what he is in relation to David: Nabal's 'foolishness' (his 'Nabal-ness') consists in his disregard of God's elect man.

> It is not just a Bedouin sheikh, rather it is the elect of Yahweh whom he is unwilling to recognise and whom he thinks he can despise and deride […]. It is really the encounter with his own and all Israel's salvation which he neglected, which he turned into a wild confrontation. It is the presence and activity of Yahweh in the person of this man that he has taken lightly […] He had to do with Yahweh himself, and he behaved like one completely ignorant of Yahweh, and *for that reason* as an impossible fellow.[16]

Nabal comes to embody folly in his failure to acknowledge David, who embodies the divine election and salvation. Nabal is 'impossible' not only in the sense that he is a 'worthless fellow' (בֶּן־בְּלִיַּעַל) with whom one cannot have a sensible discussion, but in the full sense accorded this term in Barth's christological anthropology.[17] Because genuine humanity is the humanity of Jesus Christ, the man who refuses to see himself in Jesus Christ is the man who has made

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relations' (Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 36.) See also *HALOT*, 'שׂכל-I' for the cognate verb. 'Savvy' is, perhaps, a near English equivalent. The expression טוֹבַת־שֶׂכֶל is unique to this passage, but the similar שֵׂכֶל־טוֹב can denote both success (or renown) itself (Prov. 3.4) and the attitude of one who achieves success (Prov 13.15; cf. 10.5). In the book of Samuel, David is said to have 'been successful' on the battlefield (שׂכל; 1 Sam 18.5, 14-15 (2x), 30). Barth's use of 'klug' (and its cognate 'Klugheit') matches fairly well the sense of the Hebrew term.

[15] *KD* IV/2, 482; *CD* IV/2, 429. Compare, for example, Barth's description of Abigail's hasty preparations to go and meet David – 'When the elect of God draws near, and with him the judgement, then wisdom [*Weisheit*] does not first debate with foolishness [*Torheit*], but simply bypasses it and does what is commanded' (*loc. cit.*) – with his comments on the coming of Jesus Christ as the coming of judgement (*KD* IV/1, 241-42; *CD* IV/1, 219-20).

[16] *KD* IV/2, 482; *CD* IV/2, 428.

[17] 1 Sam 25.17; cf. also 25.25.

himself 'impossible'.[18] This results in Nabal's disappearance as a matter of necessity: 'For him the message of salvation itself, once more unrecognised, turns to judgement, to death. He *can* only vanish and thus he does in fact [*tätsachlich*] vanish from the scene.'[19] The death of Nabal is not merely a contingent occurrence within this narrative world; it is the only thing which *can* happen. But Barth is not appealing here to the logic of the story's plot. This necessity derives from the logic of the *Sache* (i.e. Barth's christological anthropology): the man who does not recognise himself in God's election of humanity has rendered himself impossible and therefore *must* vanish. What 'actually [*tätsachlich*]' happens in the narrative reflects this *sachlich* necessity.[20]

For Abigail's part, her 'cleverness' consists in her knowledge and acceptance of David as who and what he really is: the elect of Yahweh. She knows the Messianic secret (so to speak), and '*this is why* she is the *clever* Abigail [*die* kluge *Abigail*]'.[21] Barth finds the rationale for all Abigail's narrated activity in this knowledge: 'Everything else depends on this, has its meaning and its power in this: that Abigail *knows* and may speak about David and thereby about the will and promise of Israel's God, about the secret of the covenant.'[22] The story's conclusion with the marriage of Abigail to David is a matter of 'inner necessity'.[23] Once again, this necessity does not derive from the logic of the unfolding plot: Barth denies that the marriage is foreshadowed or prepared for by any romantic developments within the narrative.[24] In marrying David, Abigail 'simply carries through to the end the role allotted to her in her cleverness [*Klugheit*]'.[25] 'She belongs to him as the wisdom [*Weisheit*] which steps into the place of foolishness and speaks in its place, without which he could not be the one he is as Yahweh's elect'.[26] Because they respectively typify wisdom and divine election, Abigail and David are mutually constitutive; they are two sides of the same coin.

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[18] Cf. Barth's description of sinful humanity: 'He does not conduct himself as the partner whom God has given himself, the recipient of his saving grace. He has opposed his ordination to salvation. He has turned his back on the salvation which actually comes to him. […] It is *this* man with whom God has to do in this particular redemptive history: the man who has made himself impossible with respect to the saving grace of God, and the man who has thus also become impossible in his created being as man, who has lost the ground beneath his feet, his *raison d'être*' (*KD* IV/1, 9; *CD* IV/1, 10).

[19] *KD* IV/2, 485; *CD* IV/2, 431.

[20] Barth's argumentation here is reminiscent of his comments in *Der Römerbrief* on Rom 4.9-12, in which he describes two distinct kinds of necessity – *sachlich* and *zeitlich* – and similarly gives precedence to that which the *Sache* demands over what 'temporally' or 'actually' takes place (see Chapter 1, section 3.b in this study).

[21] *KD* IV/2, 483; *CD* IV/2, 429.

[22] *KD* IV/2, 483; *CD* IV/2, 429. Emphasis modified.

[23] *KD* IV/2, 486; *CD* IV/2, 432.

[24] *KD* IV/2, 485; *CD* IV/2, 431. On the persuasiveness of this claim, see below.

[25] *KD* IV/2, 486; *CD* IV/2, 432.

[26] *KD* IV/2, 486; *CD* IV/2, 432. Note that here, as on a few other occasions in his treatment, Barth's vocabulary has slipped from the initial descriptor 'klug' (with cognate *Klugheit*) to the slightly more abstract 'Weisheit'; this slippage permits a shift from the concretely defined 'success' achieved by Abigail in the story through her

> David would not be David without Abigail, without recognising her on his part; just as Abigail would not be the clever Abigail without doing the same and therefore without David. Therefore he must take her as wife, she must be his wife, they must both become one flesh.[27]

Here it is clear that 'Abigail' and 'David' are interchangeable with 'wisdom' and 'the humanity God elects' as defined in Barth's christological anthropology. This is why Barth sees an unparalleled significance in the marriage of 'Abigail' and 'David': it is necessitated by and therefore reflects and discloses the nature and structure of God's fulfilment of the covenant in Jesus Christ.

2. Temporal sequence and narrative characterisation

Barth's christological (and hamartiological) interpretation of 1 Sam 25 involves a representational schema in which David represents Jesus Christ and the relationships of Nabal and Abigail to David represent, respectively, foolishness and wisdom, as christologically conceived. One might already suspect that this approach may tend to subordinate the narrative form to the schematic interrelation of typical figures, rather than closely following the contours of the biblical narrative. Barth's handling of key events in the narrative – Abigail's embassy and David's response, and the marriage of Abigail and David – demonstrates that he interprets the narrative in such a way as to minimize the significance of a specific feature of narrative that he finds perennially troublesome: its temporal sequence. This has serious consequences for his depiction of the narrative's characters.

According to Barth, when told that David has approached Nabal and been rudely rebuffed, Abigail immediately knows that she and her household are dealing with God's elect. Without her husband's knowledge, she prepares the requested food, sends it ahead by means of her servants, and sets out herself to meet David. Upon encountering David, Abigail's behavior betrays no anxiety, but only 'unconditional respect'; she solemnly and emphatically declares his identity and future 'with a very definite superiority'.[28] She 'fearlessly and wholeheartedly' takes up Nabal's cause with David, offering herself in his place despite her innocence.[29] Knowing that David is the anointed and future king of Israel, she asks for forgiveness. She is

'cleverness' (see below) to a theological and christological conception of wisdom which threatens to become untethered from the narrative. Barth's preliminary discussion of humanity's universal foolishness and the God who is 'the God of the fool' has prepared the way for this move.

[27] *KD* IV/2, 486; *CD* IV/2, 432.
[28] *KD* IV/2, 483; *CD* IV/2, 429.
[29] *KD* IV/2, 483; *CD* IV/2, 429.

not concerned about herself, but about him: she wishes to prevent David from incurring guilt by becoming the instrument of Nabal's destruction.

However, Barth is deeply impressed by the curious way Abigail's request is framed:

> *Wishes* to prevent this? The thought-provoking feature of her speech to David consists in precisely this: that she considers it as something objectively *already prevented.* With such superiority does she face the angry man David (before whom, however, she lies face-down on the earth!), so little does she fear him, so little does she doubt the success of her intervention, that she speaks even from the beginning as of an already accomplished fact [*von einer schon vollendeten Tatsache*]: 'And now, lord, as God truly lives, and as you yourself truly live, whom Yahweh *has prevented* [abgehalten hat] from falling into bloodguilt and helping yourself with your own hand…!'[30]

This, like the pronouncements of vv. 28-30, is an 'anticipation' of the future Yahweh has promised to David.[31] But it is more than mere anticipation: 'This is the wisdom of Abigail in her relation to David […]: her knowledge that he, as the one he is and will be, *may* not, *cannot* and therefore actually *will* not do that which he wishes to do.'[32] The identical basis of both Abigail's request for forgiveness and David's acquiescence is 'one which is already realised and operative, excluding from the very outset the execution of his purpose.'[33] David thus repeats Abigail's words: 'as surely as Yahweh the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you'.[34] For Barth, this means that '[t]he request of Abigail therefore did not first require fulfilment: it *was* already fulfilled, when and indeed before it was spoken. It only drew his attention to the accomplished fact that he *could* not and therefore *would* not do that which he wanted to do.'[35] According to Barth, before David's violent purpose is aborted, before Abigail even attempts to forestall that purpose, forgiveness is *already* operative. 'When David hears the voice of this wisdom, no particular decision is needed. It is decided for him: he *is* prevented from doing what he wished to do.'[36]

The textual basis for Barth's interpretation is the *qatal* or perfect form of the verb 'restrained' (מָנָעֲךָ) in v. 26. Abigail says that Yahweh 'has restrained' David from his course of action, when that action is apparently still in train. Some interpreters, observing the

[30] *KD* IV/2, 484; *CD* IV/2, 430. Barth's reading assumes that the difficult אֲשֶׁר of 1 Sam 25.26 MT refers back to נַפְשְׁךָ (rendering the pronominal suffix redundant). Ralph W. Klein argues that the text should read כַּאֲשֶׁר (as 𝔊): *1 Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 245.
[31] *KD* IV/2, 484; *CD* IV/2, 430.
[32] *KD* IV/2, 484; *CD* IV/2, 430.
[33] *KD* IV/2, 484; *CD* IV/2, 430.
[34] 1 Sam 25.34; cf. 25.26.
[35] *KD* IV/2, 485; *CD* IV/2, 431.
[36] *KD* IV/2, 485; *CD* IV/2, 431.

difficulty, have suggested that the text is faulty at this point.[37] For Barth, however, this apparent temporal dislocation is not a problem to be solved, but an indication of the true matter at issue; this is one of the 'emphases' in this portrayal indicating 'something of material significance'.[38] Abigail knows and declares to David that in his election by Yahweh his course of action has already objectively been forestalled: this is why it cannot and will not happen. However, Barth's interpretation is by no means the sole and self-evident interpretative possibility for the text as it stands. David Toshio Tsumura offers an alternative explanation for the verb in question: 'Abigail was probably observing his reaction to her presence, and could tell he was inclining toward restraint. Also, taking his agreement for granted is a good rhetorical ploy.'[39] This interpretation, if more mundane, arguably attends more closely to the rhetorical and affective nuances of the human interactions playing out in this scene. It is not a matter of strict interpretative necessity, therefore, that one sees in the form of this verb an invitation to disregard the apparent temporal sequence of the rest of the narrative.

More briefly, the second point at which Barth's interpretation involves temporal disruption is the marriage of Abigail to David after the death of Nabal. As we have seen, for Barth this event is not the product of cumulative developments in the unfolding story; it does not follow from the logic of the plot. The logic at work here is rather the logic of the *Sache*. As the personification of wisdom, the wisdom inseparably bound up with God's election of humanity, she is 'the helpmeet allotted to him (Gen 2.18)', and 'In this function she belongs to David *even before she belongs to him*.'[40] The narrative's final event serves to 'actualise and confirm' what is already the case: neither can exist without the other.[41] Like David's acquiescence to Abigail's embassy, both David's proposal and Abigail's acceptance are a foregone conclusion.

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[37] For P. Kyle McCarter, the verse is 'clearly out of place' and belongs between vv. 41 and 42 (*I Samuel: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 394.) Ralph W. Klein attributes the difficulty to clumsy redactional insertions by the Deuteronomist (*1 Samuel*, 247, 250.)

[38] One may catch here another echo of Origen's suggestion that the incongruous textual *signum* alerts the reader to its true spiritual *res*.

[39] *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 588–89. As another alternative, we might also see in Abigail's words a reference back to the events of ch. 24, in which David displays a superhuman restraint in the face of prime opportunity to 'save with his own hand' (note that chapter's repeated and rich play with the word יָד; and the general preoccupation of the books of Samuel with the question of whether David's replacement of Saul has left him with 'blood on his hands'). Abigail certainly seems to have (perhaps preternatural) familiarity with the events of David's story so far: is it a coincidence that, according to 1 Sam 25.29, David's enemies will be dispatched by the very same method he employed against Goliath? This interpretation depends no more than Barth's does on Abigail's access to the information the narrator has shared with the implied reader, and can appeal to the close proximity of the events of ch. 24 and their thematic similarities with the events of chs. 25 and 26 (not to mention the benefit of preserving the narrative's temporal sequence). Cf. Walter Dietrich, *Samuel: Bd. 2 (1Sam 13-26)*, BKAT, VIII (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015), 781; John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 269–70.

[40] *KD* IV/2, 486; *CD* IV/2, 432. Emphasis added.

[41] *KD* IV/2, 486; *CD* IV/2, 432.

Barth's interpretation thus downplays the importance of the narrative's temporal sequence: two of its key events are regarded not as developments within the story, but as internal to an event beyond the narrative's temporal scope: the event of election. Both the forestalling of David's wrath and the union of David and Abigail are already assumed before they actually take place, because David is 'the elect of Yahweh'.

As the narrative's temporal sequence fades in importance, so too does the concrete particularity of its human characters. In Barth's reading, the character of David retains something of the three-dimensional portrayal for which the narratives of 1-2 Samuel (and 1 Kings 1-2) are particularly notable. Yet at this point tensions are apparent between the 'David' of the narrative and the 'elect of God' with whom Barth equates this figure. As David bears down on Nabal's household, 'the elect of God draws near, and with him the judgement'.[42] Yet at the same time Barth tells us that in David's action he is answering folly with folly: this is an unjust act of retribution which, if executed, will cause David himself to incur guilt. In this case David's agency as a character in the narrative has been preserved – he is 'a man like others' – at the cost of some coherence in Barth's exposition.[43] This is not so in David's response to Abigail's embassy. In the face of Abigail's declaration of the 'accomplished fact' given in and with his election by Yahweh, David is stripped of his agency: no decision is required of him because it has already been taken in and with the fact that he is 'the elect of God'.

If the David of the narrative is eroded in Barth's reading, then Abigail is all but effaced. The narrator informs us that she is 'beautiful and clever', and Barth tells us what this means: that she represents the wisdom which, assuming the place of folly, perceives and acknowledges 'the elect of God' and thus is inseparable from this 'elect'. The narrative, however, goes on to dramatically *show* us what it means that this woman is 'clever' (טוֹבַת־שֶׂכֶל).[44] At the outset, we understand that she 'is as well-matched with David as she is mismatched with Nabal.'[45] She, like David, is a magnetic figure who can command the willing loyalty of those who are

[42] *KD* IV/2, 482; *CD* IV/2, 429.
[43] *KD* IV/2, 482; *CD* IV/2, 428. Perhaps the tension involved in associating the Christ-figure with this act of bloody retribution is diminished by the distinctive emphasis of Barth's Christology on the unlimited solidarity of Jesus with sinners (though the fact still remains that Barth wishes to deny the actual sinfulness of Christ). See *KD* IV/1, 187; *CD* IV/1, 172.
[44] For readings which are attentive to the subtle rhetorical and emotional dynamics at play here, see Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 152–56; Levenson, 'I Samuel 25 as Literature and as History', 17–20.
[45] Levenson, 'I Samuel 25 as Literature and as History', 18. The explicit and unflattering contrast between Nabal and Abigail (25.3), and implicit similarity between Abigail and David (compare 1 Sam 25.3 with 1 Sam 16.12, 18; 18.5, 14-15, 30) – let alone the subtext of Abigail's speech – is enough to put paid to Barth's claim that there is in the foregoing narrative 'no hint (at least, no hint of a romantic kind)' that paves the way for the marriage with which the story concludes (*KD* IV/2, 486; *CD* IV/2, 430;).

naturally or ostensibly bound to another.[46] She echoes the crafty Jacob in her careful manipulation of her encounter with David to ensure a propitious hearing.[47] When the moment comes, despite the highest stakes and the anxiety patent in her haste and prostration, she seizes it firmly, delivering the speech of a lifetime, carefully distancing herself from Nabal and protecting herself without displaying the naked disloyalty which would, in every sense, ruin her appeal.[48] At the same time she proves her worth to David by declaring his future prospects her own concern, and leaves him with the deft suggestion that he 'remember your maidservant' when the blameless success she has enabled finally eventuates.[49] Is this a marriage proposal? Abigail does not know how this story will end, and thus she has carefully intimated a possibility whilst maintaining plausible deniability.[50] She negotiates the story's last act no less shrewdly, carefully timing the news of her encounter with David for the cold, sober light of day; thus Nabal's heart has died even before Yahweh strikes him down.[51] Abigail begins the story in a marital situation which is at best difficult and perhaps even dangerous.[52] When the decisive moment arrives, her swift yet finely calibrated actions turn disaster to triumph. By the *dénouement*, she is married to a rising star, our hero. This, according to the narrative of 1 Sam 25, is Abigail's 'cleverness', her 'success' (שֶׂכֶל). It is difficult not to see the serene and submissive figure of Barth's presentation as a sad diminution of the 'clever and beautiful' Abigail cumulatively rendered by the narrative.

As Barth's christological reading pushes the narrative's temporal sequence into the background, the dynamic tension drains out of the narrative, and with it much of the genuine agency and realistic characterisation of the story's principal actors. Barth's impulse to pursue such a reading stems not only from extrinsic dogmatic concerns, but also from features of the text itself: namely, the curious *qatal* verb of 1 Sam 25.26, the 'disappearance' of Nabal, and the surprising-yet-unsurprising matrimonial finale. Nevertheless, what is truly indispensable for Barth's christological interpretation is the christological schema he perceives in the

[46] 1 Sam 25.14-19; cf. David's relationships with Jonathan and Michal.
[47] 1 Sam 25.19; cf. Gen 32-33.
[48] 1 Sam 25.24-31.
[49] 1 Sam 25.31.
[50] See Alter, *The David Story*, 159.
[51] 1 Sam 25.36-38.
[52] Is Abigail only indulging in wordplay when she tells David that 'Nabal [נָבָל] is his name; and foolishness [נְבָלָה] is with him' (1 Sam 25.25)? In OT usage, נְבָלָה can describe an atrocious act of sexual violence, with נָבָל denoting the one who perpetrates this act (e.g. 2 Sam 13.12-13; Judg 20.6). See Anthony Phillips, 'Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct', *Vetus Testamentum* 25, no. 2 (1975): 237–42. Might Abigail have more than one reason not to approach her husband in his lordly drunkenness? At any rate, the story leads the reader to understand that Nabal is such an incorrigible cretin that it would mean 'foolishness' of the highest order for Abigail to remain 'with him' – but Abigail is nobody's fool.

narrative, rather than the cumulative interplay of character and incident which constitutes the narrative itself.

3. 1 Samuel 25 as allegorical parable

As noted at the outset, the dogmatic context within which Barth offers his exposition of 1 Sam 25 is his christological account of hamartiology. In the light of the elect man Jesus Christ, sinful humanity is revealed as slothful; the basic dimension of this sloth is stupidity or foolishness. The presence of person explicitly designated as a 'fool' in 1 Sam 25 does not suffice to fit the passage for Barth's purpose: his theological interest is not in foolishness *per se*, or even in foolishness as a biblical theme, but in the foolishness of 'the man of sin' as revealed by humanity's exaltation in Jesus Christ. Barth is seeking a christological definition of foolishness – or, more precisely, to indirectly define foolishness in relation to Jesus Christ. He must therefore seek indications of a 'christological content' for this christologically anonymous text. As we have already seen, though Barth omits the name 'Jesus Christ' in his discussion of 1 Sam 25, he nevertheless offers a christological interpretation of the narrative, expounding the passage's meaning in terms of the Christology and christological anthropology he is developing in his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation'.[53] Barth's strategy for constructing this reading echoes the parabolic approach to christological interpretation identified earlier in his exposition of the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Elsewhere Barth deploys an aporetic strategy for the christological interpretation of Old Testament narratives, arguing that the story fails to make sense on its own terms and therefore demands a christological interpretation.[54] Here, however, one figure within the narrative is subtly but simply equated with Jesus Christ. By characterising David through a cluster of carefully chosen terms which embrace both David and Jesus Christ – 'anointed', 'promise-bearer', and most importantly 'elect' – Barth renders this figure polysemous. As a narrative about 'the elect', this story becomes a vehicle (or *Bild*) for a christological tenor (*Sache*): in

[53] Cf. Dietrich's comment: 'Die Gestalt Nabals repräsentiert für ihn [i.e. Barth] – einigermaßen überraschend – die Sünde der Trägheit. Warum? Weil Nabal sich nicht bequemt, in David den zu sehen, der er ist, der „Erwählte Jhwhs" […]. Diese Deutung setzt eine messianische Lesung von 1Sam 25 voraus.' (*Samuel: Bd. 2 (1Sam 13-26)*, 798.)

[54] See Barth's expositions of the Old Testament in *CD* II/2 (*KD* II/2, 391-453; *CD* II/2, 354-410), where the enigmatic texts treated point either to Jesus Christ or 'into the void' (*KD* II/2, 401; *CD* II/2, 363), and the discussion in Greene-McCreight, '"A Type of the One to Come": Leviticus 14 and 16 in Barth's Church Dogmatics'; Higton, 'The Fulfilment of History in Barth, Frei, Auerbach and Dante', 126–33. This is also the strategy underlying Barth's appeal to the implicit 'presupposition' of the plot in the parable of the Prodigal Son (and the somewhat different appeal to the over-strong explicit statements that the son 'was dead and is alive' etc.).

explicitly describing the interactions between David and other characters, the narrative implicitly declares the relationships between Jesus Christ, wisdom, and folly. Barth's christological reading strategy for this Old Testament text makes no appeal, explicit or implicit, to the integration of its narrative in a canonical metanarrative embracing both David and Christ; one figure is not an anticipation or prefiguration of the other.[55] The referential relationship is more direct, and understood in terms of Barth's proximate dogmatic concerns: David is to Nabal as Jesus Christ is to the man of sin.

The particular character of Barth's christological interpretation will be better understood if it is set in relation to other literary approaches to this narrative. After the literary turn in biblical studies, and especially the emphasis on the distinctive artfulness of Hebrew narration, exegetes began to explore the possibilities of understanding 1 Sam 25 in terms of 'narrative analogy, through which one part of the text provides oblique commentary on another.'[56] For Jon D. Levenson, David's interaction with Nabal in 1 Sam 25 is spliced between his interactions with Saul in chs. 24 and 26 in order to create a relationship of contrast. All three passages share the theme of David's restraint from killing, and the central episode shows us that David is not only the unimpeachable hero, but can also be 'a man who kills for a grudge', and thus gives 'the very first revelation of evil in David's character.'[57] In this way, a narrative analogy is formed with the Bathsheba episode, in which David actually *does* unrighteously kill a man and take his wife, shedding innocent blood and engendering lasting trouble for his descendants: '1 Samuel 25 is a proleptic glimpse, within David's ascent, of his fall from grace.'[58] There is also a further narrative analogy with the rebellion of Sheba son of Bichri against David (2 Sam 20) and the ultimate division of the kingdom following Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 11-12). In Levenson's reading, then, narrative analogy functions within the story's literary contexts: both the immediate narrative context (the triptych structure of 1 Sam 24-26) and the broader narrative contexts of the canonical book(s) of Samuel and the Former Prophets.[59]

Robert P. Gordon, responding to Levenson's reading, argues for a rather different analogical relationship between 1 Sam 25 and the tripartite 'narrative segment' in which it is the central

[55] This is all the more striking in light of the abundant NT resources – of which Barth's exposition makes no use – by which David and Jesus might be related as type and antitype, not least the description of Jesus at the very beginning of the NT: 'Jesus Christ, son of David' (Matt 1.1).
[56] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 21. Levenson cites this material in an earlier form: see 'I Samuel 25 as Literature and as History', 23.
[57] Levenson, 'I Samuel 25 as Literature and as History', 23.
[58] Levenson, 24.
[59] The canon on view here is the Hebrew Bible.

element (i.e. 1 Sam 24-26).[60] For Gordon, the *analogans* is the figure of Nabal, and the close *analogatum* is Saul. 'The point can be expressed in the simple equation: Nabal=Saul. Saul does not vanish from view in 1 Samuel 25; he is Nabal's *alter ego*.'[61] 'Psychologically Saul and Nabal are geminate.'[62] This analogical equation is pushed even further by Barbara Green, for whom Nabal is in fact a psychological projection of Saul. For Green, the world of this text is (quite literally) a dream-world: the narrative slides from away realism into representation – into an allegorical 'parable'.[63] As proposed narrative analogies tighten into a concealed allegorical equations, the narrative world of 1 Sam 25 correspondingly shades into unreality. Reviewing such interpretative approaches, Joseph Lozovyy warns that they risk obfuscating textual details which cannot readily be made to serve the analogy, turning the figures of the narrative into mere ciphers, such that it will be easy to conclude that the text is 'nothing but an allegory': dispensable, once the kernel has been extracted from the husk.[64]

No sharp separation can be made between reading the narrative as a looser literary 'analogy' and as a tighter moral or psychological 'allegory'. Levenson, though pursuing the former approach, acknowledges that in 1 Sam 25, 'we are close to the world of moral allegory', in that 'two of the three major figures in the latter tale [i.e. 1 Sam 25] can be viewed, in part, as personifications of certain character types common in Israelite Wisdom literature. One of them even bears as his personal name the designation of such a type.'[65] Nevertheless, we may observe the author striking a careful balance in his literary *poiesis*. Certainly in the shaping of the narrative some authorial or redactional editorialising is required so that the reader understands that 'the events refer to a realm of ideas outside themselves'.[66] However,

> If he [i.e. the author] only editorializes, he ends up with a sermon, not a narrative. The *desideratum*, then, is a story in which the author both defines his characters and lets the action and speeches prove his definition correct, in which the narrative bodies forth and bears out the author's moral vision.[67]

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[60] Robert P. Gordon, 'David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24-26', *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1979): 37–64. Gordon highlights numerous thematic and linguistic connections between 1 Sam 25 and its immediate narrative context, including Saul's admission that he has 'played the fool [הִסְכַּלְתִּי]' (1 Sam 26.21 AV).
[61] Gordon, 43.
[62] Gordon, 44.
[63] Barbara Green, 'Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul', *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 1 (2003): 5–7. Similarly, Adele Berlin judges that an allegorical reading is appropriate because the narrative and its characters are unrealistic; the latter are 'neither agents nor full-fledged characters. Rather they are types.' ('Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives', *JSOT* 23 (1982): 76–77.)
[64] Joseph Lozovyy, *Saul, Doeg, Nabal, and the 'Son of Jesse': Readings in 1 Samuel 16-25* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 11–12.
[65] Levenson, 'I Samuel 25 as Literature and as History', 22.
[66] Levenson, 22.
[67] Levenson, 22.

If, therefore, a narrative is taken to *mean* something beyond the mere telling of the tale, then interpreters must decide whether the author has crafted an artistic object of sufficient integrity and robustness that it can, in declaring itself, also speak beyond itself by way of analogy – or whether the story is something more insubstantial, such that its figures and actions are only *simulacra* allegorically representing truths which lie elsewhere.

For Barth, the narrative of David, Abigail, and Nabal *does* (indeed, *must*) mean something. The story speaks of something not expressly declared in the text. Barth is, of course, uninterested in the author's 'moral vision'. He reads this text not as a moral but as a *theological* 'sermon', 'allegory', or 'parable'. There are marked similarities between Barth's reading and the tighter 'allegorical' literary approaches. Like Barth, Gordon highlights Nabal's refusal 'to know, in particular to acknowledge David for who and what he is', and locates the marked contrast between '"the lady and the fool" […] in their respective attitudes to David; Abigail is as perspicacious as Nabal is obstinately blind.'[68] For Barth, however, Nabal's 'alter ego' is not the literary figure of Saul, but the theological figure of 'the man of sin' who refuses to see in Jesus Christ his own election and salvation. The story of David, Abigail and Nabal speaks of God's elect man, of that wisdom which is inextricable from God's elect man and that foolishness which, refusing to acknowledge God's elect man, denies its own existence.

The logic of Barth's christological reading strongly echoes the way that Jesus' narrative parables function. John W. Sider identifies 'proportional equation' – the equation of two relationships with respect to a certain *tertium comparationis*, which may be diagrammatically represented A : B = a : b (with respect to x) – as the thought-form chiefly operative in Jesus' parables.[69] The 'parable' (παραβολή; Luke 21.29-32) of the Fig Tree is a prime example: 'As soon as they [the fig tree etc.] come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.' 'These things' are to the kingdom of God as the trees' leaves are to the summer, with respect to certainty as portents. Jülicher identified this thought-form in Jesus' 'sub-narrative' parables (the similitudes or *Gleichnisse*), but it is also operative in the extended narrative parables, and the 'extension of image into narrative means extension of one proportional equation into two or more.'[70] Parabolic narratives functioning in this way are innately 'allegorical'. This term need and ought not to carry pejorative force (as if 'allegorical' literature were inherently suspect); it is simply an accurate descriptor for this mode of

[68] Gordon, 'David's Rise and Saul's Demise', 46.
[69] John W. Sider, 'Proportional Analogy in the Gospel Parables', *NTS* 31, no. 1 (1985): 1.
[70] Sider, 3, 22. cf. *DGJ*, 1:72-73.

communication.[71] A narrative parable makes meaning through a depiction, at the level of the narrative as a whole, of a set of relationships, which is to be equated (with respect to a certain feature) with another set of relationships (i.e. the tenor/*Sache*).[72]

Barth's christological reading of the narrative of David, Abigail, and Nabal can be neatly presented in these terms. Where Gordon offers a simple equation between the text's explicit content and its implicit referent ('Nabal=Saul'), Barth constructs a more complex proportional equation: David : Nabal = Jesus Christ : 'the man of sin'. This is the most important relationship, but Barth also constructs further proportional equations (David : Abigail = Jesus Christ : wisdom, and Abigail : Nabal = wisdom : folly) according to the permutations of relationships in the narrative. That is, Barth reads the story as a parable, constructing an analogy between the network of relationships depicted by the narrative (*i.e.* the vehicle/*Bild*) and the elements of his christological anthropology (chiefly 'the elect man' and 'the man of sin'), which constitutes the tenor or *Sache*.

In Jesus' parables, analogies are often incompletely stated, with the vehicle explicit but the tenor elided, and yet remain intelligible if the reader/hearer is supplied with 'suitable context'.[73] What is the 'suitable context' by which Barth is able to connect the textual *Bild* of 1 Sam 25 to its christological *Sache*? Importantly, this context is clearly not a canonical metanarrative embracing both this narrative and the story of Jesus Christ. The equation between David and Jesus which anchors Barth's proportional analogy is not a typological relationship of 'old' and 'new' arising out of the temporal structure of a salvation history. The narrative of 1 Samuel 25, like a parable, is a self-contained literary world. Barth does draw on some aspects of the narrative's broader literary context within 1-2 Samuel in order to equate David as 'the elect of Yahweh' with Jesus Christ. Yet even this appeal to the narrative's literary context is very limited, and is not entirely straightforward. Neither 1 Samuel 25 nor its narrative context explicitly describes David as 'the elect of Yahweh'. Even in the anointing scene mentioned by Barth, while the implication of Yahweh 'not choosing' (לֹא־בָחַר יְהוָה; 16.8) David's Saul-like

[71] Drawing on Sider's work, and Hans-Josef Klauck's clarifying distinctions between *Allegorie* (a literary mode present in diverse genres, imbuing texts with a symbolic dimension at the level of composition), *Allegorese* (the allegorical interpretation and elaboration of allegorical texts) and *Allegorisierung* (the imposition of allegorical interpretation on non-allegorical texts), Craig L. Blomberg advocates for the rehabilitation of 'allegory' in biblical studies and for the recognition of the essentially allegorical character of Jesus' parables: see *Interpreting the Parables*, esp. 36-48. See also Robert Louis Wilken, 'In Defense of Allegory', *Modern Theology* 14, no. 2 (1998): 197–212.

[72] This kind of allegory assumes that parabolic meaning (i.e. *Sache*) is holistically interwoven with the narrative *Bild*. See Mary Ford, 'Towards the Restoration of Allegory: Christology, Epistemology and Narrative Structure', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34, no. 2/3 (1990): 171.

[73] Sider, 12. *E.g.*, though the tenor is elided in the parable of the Tenants, Jesus' opponents 'perceived that he had told this parable against them' (Luke 20.9-19).

older brothers is clear, David – unlike Saul – is not explicitly described as 'chosen'/'elect' (16.6-7; cf. 10.23-24). Barth's characterisation of David as 'the elect of Yahweh' – and as 'the promise-bearer κατ' ἐξοχήν', in whose person Nabal encounters 'Yahweh's own presence and action' and Abigail perceives 'the will and promise, the secret of the covenant, of the God of Israel' – resonates much more strongly with his own dogmatic articulation of Jesus Christ, elect man and electing God, than with David's cumulative narrative characterisation in the narrative of the books of Samuel.[74] Once again, the literary context of *Church Dogmatics* itself, in which this portrayal of Jesus Christ takes shape, is the 'suitable context' which enables the parabolic christological interpretation of the christologically anonymous narrative in 1 Sam 25. Barth's deliberate choice to interpret this particular text at this particular juncture in the pursuit of his constructive dogmatic project carries concealed but decisive force for the shape of his interpretation; the christological interpretation of the text offered here would not be possible in another context. Barth's christological interpretation of 1 Sam 25 is thus a true 'virtuoso performance': brilliant, uplifting, and inspiring, but not reproducible.[75]

4. Conclusion

The story of David, Abigail, and Nabal, like the parable of the prodigal Son, makes no explicit mention of Jesus Christ; both narratives are christologically anonymous. Nevertheless, Barth interprets both narratives christologically, and his interpretative approach to the Old Testament narrative closely parallels his treatment of the New Testament parable. Like the world rendered by a parable, the narrative world of this Old Testament story is self-contained; the text's christological meaningfulness is only minimally dependent on its integration in its immediate literary context, and is not sustained or shaped in any way by the unfolding temporal sequence of an overarching canonical metanarrative. The figures of David and Jesus Christ are not related as 'antitype' and 'type' (i.e. 'old' and 'new') within a salvation-historical story. There is no sense here of the Old Testament's significant priority to the New Testament. In typological interpretation, the temporal structure of Old and New helps to safeguard the integrity and genuine alterity of the type; in Barth's parabolic interpretation, having dispensed with this structure, the type is drawn irresistibly into the gravitational pull of the antitype.

[74] Significantly, the explicit attribution of election, promise, and covenant to David all occur much *later* in the narrative, especially in association with the distinct and concrete divine speech-act described in 2 Samuel 7; insofar as Barth's portrait of David corresponds to the biblical depiction, it treats the latter as a synchronous totality.

[75] Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 9–11.

Barth relates David and Jesus Christ as *analogans* and *analogatum* within an *analogia proportionalitatis*. Barth multiplies both proportional equations and *tertia comparationis*: Nabal is to David as the man of sin is to the elect man not only with respect to failure of recognition, but also with respect to necessary displacement. Abigail is to David as wisdom is to the elect man, with respect to proper recognition and with respect to their necessary and indissoluble unity. Abigail is to Nabal as wisdom is to folly, with respect to gracious displacement in the face of judgement. The analogy between textual *Bild* and christological *Sache* is drawn tightly, stressing similarity and minimising dissimilarity. Every analogy must break down at some point; in order to maintain his narrative analogy as he draws it ever tighter, Barth instead allows the *narrative* to break down.

Read as a parable of the humanity elected by God in Jesus Christ – as the textual vehicle for a christological *Sache* – the narrative of 1 Sam 25 takes on an air of unreality. Barth's parabolic and allegorical christological reading is by no means an arbitrary act of interpretative violence; election, wisdom, and folly are themes obviously present in the narrative itself, and Barth gives careful attention to many of the features of the text as it stands in its canonical form. The final result of Barth's reading, however, is that the contours – of action and consequence, knowledge and uncertainty – which structure the narrative are smoothed and flattened. The spectrum of unique psychological, emotional, and rhetorical colour which gives the narrative its vibrancy and power and sets it firmly in the one real world – the world of both text and reader – is attenuated and dimmed. The narrative's characters lose their distinct identity and agency, becoming theological ciphers. The textual residuum which might serve as a reminder that Abigail is not simply the personification of wisdom, but a particular 'clever' woman, and that David the Messiah is not simply Jesus Christ, but only his tragically flawed anticipation, is allowed to fade from view. In Barth's parabolic christological interpretation, the narrative, rather than generating an analogical or typological *extra* when perceived in its canonical context, tends to be reduced to 'nothing but an allegory'. For all the creative insight and power of Barth's christological interpretation, we may judge that in this case the charge of flattening the Old Testament's distinct anticipatory witness to Jesus Christ is substantiated.

These same issues of the Old Testament's priority, integrity, and reality will emerge even more clearly as we turn in our next chapter to explore Barth's parabolic christological interpretation of the first creation narrative in the book of Genesis.

Chapter 6. Creation and covenant: Gen 1.1-2.4a as pre-historical parable

With this final chapter we broaden the scope of Part II of this study beyond Barth's 'Doctrine of Reconciliation', examining his interpretation in *CD* III/1 of the creation narrative with which the canon of Christian Scripture has its beginning. Barth's very substantial exposition of this Old Testament narrative text plays a key role in the dogmatic construction of his 'Doctrine of Creation'; here, therefore, the theological significance of Barth's compressive reading is especially clear. Once again, the concept of 'parable' proves instructive, now illuminating the similarities between a collection of parables of the kingdom and Barth's 'fractal' christological interpretation.

1. Christological exegesis in the doctrine of creation

In *CD* III/1-4, having found at the heart of the doctrine of God the reality of Jesus Christ – electing God and elect man – Barth focuses his attention on that which is distinct from God: the creation. For Barth, a genuinely Christian doctrine of creation must be a christological doctrine of creation. The first and second articles of the 'Apostles' Creed' are distinct but inseparable, and exist in a definite order: faith in Jesus Christ 'contains within itself faith in and therefore knowledge of God the Creator'.[1]

Here, as elsewhere, Barth spells out the hermeneutical implications (or underpinnings) of this dogmatic ordering. Every element in the credal statement that God is *creator coeli et terrae* may be traced back to 'the linguistic use of Holy Scripture'.[2] Yet it is not the biblical utterances about creation *per se* that constitute the proper foundation for a Christian doctrine, but rather these statements as 'testimony to Christ [*Christuszeugnis*], the divine self-witness of the Old and New Testaments in their differentiation and unity.'[3]

> Its [i.e. the Bible's] word in all words is this word. And it is this word, its testimony to Christ [*Christuszeugnis*], that makes all its words the infallible word of God. […] The entire Bible speaks prefiguratively [*vorbildlich*], prophetically of him, of *Jesus Christ*, when it speaks of the creation, of the Creator and of the creature. Therefore if we wish to rightly understand and appreciate what the Bible says about this topic, then we must primarily observe that in this – as with everything that it

[1] *KD* III/1, 33; *CD* III/1, 32. According Barth, that is, the order of the first and second articles of the Creed does not reflect their proper dogmatic ordering.
[2] *KD* III/1, 9; *CD* III/1, 11.
[3] *KD* III/1, 10; *CD* III/1, 11.

> says – it also first and last means and attests him. Here too he is the primary and ultimate object of its witness, which cannot be overlooked.[4]

Christ and creation are not only indissolubly linked, but stand in the relation of centre to circumference: 'the entire circumference of Scripture's content and thus also the truth and reality of the creation of the world by God can be understood only from this centre [*von dieser Mitte her*]'.[5] Moreover, it is in the 'centre of the Bible' – 'the fact [*Tatsache*] indicated in the name Emmanuel: that God has accepted humanity in Jesus Christ' – that 'God himself has made visible the relationship between Creator and creature – its basis, its norm and its meaning', and thus 'everything else that is to be learned from the Bible may be learned *in nuce* here.'[6] The only alternative to this christologically intensive approach, apparently, is a disjointed and untrinitarian biblicism which attempts to understand the biblical witness to creation 'without this centre', and thus quickly becomes 'confused myth and wild metaphysic'.[7] Barth's articulation of a Christian doctrine of creation, therefore, will require a christological interpretation and exposition which sets the Bible's textual material regarding creation in direct relationship to Jesus Christ, and thus approaches its exegetical labours at the dogmatic circumference as 'plain exegesis' of the 'text of this fact [*jener Tatsache*] attested at the centre of the Bible'.[8]

This is the task Barth undertakes in the section of 'The Doctrine of Creation' entitled 'Creation and Covenant'.[9] Barth's general practice in *Church Dogmatics* is to engage with the biblical text in *ad hoc* fashion. The dogmatic and the exegetical task are inseparable but distinct, and thus direct and explicit exegetical material (presented in smaller typeface in the English translation) complements and supplements Barth's own constructive theological account of any given dogmatic locus (presented in regular typeface).[10] Small-typeface sections, though they may be very extensive, fit within the framework provided by the regular-typeface sections. In Barth's account of 'Creation and Covenant' however, the biblical text provides the framework and dogmatic and exegetical concerns converge as theological commentary on the

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[4] *KD* III/1, 24; *CD* III/1, 23-24.
[5] *KD* III/1, 24; *CD* III/1, 24.
[6] *KD* III/1, 26; *CD* III/1, 25. That which is named by 'Emmanuel' is also 'the point [*Punkt*] […] to which the Bible refers from the beginning and on all sides' (*KD* III/1, 25; *CD* III/1, 24).
[7] *KD* III/1, 25-26; *CD* III/1, 24-25.
[8] *KD* III/1, 26; *CD* III/1, 25. Cf. Kathryn Tanner, 'Creation and Providence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112.
[9] *KD* III/1, 44-377; *CD* III/1, 42-329.
[10] See Barth's methodological comments on the relationship between dogmatics and exegesis (*CD* I/2, 820-822).

narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 becomes the mode of dogmatic construction.[11] As Barth states in the preface to *CD* III/1, 'I perceived the proper task for dogmatics, at this point, […] to consist exclusively in repeating this "saga" [*jene «Sage» nachzusagen*]'.[12]

This mode of theological construction, unique within *Church Dogmatics*, is determined in part by the extraordinary form of the Scriptural witness in Gen 1-2. In the biblical creation narratives, in accordance with the singular character of their content, the reader encounters 'pure saga [*Sage*]':[13] 'an intuitively and poetically formulated picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is concrete, unique, and confined in time and space.'[14] Poised between *Historie* (the reportage of empirically accessible world-occurrence) and *Mythus* (the imagistic depiction of eternal truth), the literary mode 'saga' combines the work of poetic imagination with an essential and irreducible narrativity.[15] That saga involves 'fantasy' and 'fabrication' – i.e. imagination and literary *poiesis* – detracts not at all from its truthfulness. Precisely in virtue of these elements, saga is the form uniquely suited to depict the truth of the uniquely historical event of creation. Creation is neither the kind of atemporal truth conveyed by myth nor is it seamlessly integrated with the sort of historical occurrence which is accessible to *Historie*: it is 'pre-historic history [*praehistorische Geschichte*]' and therefore 'unhistorical history [*unhistorische Geschichte*]', and thus properly depicted only by 'unhistorical historiography [*unhistorische Geschichtsschreibung*]'.[16] Crucially, the biblical creation sagas depict the 'pre-history' (*Vorgeschichte*) of the history of Israel, and thus remain distinct but inseparable from the history of God's covenant of grace.[17]

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[11] 'Unter dem »theologischen Ansatz« gehen Dogmatik, Exegese und Theologie ineinander über und ineinander auf: Theologie ist Exegese, und Exegese ist Dogmatik. Die dogmatische Argumentation wird bestimmt und geleistet durch die Exegese.' (Otto Bächli, *Das Alte Testament in der Kirchlichen Dogmatik von Karl Barth* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987), 227.) See also pp. 227-229.

[12] *KD* III/1, vii; *CD* III/1, x.

[13] *KD* III/1, 89; *CD* III/1, 82. According to Barth, *Sage* is pervasive in Scripture, but only rarely, as in Gen 1-2, is it 'pure' (i.e. unmixed with *Historie*). See *KD* III/1, 88-89; *CD* III/1, 81-82.

[14] 'Ich verstehen […] unter *Sage* ein divinatorisch-dichterisch entworfenes Bild einer konkret einmaligen, zeitlich-räumlich beschränkten praehistorischen Geschichtswirklichkeit' (*KD* III/1, 88; *CD* III/1, 81). We cannot address here all the complexities involved in this statement (or in the pyrrhic task of translating it into English): for useful discussion, including of the crucial distinction between *Historie*/*historisch* and *Geschichte*, see Andrew B. Torrance, 'Creation and Covenant: Karl Barth's Exegesis of Genesis 2:8-17', in *Freedom under the Word: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, ed. Ben Rhodes and Martin Westerholm (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 177–81. Barth's bespoke definition of *Sage* has its nearest neighbor in Gunkel's use of the concept in the introduction to his Genesis commentary (entitled 'Die Sagen der Genesis'); both the continuities and discontinuities between the two are instructive: see Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), vii–lxxxvi.

[15] Unlike myth, saga 'does not merely use narrative as an accepted form. It is narrative through and through. […] What it says can be said *only* in the form of its own narrative and of the narrative which follows on from it' (*KD* III/1, 91-95; *CD* III/1, 84-87).

[16] *KD* III/1, 84, 87; *CD* III/1, 78, 80. Emphasis modified.

[17] *KD* III/1, 67; *CD* III/1, 63.

In the context of the present study, the relevant dimensions of Barth's powerful and subtle conception of 'saga' are the striking similarities between 'saga' and parable as modes of cognition and communication. Both sagas and parables are works of literary artistry, engaging reality in fictive mode rather than aspiring to *wissenschaftlich* reportage. In both cases poetic intuition or imagination is essential in apprehending the truth of an object not directly accessible to human perception, and narrative is the indispensable form in which this truth is communicated: the story simply means what it says. But in both cases the meaning of the 'story' stands in a complex relationship to 'history': what is narrated in the form of parable or saga can neither be divorced from nor simply integrated within world-occurrence as the reader experiences it. Neither form purely presents the reader with 'just a story', nor with 'what actually happened'. In both biblical parable and biblical saga, the story's meaning is nothing other than what the story says, and yet what the story says also declares something beyond the story: the story bears witness to Jesus Christ.

This chapter will focus on Barth's parabolic christological exposition of Gen 1.1-2.4a, which he refers to as 'the first creation saga [*Schöpfungssage*]'.[18] For Barth, the biblical history of creation (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*) is presented in two discrete and independent but thematically complementary 'sagas'.[19] The first (Gen 1.1-2.4a) describes 'creation as the external basis of the covenant', and the second (Gen 2.4b-25) describes the 'the covenant as the internal basis of creation'.[20] Barth especially associates creation's prefigurative and anticipatory character with the second creation saga, and its promissory and proclamatory dimension with the first, but this is a question of emphasis rather than material distinction.[21] We will attend to the way that Barth grounds the teleological or prophetic character of the first creation saga in its prefigurative or sacramental character. To read the creation story as a 'prefiguration' of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ is, in effect, to read it as a parable of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

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[18] *KD* III/1, 108; *CD* III/1, 99. This delimitation is primarily for reasons of space.
[19] See Barth's comments at *KD* III/1, 259-263; *CD* III/1, 228-233.
[20] *KD* III/1, 261-62; *CD* III/1, 231. Barth characteristically accepts the judgement of critical scholars on the shape of the biblical text (namely that the 'Priestly' creation account in Gen 1 must be distinguished from the 'Elohistic' account in Gen 2: see *KD* III/1 259-60; *CD* III/1, 229) but exploits it for his own theological ends. There can be no question of creating a literary unity between these accounts by harmonisation of their narrative details. It is as discrete literary units that they combine in a discursive unity oriented to the question of creation and covenant: 'Barth ultimately harmonizes the sagas in light of their respective concerns with the creation-covenant relationship and connection with the history of the covenant of grace' (Christina N. Larsen, 'Barth on God's Graciousness toward Humanity in Genesis 1-2', in *Freedom under the Word: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, ed. Ben Rhodes and Martin Westerholm (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 209.)
[21] *KD* III/1, 262-63; *CD* III/1, 232.

In addition to the generic similarities between parable and saga, Barth takes a similar interpretative approach to the christological interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son and of the first creation saga. Each narrative, viewed in canonical perspective, attests something beyond the narrative – not because of an overarching canonical metanarrative, but because of structural parallels between the features of the text and the singular object of Scripture's witness (as Barth perceives it). Unlike the story of David, Abigail, and Nabal, however, Barth treats this text not as a single parable, but as a largely uncoordinated collection of parabolic images.

Jesus' parables of the kingdom are gregarious, congregating in clusters within the synoptic Gospels. Yet even in a crowd, parables stand alone. The parabolic reference of each parable generally operates independently of its neighbours. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus successively likens the 'kingdom of heaven' to a tiny seed, a hidden treasure, a net full of fish.[22] These brief parabolic word-pictures have a single speaker in Jesus of Nazareth and a single object in 'the kingdom of heaven', but what each image says about this kingdom, it says independently of the others. This is the case even when juxtaposed parabolic images seem to address the same aspect of the kingdom: if a reader with 'ears to hear' were to attend to either the parable of the Hidden Treasure or the parable of the Pearl in isolation from the other, the message about the kingdom's surpassing value would still ring out.[23] Likewise, even similarities in narrative or pictorial representation do not necessitate coordination, much less integration in a narrative unity. The reader's success or otherwise in identifying or distinguishing the 'sower' who 'went out to sow', the 'man who sowed good seed in his field', and the 'man' who 'took and sowed' a grain of mustard seed 'in his field' does not affect the communicative force of the parables in which these men figure.[24] There is no need to imagine that the parables of the Sower, Weeds and Mustard Seed depict successive episodes in an unfolding agricultural drama. For all that these brief narratives share in common – themes, speaker, textual location, and ultimate object – the parabolic reference to the kingdom of God belongs to each individual parable in the collection, and not to the collection as a whole. Similarly, Barth's christological interpretation of the first creation saga effectively fragments its narrative into a series of uncoordinated parabolic images, each independently attesting the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

[22] Matt 13.
[23] Matt 13.44-46.
[24] Matt 13.3, 24, 31.

2. *Schöpfungsgeschichte* and *Bundesgeschichte* in Gen 1.1-2.4a

As with all Scripture, Barth is determined to read the narrative of Genesis 1.1-2.4a christologically. The relationship Barth perceives between this text and Jesus Christ reflects the dogmatic ordering of creation and covenant sketched at the beginning of 'The Doctrine of Creation'. Barth refuses to contemplate either a doctrine of creation which is separable from Christology, or a Christology which is reducible to the doctrine of creation. The narrative of Gen 1.1-2.4a recounts 'the history of creation' (*die Schöpfungsgeschichte*). But the history of creation is not intelligible solely on its own terms; interpreted on its own terms, this history looks beyond itself to 'the history of God's covenant with humanity which has its beginning, its middle, and its end in Jesus Christ' (or, more concisely, 'the history of the covenant [*die Bundesgeschichte*]').[25] The relationship between these two '*Geschichten*' is complex.[26] They are neither disparate nor identical; they are closely related yet remain two distinct 'histories' and not one.[27]

Articulating the relationship between the text of Gen 1.1-2.4a and the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ, though difficult, is crucial for understanding the shape of Barth's christological interpretation of this Old Testament narrative.[28] For Barth, creation is a beginning, and looks to a continuation in the history of the covenant. This beginning and continuation, however, are not understood in narrative terms. The story of creation does not offer the kind of beginning which awaits a middle and end, in whose light it will eventually become fully apparent what has begun.[29] The first creation saga speaks of Jesus Christ, but not because, in the fullness of time, it will become apparent that the story begun here is the beginning of *his* story, such that the history of creation can be retrospectively read as an anticipation of God's activity in Christ. The relationship between *Schöpfungsgeschichte* and *Bundesgeschichte* is not mediated by an

[25] *KD* III/1, 44; *CD* III/1, 42. The term *Geschichte*, of course, matches the scope of the English word 'history' in the sense that it can refer both to a series of events (i.e. the raw 'stuff' of world-occurrence) and to a narrative account of a series of events (i.e. written 'history'). While the 'history of creation' (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*) is identified with the narrative of the first creation saga (i.e. Gen 1.1-2.4a), the 'history of the covenant' (*Bundesgeschichte*) is not similarly associated with a specific textual narration or mediation of that 'history'; for Barth, the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ is the theme of Scripture *as a whole*.

[26] Indeed, even the designation 'Geschichte' must be approached carefully: see below.

[27] This pattern of holding opposing emphases in tension is a familiar feature of Barth's thought. In this case the label 'dialectical' is not appropriate, however, as thesis and antithesis approach synthetic resolution via the concept of 'pre-history'.

[28] The difficulty not arises only from to the aforementioned complexity of the relationship, but also from the fact that not all of Barth's statements concerning this relationship in the course of his very long treatment can be easily made to cohere. What is described here, therefore, represents a general tendency in Barth's interpretation and not a rigid system.

[29] Compare the use of the Aristotelian categories of 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end' invoked in Francis Watson's essay 'Creation in the Beginning': *Text and Truth*, 225–75.

overarching narrative in which creation and covenant respectively comprise the beginning and the middle. According to Barth, already, on its own terms, without appeal to subsequent developments in an overarching narrative of which it forms only the first part, the first creation saga declares Christ because it depicts God's 'Yes' and 'No'. *The history of creation is teleologically oriented to the history of the covenant because the history of the covenant is already prefigured in the history of creation*. God's activity in creation enables and necessitates the covenantal 'history' between God and humanity because the lineaments of the covenant event can already be discerned, implicitly but unmistakeably, in the history of creation. That is, the Bible depicts creation as the 'external basis of the covenant' because the Bible's first creation saga presents the history of creation, for those with eyes to see, as a parable of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The textual *datum* in which the complex relationship between *Schöpfungsgeschichte* and *Bundesgeschichte* becomes visible is the divine rest of the seventh day (Gen 2.1-3). Within the text of the first creation saga, this event provides 'the single explicit, (or rather, entirely unambiguously expressed) connection to the history which follows creation.'[30] For Barth, this event is the key to understanding the 'history of creation' in its entirety and in its relationship to the history of the covenant.

> This is the goal of the creation and at the same time the beginning of everything which follows upon it: the event of this Sabbath-freedom, Sabbath-celebration and Sabbath-joy of God, in which humanity too is summoned to participate […] It is the covenant of God's grace which in this event at the climax and endpoint of the first creation history is glimpsed as the point of departure [*Ausgangspunkt*] for everything which follows. Everything which precedes is the way which leads to this summit. The connection and the succession of the individual events of the history of creation and these individual events themselves – each in its own place in in its own way – points to this last event […]. Therefore, this text must also be read from back to front in order to understand it rightly. One must be aware of how the text, according to its own account, intends to go 'outside' itself, out from the pre-historical and into the historical realm.[31]

Here the text itself 'unambiguously' points the reader beyond the text. This final event of the narrative, then, is determinative both for understanding the various preceding events in the narrative, and for understanding the sense in which the narrative as a whole is the 'point of departure' for what 'follows'.

If God's Sabbath rest is both the final event of the story of creation and the first event of the story of the covenant, this might be taken to mean that the story of creation and the story of the

[30] *KD* III/1, 255; *CD* III/1, 225.
[31] *KD* III/1, 108; *CD* III/1, 98-99.

covenant occupy horizontally adjacent portions of a single unfolding timeline, and can thus be understood as two portions of a single overarching narrative: two successive epochs sharing a single event which marks the transition from one to the other. If this were the case, the 'teleology' of the creation story would be akin to the teleology of a novel's first chapter, in which important characters and themes are introduced in anticipation of their further development as the remainder of the story plays out. The reader could then look for a typological relationship between creation and covenant as a function of the integration of the history of creation and the history of the covenant in a single overarching biblical narrative (that is, a covenantal or christological typology grounded in narrative teleology). This, however, is not Barth's approach.

For Barth, the teleological orientation of the history of creation to the history of the covenant is not a function of their integration in a single metanarrative. While stressing this teleological orientation, Barth also wishes to keep this emphasis in balance with the distinction of the story of the creation from the story (or event) of the covenant:

> but the beginning of this actual occurrence [*dieses eigentlichen Geschehens*] to which the creation points is only touched on at the very close and therefore on the margins of the representation [i.e. the narrative in Gen 1.1-2.4a]: clearly enough to make the teleology of the creation visible, but also reservedly enough that it cannot be forgotten that the creation and its continuation in the history of the covenant are really two different things.[32]

The final event of the saga, the 'event' of God's Sabbath rest, signals the 'event' or 'occurrence' in which the 'history of the covenant' consists, establishing the teleological orientation of the entire creation saga. Yet this ostensive signalling from within the creation saga should not be taken to imply the fusion of these two stories into a single overarching narrative. With his explicit affirmations that the history of creation includes within itself the commencement or even the totality of the history of the covenant, Barth is stressing the inseparability of these two histories: with the 'completion' of the preparatory history of creation, there can be and is a commencement for the history of the covenant. The strength of these affirmations reflects Barth's intense theological concern to maintain an indissoluble connection between creation and covenant, rather than a hermeneutical strategy of fusing the two distinct histories of creation and covenant into a single story. This emphasis is balanced by a countervailing stress on the distinction between the history of creation and the history of the covenant. The seventh day of the creation story is just that: the seventh day, and not a cipher

[32] *KD* III/1, 107; *CD* III/1, 98.

for 'the whole time and history which follow creation'.[33] Nor is the seventh day of the history of creation the first day of the history of the covenant in any temporally straightforward sense.[34] The 'event' of the seventh day still belongs properly to the story of creation as such, and thus to the 'groundwork and preparation for the covenant- and salvation-history which follows the history of creation.'[35] The creation story includes, in its final event, a reference to the covenant story, but this reference, whilst hugely significant in establishing the theological relationship between creation and covenant, should not be simply equated with the actual commencement of the history of the covenant itself. For all its significance regarding the history of the covenant, the event of God's Sabbath rest depicted in Gen 2.2 nevertheless properly belongs to the history – or, more accurately, pre-history – of creation and does not, in the final analysis, actually participate in the history of the covenant as such. This event is both the goal toward which the creation account moves and the vantage point from which the reader may see beyond the creation account itself to the incipient history of the covenant. Like Moses, we remain on Mount Nebo – at journey's end we have not in fact crossed the threshold into the promised land – and yet we can already see that country spread out before us.

For Barth, the 'history of creation' is *pre-history*, in the strictest sense. This narrative depicts that which is qualitatively prior to actual history proper (i.e. to the history of the covenant): the presupposition of that history.[36] The history of creation is the pre-history (*Vorgeschichte*) to the history of the covenant: the first creation saga depicts the preparation (*Vorbereitung*) for the history of the covenant, consisting in the establishment of that history's necessary precondition (*Voraussetzung*), because the history of creation is the prefiguration (*Vorbild*) of the history of the covenant. Barth could concur with Henri Blocher's characterisation of the early chapters of Genesis – 'It is permissible, therefore, not to identify the narrative with

[33] *KD* III/1, 254; *CD* III/1, 225.

[34] Barth's voluminous treatment of the first creation saga does contain some explicit statements which suggest that the history of the covenant commences with the conclusion of the history of creation. For example, Barth speaks of 'this final act of the history of creation—which as such is obviously also the first act of a nascent [*anhebend*] covenantal history between God and man' (*KD* III/1, 246; *CD* III/1, 217-18; see also *KD* III/1, 198-200; *CD* III/1, 177-178). However, Barth also identifies the commencement of the covenantal history with a wide range of events both within and without the first creation saga: the creation of light, the blessing of fish and birds, the blessing of humanity, the conflict between God and humanity, and the Abrahamic blessing (*CD* III/1, 151, 163, 170, 188-189, 209-212). These various commencements cannot be reconciled with a simple linear timeline in which the conclusion of one part of the story is the commencement of the next, but suggest an entirely different temporal relationship between these two 'histories'. These two histories are intimately related, but cannot be fused into a single history.

[35] *KD* III/1, 255-256; *CD* III/1, 226.

[36] 'Secondly, we adhere to the fact that the content of the biblical creation-histories as such has an expressly pre-historical character: pre-historical naturally understood in the sense of also preceding *natural* history [*im Sinn auch von prae*-natur*historisch*]! They are certainly concerned with a temporally organised occurrence, but this occurrence is that of the genesis of the natural presuppositions [*Voraussetzungen*] of all other history' (*KD* III/1, 86; *CD* III/1, 79).

straightforward, ordinary history, and to look for another historical genre: that of a well-crafted, childlike drawing of the far-distant past, with illustrative and typological interests uppermost' – as a description of the first creation saga in all respects but one: this 'pre-history' does not depict the events of a past so temporally distant that they are now all but inaccessible.[37] Barth can speak of the history of the covenant as 'coming' and even 'future' with respect to the history of creation, and also as 'following' and 'continuing' the history of creation. But the kind of 'continuation' Barth has in mind is not that of a second chapter continuing the story begun in the first chapter of an overarching narrative. The priority of the 'history of creation' to the 'history of covenant' is closer to the logical 'priority' of a presupposition to an argument than the temporal priority of a beginning to a middle and an end. As such, the temporal priority of creation to covenant is relativised and even overturned by the rather different priority in the logical relationship between covenant and creation:

> [The covenant] indeed follows after creation, but does not follow from it [*Sie folgt wohl auf die Schöpfung, aber sie folgt nicht aus ihr*]. Rather, as it follows creation, it constitutes creation's scope. One could rather say of the creation: it follows from [*sie folgt… aus*] the history of the covenant of grace, because it is the covenant's necessary basis and presupposition.[38]

As 'pre-history', the history of creation thus constitutes the 'preface' (*Vorwort*) to the proper biblical history.[39] This 'preface' does not offer a dim impression of the remote back-country of the single temporal track upon which the story proper will unfold, and does not offer the kind of narrative material which could, in theory, be expanded into a more fully realised 'prequel' to the covenantal history. The term 'history' (*Geschichte*), then, is used equivocally in the expressions 'the history of creation' (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*) and 'the history of the covenant' (*Bundesgeschichte*). These '*Geschichten*' are intimately related, but differ qualitatively: they are respectively *Vorgeschichte* and *Geschichte*. They do not and cannot share a single timeline, occupying separate or contiguous portions of that timeline. The seven days of the first creation saga do not successively depict days one through seven in the story of God's world (nor do they figuratively represent epochs or stages in world-time). Rather, as 'pre-history', they

[37] Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 41. Cf. *KD* III/1, 269; *CD* III/1, 238.
[38] *KD* III/1, 46; *CD* III/1, 46.
[39] *KD* III/1, 71; *CD* III/1, 66. Barth's conception of 'pre-history' is designed to prevent both the abstraction of the history of creation into timeless or ahistorical truth ('Vorwahrheit') and the absorption of the history of creation into the actual history of the covenant. Where Barth resists the term *Vorwort*, he is rejecting abstraction and neutrality in the doctrine of creation. Cf. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 54–55.

together depict a kind of 'day zero': here are the events (or, rather, event) which undergird but do not partake of the unfolding sequence of created time.

This perspective is clear in Barth's comments on the divine declaration concerning the provision of vegetarian sustenance for humankind and animals (Gen 1.29-30). 'It was obviously *not* his [*sc.* the biblical author's] intention to unfold the story of an initial state of creaturely innocence and freedom, prompting the reader and hearer to homesickness instead of hope'.[40] Contra Gunkel, no vanished 'golden age' is depicted here:

> But it seems as if the biblical saga wished precisely to avoid giving real scope for the Persian, Greek and Roman concept of an initial period of peace [*Friedenszeit*] in creaturely existence. That it 'was so' really means only that, with respect also to this last moment in the creation of humanity and of the creature in general, humanity and the creation in general came into existence [*zu existieren anhoben*] 'so' (as they this receive this permission and order and thereby implicitly are set under this prohibition). Or one could think of this period in this way: the 'era' of this coming-into-existence is the *pre*-historical era [*das «Zeitalter» dieses Anhebens ist das* vor*geschichtliche Zeitalter*], in which strictly speaking – for this is what the saga also confines itself to – there can be talk only of the permission and order of God, but not of the corresponding activity and existence of the creation, which cannot become the object of a pictorial representation.[41]

Gen 1.1-2.4a, then, is not chronicling an 'era' belonging to the ancient past of our world's history, but rather outlining a strictly '*pre*-historical era': the 'pre-historical' conditions in which creaturely existence takes its rise.[42] Barth takes the sketchiness of the narrative at this point as an indication that we are beyond those borders of 'history' proper within which genuine narration (i.e. the depiction of action and corresponding responsive action) is possible; we are in the realm of 'pre-history'. This divine pronouncement, and the 'history of creation' within which it appears, is the presupposition for but not a constituent part of 'the proper [*eigentlich*] history of the Old Testament, the history of the covenant of grace between creation and perfection'.[43]

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[40] *KD* III/1, 239; *CD* III/1, 212.
[41] *KD* III/1, 238; *CD* III/1, 211. Emphasis modified.
[42] David Ford correctly notes that Barth's interpretation has scant warrant in the literal sense of the text, but, overly impressed by Barth's methodological statements about the theologically requisite temporality of creation, is disappointed by the way that Barth's actual exegesis here assumes 'a distinction between the saga and the rest of the Bible', such that the saga becomes 'a way of telling us the original will of God'. But in Barth's christological interpretation of the saga this is, in fact, the rule rather than the exception. As we will see, this is certainly not the only case in which Barth has allowed theological concerns derived from the totality of the canon to overshadow the text of Gen 1.1-2.4a such that 'the pre-history told by the saga has been assimilated completely into a description of God and his will'. Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, 113–14.
[43] *KD* III/1, 239; *CD* III/1, 212. This 'proper history' occurs 'between' the 'pre-history' of creation and the 'post-history' of perfection. This work will not address the 'sense of an ending' in Barth's construal of Scripture, in part for reasons of space, and in part because the incomplete final state of *Church Dogmatics* prevents an examination of how Barth might have developed his notion of final redemption or perfection with respect to biblical narrative.

In Barth's christological interpretation, the first creation saga is intimately related to the history of the covenant. Textually, this narrative is self-enclosed, but hermeneutically its sense is dependent on its relationship to a history or event which lies beyond the text. Without explicitly speaking the name of Jesus Christ, the text is clear on its own terms that it adumbrates the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and therefore interpretation of the text on its own terms forbids the isolation of this text from that covenant history. The interpretative link between textual surface and christological substance is not mediated, however, by an overarching metanarrative enfolding the events presented by the first creation saga and the event of Jesus Christ.[44] The parallels between Barth's treatment of the parable of the Prodigal Son and of the creation saga are strong, and our understanding of Barth's christological interpretation of this text will be furthered by exploring the sense in which it, too, is 'parabolic'. Like a parable, the creation saga is a self-enclosed narrative – the story told here is does not represent an early segment of a great story whose climax comes with Jesus Christ – which nevertheless ought not be understood in abstraction from the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This 'teleological' orientation of the narrative is grounded in Barth's contention that – indirectly, but unmistakeably – this text bears witness to Jesus Christ by 'prefiguring' God's covenant with humanity.

3. Pre-history as prefiguration

The creation, then, is oriented 'teleologically' toward the covenant. When the creation described in this 'pre-history' becomes the setting for a genuine history, that history can only be the history of the covenant. This is the case because the 'future' of this world is already present at its creation. The creation, as such, is a 'type' – or better, 'prefiguration' – of the covenant. We turn now to explore how Barth understands and constructs his 'prefigurative' reading of the first creation saga, and the hermeneutical consequences of this approach to the Old Testament text.

[44] Kathryn Greene-McCreight rightly observes that Barth resists the isolation of the history of creation from its biblical context, but misses the mark when she suggests that Barth 'seems here to be saying that a proper or plain reading of scripture does not isolate one part of the narrative over against the whole or remove it from the context of the narrative flow. Since the "center" of the narrative is Christ the Word, the words must be read in light of that center.' (*Ad Litteram*, 176, see also p. 188.) This concept of an extensive, unfolding narrative centred on Jesus Christ is just what Barth does *not* invoke in his christological interpretation of the first creation saga. Rather, the creation sagas place the reader directly before 'the mystery of the divine covenant of grace' rendered in the entirety of Scripture (p. 199). More perceptive are Greene-McCreight's comments on Barth's use of the word *Bild*, suggesting that viewing a painting is an appropriate analogy for the way Barth treats biblical narrative: more like an instantaneous and simultaneous confrontation with the Bible as a canonical totality than a 'linear movement through the text, as though he were reading a novel for the first time' (p. 197).

Here, as elsewhere, this prefigurative reference of the creation to the covenant is a matter of structural correspondence between the shape of the creation and the shape of the fulfilment of the covenant in Jesus Christ. As we have seen, Barth announces at the outset his intention to read the first creation saga from back to front, allowing what he regards as the 'unambiguous' christological reference of the saga's conclusion to guide the interpretation of every preceding part. In the event of God's Sabbath rest, the relationship between God and his creation is definitively specified. 'Rest' means that God is truly himself in fully associating himself with what he has made other than himself. This act of divine freedom is an (implicit) invitation eliciting a corresponding act of created freedom consisting in a creaturely participation in the divine freedom. These are, of course, precisely the terms in which Barth understands God's activity in the covenant of grace. God elects not to be God without us, but to have time for us. Thus what is 'concretely revealed' in Gen 2.3 is 'no more and no less than the meaning and intention of the covenant between God and humanity.'[45] A christological interpretation of the divine rest in Gen 2.3 is demanded by what Barth considers the obvious structural and thematic similarity between the divine attitude and action in respect of the creation which is visible here and that which is visible in Jesus Christ. This passage cannot therefore be interpreted 'without reference to the christological content of the text [*den christologischen Gehalt des Textes*]'.[46] Here the creation saga 'has spoken prophetically of him', in the sense that the shape of the covenant fulfilled and revealed in Jesus Christ is discernible in this text at this point.[47]

The christological reference of Gen 2.3 is an not isolated feature of this OT text, but it is determinative for the meaning of the entire passage. The entire creation saga, in every part, bears witness to Jesus Christ. Barth's key language and conceptuality for the relationship between a given feature of this text and its christological referent in the covenant is 'prefiguration' (*Vorbild*).[48] Various elements in the history of creation are said to prefigure

[45] *KD* III/1, 247; *CD* III/1, 218. Though Barth's conception of 'the covenant between God and man' significantly exceeds the Old Testament conception of בְּרִית, it remains significant that, despite the best efforts of the Reformed exegetes who have sought a 'covenant in creation', Genesis does not use this language to describe God's relationship with humanity in creation, instead reserving בְּרִית for specific moments in God's postlapsarian dealings with humanity (i.e. with Noah, and with Abraham and his 'offspring'). It should be also noted that the parallellism between Barth's conception of the covenant between God and humanity and the text of Gen 2.3 is more implicit than he is willing to admit. Not only is humanity not invited to participate in God's creative work: humanity is not explicitly invited to participate in the divine rest at all (cf. *KD* III/1, 245-26, 254-55; *CD* III/1, 217, 225).

[46] *KD* III/1, 257; *CD* III/1, 228.

[47] *KD* III/1, 258; *CD* III/1, 228.

[48] It is difficult to find an English translation that precisely matches Barth's use of *Vorbild* and its cognates. 'Example' and 'paragon' are clearly inadequate. 'Pattern' or 'prototype' are closer (and the term is used in this way, following the preposition *nach*, to translate דְּמוּת at Gen 1.27), but Barth does not wish to suggest that God's activity in the covenant is a reproduction deriving from an original found in God's creative activity. The reverse is intended: because the shape of creation derives from the shape of the covenant, the latter can therefore be

(*vorbilden*) the covenant, or described in terms of their 'prefigurativity' (*Vorbildlichkeit*) or 'prefigurative character' (*Vorbildcharakter*).[49] It is in virtue of this character that the first creation saga announces or testifies to the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In some cases this prefiguration is derivative: elements in the narrative prefigure the covenant insofar as they prefigure the 'unambiguous' reference to the covenant at the narrative's climax.[50] In other cases the prefigurative relationship is more direct: for example, Barth feels able to establish that light is a prefiguration of the covenant (in its revelatory aspect) without explicit reference to the event of God's Sabbath rest:

> In the heart of nature, light is the prefiguration [*Vorbild*] of the revelation of grace. With its creation, it has already become the unveiling of the previously hidden decision of the event of God's good will. Immediately with this his first work, when it occurs, when in its occurrence he bears witness concerning himself, God speaks his 'Yes' to the creature.[51]

The effect of conceiving the Old Testament's *Christuszeugnis* as 'prefiguration' in these non-narrative terms is to downplay the oldness of the Old and the newness of the New. Like 'analogy', 'prefiguration' entails both similarity and difference. A prefiguration must bear the likeness of that which it prefigures, but must also be non-identical with – because it is in some sense 'prior' to – that which it prefigures. As in an analogy, the stress may lie on either similarity or difference. To identify a feature in an unfolding narrative as a 'prefiguration' of some climactic event may highlight the incompleteness with which that feature anticipates its climactic counterpart and the further development that must still take place. Here the reverse is true: without denying the non-identity of prefiguration and that which is prefigured, Barth stresses their similarity and downplays the 'priority' of the prefiguration (and conversely the 'subsequence' of that which is prefigured). Of light as the 'prefiguration' of revelation, Barth writes:

> More than the prefiguration of revelation, therefore, certainly cannot be found there. But its prefiguration certainly can be found: when revelation comes, for all its newness, it will nevertheless not be absolute novelty. […] Light was from the beginning the prefiguration, the sign, the announcement of precisely this occurrence: the knowledge of the Lord.[52]

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discerned in the former. 'Prefiguration' is chosen because it best fits this sense. The translators of *CD* have generally opted for 'type' and its cognates, indicating Barth's concern with the relationship between the Old Testament text and Christ, for which 'typology' is standard vocabulary, but obscuring his distinctive approach to this relationship.

[49] *KD* III/1, 150, 174, 199; *CD* III/1, 134, 156 , 178.

[50] The animals of Gen 1.24-25 offer this kind of 'prefiguration': see *KD* III/1, 199; *CD* III/1, 178.

[51] *KD* III/1, 132; *CD* III/1, 118.

[52] *KD* III/1, 132; *CD* III/1, 119.

If creation is a 'type' of the covenant, it is not so in the salvation-historical sense of 'typology' outlined previously. The 'prefiguration' of the covenant in creation, as Barth describes it, does not depend on an unfolding narrative beginning with creation and climaxing in the fulfilment of God's covenant in Jesus Christ. Rather, a 'history of the covenant' is dependent and consequent upon the fact that the covenant is already prefigured in the history of creation. We may detect a correspondence between the sense in which creation is a 'prefiguration' (*Vorbild*) of the covenant and the sense in which the story of creation is the 'prehistory' (*Vorgeschichte*) of the story of the covenant. As 'prehistory', the history of creation is not a very early part of the history of the covenant, but the presupposition of that history in its entirety. Similarly, 'prefiguration' does not mean the introduction of partial elements or aspects of the covenant which are to be expanded, developed and interrelated in the course of an unfolding salvation-historical story, finally reaching their ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. There is a prefiguration of the covenant in the structures of creation because these structures already reflect the structure of the covenant *in toto*. The creation is fitted to be the theatre of the covenant because the covenant is already the secret of creation. Barth's conception of creation as prefiguration retains a nominal commitment to the non-identity of creation and covenant – the 'priority' of the former and 'subsequence' of the latter – but his location of this prefigurative relationship in structural correspondence rather than narratival anticipation tends to lay such stress on the similarity between prefiguration and fulfilment that it is difficult to see how the latter might offer a substantial advance on the meaning of the former.[53]

With this concept of 'prefiguration', we are very close to Barth's use of the category of 'parable'.[54] Both prefiguration and parable are an analogical depiction of something else. Jesus' parables are not free-standing and self-contained literary artefacts, but 'parables of the kingdom': they are directed beyond themselves to something else. A parabolic *Bild* 'precedes' its *Sache* in the sense that a parable is not a communicative cul-de-sac: the reader who truly inhabits the world of this text will be led by the parable beyond the parable and into another world. This 'priority' of *Bild* to *Sache* not is temporal, but epistemic: the parable serves its

[53] Though Barth writes that God in his rest 'looks forward to a completely different fulfilment and completion of his work's relationship to him' (*KD* III/1, 251; *CD* III/1, 222), Barth's christological exegesis makes it unclear how this difference ought to be materially construed.

[54] Barth does not expressly use the word *Gleichnis* to describe either the literary form of the first creation saga or the relation of its content to the covenant. However, Barth suggests that the distinction between *Bild* and *Gleichnis* is 'colourless' (*blass*), and that *Vorbild* is a further specification of *Bild* (both entail the mimetic notion of 'repetition and correspondence to an original': *KD* III/1, 221; *CD* III/1, 197). Hence *Vorbild* narrows but does not vacate the conceptual space occupied by *Gleichnis*. Here is further encouragement to see a close parallel between 'prefiguration' (*Vorbild*) and 'parable' (*Gleichnis*) in Barth's thinking: the relationship between these concepts falls somewhere between synonym and rhyme.

reader by enabling the apprehension of the *Sache* for what it is. Similarly, that creation temporally precedes the historical fulfilment of the covenant is scarcely important for Barth's reading of the first creation saga as *Vorbild*. What matters is that creation offers an analogical depiction of the covenant. The depiction of creation in the narrative of the first creation saga is a 'prefiguration': it is oriented beyond itself to the covenant. As *Vorbild*, creation serves as another witness to the covenant. Creation 'precedes' the covenant as a parable precedes the kingdom of heaven: as the Baptist precedes the Christ. It is a witness and not that to which it bears witness; it is entirely necessary that it 'come first', in order to 'prepare the way', but this temporal priority is eclipsed by the self-abnegating epistemic 'priority' entailed in its function as witness to the eternal event fulfilled in Jesus Christ ('He who comes after me is before me, because he was before me').[55]

By means of structural correspondence between God's activity in creation and covenant, then, the first creation saga 'prefigures' and thus testifies to Jesus Christ. But this witnessing property belongs not so much to the text *as a whole* as to the text *in every part*. The effect of this approach is rather like looking through a kaleidoscope: from this perspective, the narrative appears as a collection of fractured images, or rather as a collection of serial reproductions in miniature of a single image. Every part of the textual surface reflects back the image of God's covenant with humanity. The covenant of grace is prefigured not only by God's rest with his creation, but also by the sexual duality of humanity, and by the bipartite structure ('heavens and earth') of the cosmos, the division of light and dark, waters above and waters below, waters and dry land, by the appearance of vegetation, the animal world, by the nourishment of human beings and animals: even the distinction between 'plants' and 'trees' (עֵשֶׂב and עֵץ; v. 11), 'while it takes botanical form, is materially a prefiguration [*Vorbild*] like everything under consideration here.'[56]

This thoroughgoing christological (or covenant-prefigurative) reading of the first creation saga in all its parts is not simply foisted upon the text; Barth endeavours to construct and sustain his interpretation by means of a close exegetical engagement.[57] To this end, Barth treats the text in ten segments.[58] This segmentation is not a matter of mere convenience, nor is it demanded by the text itself: Barth's subdivision overlaps substantially but not entirely with the overt structural patterning achieved by the repetition of the formula '… וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם'.

[55] John 1.6-8, 15, 19-27; Matt 17.10-13.
[56] *KD* III/1, 173; *CD* III/1, 155.
[57] Cf. Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram*, 206.
[58] The ninth and lengthiest section (treating Gen 1.24-31) is further subdivided.

The form of Barth's interpretation serves his interpretative purposes: each textual segment is sufficient in itself to yield one or more prefigurations of the covenant, and the divisions between segments allow Barth to discretely address textual elements whose combination might problematise a covenantal interpretation of the kind he seeks to construct.[59] For each segment of the text, Barth first gives an outline of its theological significance (which is equivalent to its witness to the covenant), then proceeds to expand this outline through extended exegetical comments involving minute and perceptive attention to the details and patterns of the text. The persuasive power of Barth's exegetical argumentation varies, however: at points the text proves intransigent and Barth's covenantal exegesis is strained and unconvincing.[60] Barth's extensive and rich interpretative comments on the first creation saga will not permit anything like a comprehensive analysis; instead we must be content with a few broadly representative samples. These will serve to illustrate and substantiate the claims we have already made about Barth's efforts to read this Old Testament text as Christian Scripture, and will demonstrate the ingenious character of his christological exegesis: varyingly sustained by brilliance, brio, and sheer bullheadedness.

a. 'Heaven and earth' (Gen 1.1)

Barth interprets Gen 1.1 christologically by finding in the expression 'heaven and earth' a depiction of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This interpretation is constructed by an appeal to an inherent structural parallelism rather than integration in an overarching biblical narrative. Even the immediate narrative context is more liability than asset for this interpretation: v. 1 functions as a parable of the covenant insofar as it presents a discrete parabolic image.

'In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth'. For Barth, this means that at the beginning of all things stands the covenant of grace: 'precisely this divine willing and accomplishing with respect to humanity.'[61] This equation is possible because, according to the first creation saga,

> The work of this beginning was […] a cosmos, *the* cosmos, the world ordered by this God, in which heaven and earth – a picture [*Bild*] of the relationship between God and humanity in the covenant of grace – confronted one another in mutual

[59] The clearest example of this occurs with vv. 1 and 2, on which see below. The introduction of interpretative space between closely related textual features is further abetted by the sheer extent of Barth's exposition.
[60] The most striking example of this is Gen 1.2, which is explained away to such an extent that it is effectively excised from the text.
[61] *KD* III/1, 108; *CD* III/1, 99.

> separation and interconnection: a superior and an inferior, one sphere essentially invisible to man, the other essentially visible, one transcending him in unknown heights, the other his own and entrusted to him.[62]

One can discern in the expression 'heaven and earth' a mimetic reflection of the covenant between God and humanity, that is, because the hierarchical bipartite structure of the former parallels that of the latter. This structural parallelism between creation and covenant grounds the teleological orientation of the creation to the covenant: 'in virtue of this figurative [*abbildlich*] superordination and subordination it [*i.e.* the creation] is fitted to be the arena of the covenant, of the purpose of the divine willing and accomplishing'.[63] In other words, because the depiction of the creation in Gen 1.1 can be read as a parable of the covenant, creation can and must be understood as a preparation for the divine-human covenant which is God's eternal will.

The *Christuszeugnis* of this text, then, is not dependent on its integration in a broader biblical narrative; the expression 'heaven and earth' is sufficient in itself for this witnessing function.[64] Yet Barth's christological interpretation must also resist the force of this verse's integration in its immediate narrative context: v.1 must be effectively treated as virtually a discrete textual unit. For the structural parallel with the covenant to work, 'heaven and earth' cannot be simply a merism indicating the totality of God's creation (i.e. the universe), but must indicate an essentially bipartite hierarchical structure of superior and inferior, invisible and visible.[65] Thus Barth must accentuate the verse's total canonical context at the expense of its immediate literary context: 'The expression "heaven and earth" designates elsewhere in the Bible [*in der ganzen übrigen Bibel*] the ordered and formed cosmos, in so doing speaking comprehensively of the decisive thing [*von dem Entscheidenden*] – namely, of the existence, of the differentiation and of the being of a superior and an inferior.'[66] We must be able to discern in the 'heaven and earth' of v. 1 – in line with this broader canonical usage – the ordered cosmos, and not the cosmos suggested by the immediate literary context, which awaits ordering and cannot be declared 'finished' (Gen 2.1) until 'earth', 'heaven', and 'waters' have been properly

[62] *KD* III/1, 109; *CD* III/1, 99.
[63] *KD* III/1, 109; *CD* III/1, 99.
[64] Strictly speaking, Barth's christological interpretation of this text draws on a perception of the overall theological import of its canonical context (i.e. the Bible's *Sache*) without appealing to a specific element of its literary and canonical context (cf. the description of this dynamic in Ch. 4, section 2 above).
[65] On this expression as merismus, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 101; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 15.
[66] *KD* III/1, 110; *CD* III/1, 100.

differentiated and populated through God's further creative acts in the intervening narrative.[67] Thus Barth argues that the sense of 'earth' in Gen 1.1 does not match its use elsewhere in this chapter (הָאָרֶץ in v. 1 is especially not to be identified with הָאָרֶץ in v. 2), and that the 'heaven' of 1.1 refers implicitly to an invisible threefold celestial totality which is discernible in the remainder of Genesis ch. 1 only with some difficulty.[68] The understanding of the expression 'heaven and earth' which is essential for Barth's covenant-prefigurative interpretation depends on maximising the interpretative significance of select elements of the total canonical context, and conversely minimising the significance of the immediate narrative context, especially its developmental aspect.[69] Barth finds a parable of the covenant in Gen 1.1 by treating this verse as a discrete parabolic image. The immediate context will prove to contain further parabolic images – indeed, images of the same covenantal original. Yet while these images are collated, they are not coordinated.

b. The god and world of myth (Gen 1.2)

Barth's christological interpretation of the first creation saga relies on the effective fragmentation of the narrative into a series of discrete parabolic images. This fragmentation operates slightly differently, however, for each of the narrative's first two verses. As we have seen, Gen 1.1 offers a self-contained testimony to the covenant between God and humanity:

[67] Cf. Gordon Wenham's comments: 'Commentators often insist that the phrase "heaven and earth" denotes the completely ordered cosmos. Though this is usually the case, totality rather than organization is its chief thrust here. It is therefore quite feasible for a mention of an initial act of creation of the whole universe (v. 1) to be followed by an account of the ordering of different parts of the universe (vv. 2-31).' *Genesis 1-15*, 15.

[68] See *KD* III/1, 110-111; *CD* III/1, 100-101. Barth does attempt to justify his reading by appeal to the immediate narrative context: the effective marginalisation of this context is a product and not an explicit presupposition of his interpretative practice. Barth can find hints of the solid and fluid members of the celestial triad within the chapter (though neither identification is exegetically unassailable), but the 'celestial heaven' must be supplied from references elsewhere in the Bible; he is left to rather awkwardly claim that it 'is also visualized in Gen 1.1, although there is no further reference to it in what follows'. This omission presents a serious difficulty which cannot be satisfactorily dismissed by the homiletic suggestion this highest heaven is the concern of God and not of humanity. The pall of arbitrariness hangs over this move: on what basis can the interpreter judge on the one hand that the 'heaven of heavens' ought to be supplied from the broader canonical context, and on the other that the biblical notion of heavenly or earthly 'pillars' (עַמּוּדִים) has 'no constitutive significance for the concept of creation'? It seems that when exegesis is the mode of theological construction, as is the case here, exegetical conclusions *must* serve theological concerns. Cf. Bächli, *Das Alte Testament in der Kirchlichen Dogmatik*, 227–29. For remarks on the convenience of Barth's exegetical findings for his theological programme, see Torrance, 'Creation and Covenant: Karl Barth's Exegesis of Genesis 2:8-17', 183; Larsen, 'Barth on God's Graciousness toward Humanity in Genesis 1-2', 213.

[69] *Pace* Nathan MacDonald, 'The Imago Dei and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26-28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Karl Barth', *IJST* 10, no. 3 (2008): 323.

Barth declares that '1.1 stands in no positive relationship to 1.2'.[70] But there is a *negative* relationship between the second verse and the first. The covenantal or christological interpretation of v. 1 relies on this verse's independence of v. 2, but the sense of v. 2 is parasitic upon the sense of v. 1. Here, according to Barth, is a depiction of the world that God did *not* create, testifying to that which he did *not* choose according to his covenantal will: the negative mirror image of the covenantal relationship pictured in v. 1.

Against the *opinio communis* which would set vv. 1 and 2 in a positive relationship, depicting an initial creative act and its immediate outcome, Barth enlists Hermann Gunkel's *a priori* declaration that '[t]he thought of a creation of chaos is intrinsically contradictory and bizarre; chaos is the world before the creation'.[71] Persisting with Gunkel's line of interpretation, Barth finds in v. 2 'a "veritable mythological treasure chamber"'.[72] In תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ we have figures of the mythological world, 'personifications of that which is abhorrent'; the connection of תְּהוֹם with the Babylonian *Tiamat* indicates that the narrative 'treats the element of water as the principle which in its abundance and tyrannical power is absolutely opposed to God's creation', and חֹשֶׁךְ in connection with תְּהוֹם 'cannot possibly be regarded even as a potentially positive factor.'[73] Most strikingly, the final line (וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם) indicates, in a kind of grim hypothetical *Gedankenexperiment*, the fluttering impotence of the Spirit over a chaotic creation.[74] Verse 2, then, stands in 'glaring opposition' to v. 1, characterising 'the utter irrelevance and untrustworthiness of the timeless *God of myth*, in conscious and cutting contrast to the actual [*wirklich*] Creator God and his work in a picture of devastating irony'.[75] Verse 2 depicts the unrealised opposite of the God and world of v. 1, thus testifying to the non-willing entailed in God's actual, positive, and definite covenantal will. The verse speaks of

> the possibility which God, when he takes the step of creating, has *passed over*, which he contemptuously *passes by*, as a human creator also, when he elects a

[70] *KD* III/1, 110; *CD* III/1, 100. While Barth immediately goes on to explicitly link v. 1 to vv. 3-31, this claim is belied by the looseness of the connection between this verse and the remainder of the chapter in his discussion of the expression 'heaven and earth' (see above).
[71] *KD* III/I, 110; *CD* III/1, 100. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 103.
[72] *KD* III/1, 112; *CD* III/1, 102. Cf. Gunkel, 104.
[73] *KD* III/1, 115-117; *CD* III/1, 105-106. Emphasis removed. David Toshio Tsumura disputes the linguistic parallels between the nouns of Genesis 1.2 and ANE creation myths, concluding that 'both the biblical context and extra-biblical parallels suggest that the phrase *tōhu wabōhu* in Gen 1:2 has nothing to do with "chaos" and simply means "emptiness" and refers to the earth which is an empty place, i.e. "an unproductive and uninhabited place"'; 'no motif of "chaos" exists in Gen 1:2' (*The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*, JSOT Supp. 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 156, 168.) If this is the case, Gunkel's (and Barth's) misgivings about the 'chaos' of v. 2 are easily assuaged.
[74] See *KD* III/1, 117-119; *CD* III/1, 106-108.
[75] *KD* III/1, 114, 119; *CD* III/1, 104, 107-108.

> particular work, does *not* elect and therefore *rejects* another – perhaps many others – passing them by, leaving them behind, unimplemented. […] Nothing remains to us but to understand v. 2 as a portrait, not coincidentally extracted from *myth*, of the world which according to God's revelation is *negated* and *rejected*, *passed by* and *left behind* in his real [*wirklich*] creation […].[76]

In Gen 1.2, then, we are concerned with the doctrine of election, with the 'Yes' and 'No' of God's covenant. This verse, too, testifies to Christ insofar as it testifies to the negative side of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ.[77] Again, this identification is not sustained by an appeal to an overarching biblical narrative, but to direct parallels between the text of the first creation saga and the structure of the covenant itself. At the level of the immediate narrative context, it depends on the coordination of verse 2 with verse 1, but only in an antithetical relationship.[78] Verse 1, in the bipartite hierarchical structure of 'heaven and earth', testifies to the two partners of the covenant willed by God. In its depiction of formless chaos, a bleakly parodic inversion of the covenantal structure perceived in v. 1, v. 2 portrays another structural duality in God's singular covenant: the 'No' implied in God's 'Yes'.

So strong is Barth's commitment to this covenantal interpretation, grounded in structural parallelism, that he is prepared to pay a high price in its construction. Against his declared and usual *modus operandi*, he moves from the general to the particular, subjecting the biblical narrative to an *a priori* assumption about the meaning of 'chaos'.[79] His interpretation effectively *remythologises* Gen 1.2, finding here not the pliant stuff of creation – effortlessly divided, named, populated, blessed and thus declared 'good' by the fiat of its Creator – but hostile primeval numina. Barth's interpretation amounts to a claim that the text moves from the polemical subversion of myth in the בָּרָא of v. 1 to the same in the וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים of v. 3 by means of an ironic mythological picture of a wordless 'Spirit of *Elohim*' in v. 2, with no warning sign for the reader that she is entering a chicane involving two one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turns in world-view in as many verses: it will be no wonder, then, if she suffers some whiplash.[80] This extraordinary exegesis indicates both the strength of Barth's

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[76] *KD* III/1, 119; *CD* III/1, 108.

[77] 'Gen 1.2 speaks of the "old" that according to 2 Cor 5.17 has radically passed away in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (*KD* III/1, 121; *CD* III/1, 110).

[78] Similarly, God's actual creative work in v. 3 – the utterance of the Word of God – can only be understood as an antithesis to the unreal 'wordless' impotence Barth perceives in v. 2. See *KD* III/1, 119; *CD* III/1, 108.

[79] Cf. Nahum Sarna's comments: 'That God should create disorganized matter, only to reduce it to order, presents no more of a problem than does his taking six days to complete creation instead of instantaneously producing a perfected universe. The quintessential point of the narrative is the idea of ordering that is the result of divine intent.' *Genesis*, vol. 1, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 6.

[80] Compare *KD* III/1, 114-119 with p. 109 and pp. 124-6; *CD* III/1, 104-8, 100, 112-114. At this point the expansive bulk of Barth's theological commentary helps to mask the difficulties of his atomistic exegesis: the actual created 'earth' of v.1 and the mythological uncreated 'earth' of v. 2 – and the 'wordless' Spirit of v. 2 and

determination to construct structural analogies between the Old Testament text and its christological *Sache*, and the tenuousness of his commitment to the form of the text as a connected and unfolding narrative.

The first two verses of the creation saga, then, both testify to the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This testimony consists in correspondences between the features of the text and the shape of the covenant. While there is variation in how the text attests God's covenantal decision, the object of the text's witness is singular: it is always God's covenant that is attested. Just as Jesus successively likens the kingdom of heaven to a merchant's finding a valuable pearl and a net cast into the sea, the creation saga's first two verses give us two figurative depictions of the one object.[81] There are 'many such parables', but they speak only one 'word'.[82]

c. Light and darkness (Gen 1.3-5)

Barth also reads God's activity in Gen 1.3-5 as a parabolic witness to the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. These verses speak of the establishment of the natural, cosmic, phenomenological reality of light in its separation from darkness, but in so speaking declare something else: the positive and negative dimensions of God's covenantal decision.

> The passage speaks of natural light and of natural darkness [*Vom natürlichen Licht und von der natürlichen Finsternis ist die Rede*]. But precisely of natural darkness as that which proclaims [*der Verkündigerin*] this reality rejected by God and therefore past, and of natural light as the proclamation [*Kundgabe*] of the opposing will of God. Precisely natural light as such is the unanswerably and irrevocably expressed announcement [*Ankündigung*] of life and thereby, negatively, the overcoming, separation, displacement and banishment of this other reality, which God does not will or create.[83]

As with the parable of the Prodigal Son, in and with its direct and explicit 'speech', this text is indirectly and implicitly 'proclaiming' another factor which is not apparent on its surface. This declarative or witnessing capacity of the text arises from the way that its depiction of the structured relationship between light and darkness reflects the structure of God's eternal decision, enacted and expressed in Jesus Christ:

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the divine word of v. 3 – are separated in Barth's analysis by page after page of commentary, but only by a handful of words in the original text. When this textual proximity is reasserted, Barth's comments seem far less plausible. It is not the *opinio communis*, but Barth's effort to overturn it, which constitutes 'an act of violence' (*KD* III/1, 110; *CD* III/1, 100).

[81] Matt 13.45-50.

[82] Mark 4.33.

[83] *KD* III/1, 130; *CD* III/1, 119.

> The proper and strict analogy to the relationship between light and darkness can in fact be seen only in the relationship between the election and the rejection of God himself, in the eternal Yes and No which is spoken by God himself when he, instead of remaining in and with himself, strides on to the *opus ad extra* of his free love. When God does that which we recognise in Jesus Christ as his original and basic intention, as the beginning of all his ways and works in himself, he also accomplishes this division, he also draws this boundary, he also sets up this hierarchy. That is what the history of creation has to attest with its report about the work of the first three days and in emphatic form in its report about the first day.[84]

The 'light' of Gen 1.3, therefore, is the 'prefiguration and sign and announcement [*das Vorbild, das Zeichen, die Ankündigung*]' of the revelatory event of God's covenant.[85]

As a parabolic narrative does not directly and explicitly disclose its *Sache*, so too *was da steht* in the text of Gen 1.3-5 makes no explicit reference to the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Barth constructs his structural analogy between textual *Bild* and christological *Sache* by appealing to concrete textual features. Especially in v. 4, God's activity with respect to light and darkness is represented asymmetrically. The text mentions the existence of darkness, but does not say that God created darkness, nor that God saw that the darkness was good.[86] What God does, he does by 'day' (Gen 1.5, 8, 13, etc.), not by night.[87] From this textual silence Barth deduces that 'Light *is*. Of darkness one can only say that it is, insofar as light is […]. Darkness has no reality in itself; it is a by-product [*Sie ist nicht* da; *sie ist nur* dabei].'[88] Even more strongly, 'darkness, the chaos of which it is the exponent, is not the creation of God'.[89] The more symmetrical presentation of God's treatment of light and darkness in v. 5 is more problematic for Barth's typological interpretation, requiring that the two occurrences of the verb קרא in this verse's paired clauses be understood very differently. To name the light 'day' indicates its divine adoption and consecration; to name the darkness 'night' indicates only God's mastery over a threat which he relegates to the margin of

[84] *KD* III/1, 137; *CD* III/1, 123-24.
[85] *KD* III/1, 139; *CD* III/119.
[86] *KD* III/1, 135; *CD* III/1, 121. Barth's exegetical argumentation at this point depends on the identification of the entire situation depicted in 1.2, including תֹּהוּ, with chaos and therefore with unreality (see above).
[87] Barth also finds support for the theological emphases of his prefigurative reading in the sequence of the narrative: in the creation of light before the creation of luminary bodies (indicating the superiority of God's self-witness to its creaturely mediation), and in the naming of light before that of darkness. (*KD* III/1, 133-35, 137-138; *CD* III/1, 120-21, 124). For all Barth's difficulties with narrative sequence, he is able to make use of this textual feature on occasion, when it is theologically advantageous to do so. Ford rightly observes that sequence is inherent in the temporality on which Barth insists, and duly notes Barth's appeals to textual sequence, but misses the ambivalence towards this element of narrativity indicated by Barth's minimal and incidental use of such argumentation. See *Barth and God's Story*, 112.
[88] *KD* III/1, 137; *CD* III/1, 123.
[89] *KD* III/1, 137; *CD* III/1, 123.

creation.[90] This rather awkward interpretative move is smoothed by adducing a mass of canonical intertexts where 'darkness' and 'night' appear as the negative counterparts of 'light' and 'day' (bolstered by a catena of Christian hymns which make the same point).[91] The expression concluding the account of the first day (וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד) requires careful explanation. 'Evening', the close of the day, indicates the finitude of time, and thus God's accomplishment of his work in the finitude of creaturely time. 'Evening' and 'morning' are a careful and theologically motivated circumlocution, alluding to the coming of night without its express mention, amounting to the denial that 'day' consists of both 'day' and 'night'. Rather, night is 'hemmed in' and encircled by evening and morning, and thus by day. That day consists of 'morning' indicates that each day includes the promise of a new day: that God renews and upholds the creaturely time in which his will is accomplished, and that 'night' may not and will not end 'day'.

Here we may observe how, for all Barth's careful attention to certain textual details, the text's implicit witness to the covenant threatens to overwhelm and displace its direct and explicit meaning. Barth claims that the text's cosmological or aetiological concern with the origin of natural light cannot simply be dissolved into its witnessing function; this function belongs to 'natural light as such'.[92] Barth's interpretation of the text's light and darkness as a parable of God's 'Yes' and 'No', however, tends to undercut this position, especially in his comments about natural darkness and night. 'When darkness is called night and therefore precisely not day nor a part of day, it is thereby decreed: it has *no* constitutive meaning for the

[90] *KD* III/1, 141; *CD* III/1, 126. Similarly, the 'separation' (בדל) of light and dark (1.4) is of a wholly different character to the 'separation' (בדל) of the waters above and below the רָקִיעַ, and from the differentiation of dry land and waters by the assemblage (קוה) of the latter (*KD* III/1, 136; *CD* III/1, 122-23).

[91] *KD* III/1, 141-143; *CD* III/1, 126-129. This dynamic is reversed in Barth's comments on v. 4, where a relevant canonical intertext (Isa 45.7) presents something of a hindrance to be overcome. See also Barth's attempt to establish a material and not merely an illustrative relationship between the heavenly bodies and God and his saving work, in which uncongenial material (e.g. Ps 121.6; Isa 49.10; Rev 7.16) is quietly passed over (*KD* III/1, 182-84; *CD* III/1, 163-65). The citation of masses of thematically related biblical material is a recurrent feature of Barth's exposition of the first creation saga. For all their selectivity, these word studies also help to offset the reductive tendencies of Barth's christological interpretation. Thematic similarities in cross-canonical intertexts emphasise the relationship between the history of creation and the history of the covenant, but also yield some of Barth's clearest statements about the non-identity of these histories, and the extensive and developmental character of the 'history of the covenant', especially in texts indicating an eschatological transformation of the theme at issue. It should not be forgotten, however, that Barth is typically more willing to make such statements in the context of relatively broad-brush interpretative comments than in detailed exegesis, and that the links drawn between the history of creation and the history of Israel are generated by *ad hoc* thematic linkages rather than any conception of an extensive narrative unifying and ordering the various canonical texts.

[92] Barth makes a similar claim in his comments on 'Gen 1.3' (which are really restricted to that verse's first two words). וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים is to be read in the context of the New Testament witness to the Word of God, 'without detriment to its obvious and specific [*nächste und besonderen*] meaning', 'if we are really to grasp its obvious and specific meaning' (*KD* III/1, 128; *CD* III/1, 115).

reality of day and therefore for the reality of time.'[93] If day is time, night is 'non-time' (*Unzeit*).[94] The contrary suggestion – that the natural phenomenon of night exists alongside that of day in accordance with the creative will of God – is tantamount to 'the trivialisation [*Banalisierung*] of the concept of "night" and thereby also […] of the concept of "day," and thereby […] of the whole concept of time'.[95] Does 'natural darkness' really remain on view in these comments – or has an interest in cosmic phenomena finally been rendered 'trivial' in the face of the text's covenantal referent?[96] Here the pressure of the text's *Christuszeugnis* – the structural analogy Barth has constructed between light/darkness and election/rejection – threatens to distort the 'natural' sense of the text.

This issue recurs throughout Barth's exposition. Barth's commitment to a covenantal or christological interpretation ensures that the reader cannot reduce the text to a rudimentary ancient essay in natural science, thereby losing sight of the text's *theological* interest in the God with whom all Scripture is concerned: the God who declared himself 'Yahweh' as his glory passed before Moses and the same God whose glory is finally seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Yet this theological interest (along with its ethical corollaries) is articulated in and with a narrative account of this God's original creation, shaping, and blessing of the physical world of daily human experience. The text's theological content cannot be abstracted from its cosmogenic form. Barth is anxious that the text's meaning is not exhausted by a naturalistic interpretation, but his covenantal interpretation often risks subsuming what the text says directly about the origin and structure of the natural world into what he perceives it saying indirectly about God's covenant as the eternal basis and goal of all things. In his willingness to neglect the particular shape given to the text's theological content in and with its articulation of God's original creative activity, Barth regularly ascribes to the author or the text his own disinterest in cosmology as such. For example, Barth takes the fact that the functions of the heavenly 'lights' within the created cosmos are not exhaustively detailed as an indication that

[93] *KD* III/1, 142; *CD* III/1, 127.
[94] *KD* III/1, 143; *CD* III/1, 128.
[95] *KD* III/1, 143; *CD* III/1, 128. See also *KD* III/1, 146; *CD* III/1, 131.
[96] In a similar vein, commenting on v. 4: 'All other possible qualities and advantages of light – that one can see in the light, that light is usually attended by warmth, that it is a condition of animal life, and so on – have indeed interested many exegetes, but hardly interest the biblical author here. The good thing about light, in God's gracious opinion, is this: that he, God, according to the following verse, intends to fix light as a landmark against darkness and therefore against chaos' (*KD* III/1, 136; *CD* III/1, 122). As we have similarly observed elsewhere, this interpretation depends on the effective isolation of the textual subunit (vv. 3-5) from its narrative context, whose remainder suggests that the 'goodness' of light cannot be wholly separated from its benefit to animal and vegetable life.

these functions are not at issue in the text, and interprets what *is* said regarding these functions in terms of human participation in God's covenant.

> So immeasurably great and important is this function [i.e. enabling covenantal participation] for the author that he – here too he thought not of natural science, but here too he is captivated by the sight of the coming history of salvation – rather than saying everything else which could be further indicated as the function of the stars, holds silence in order to say this one thing and with it to say everything [*um dieses Eine und mit ihm Alles zu sagen*].[97]

For Barth, if this 'one thing' has been said, then 'everything' has been said. Other readers may judge that in Barth's exposition, here and elsewhere, the text's varied 'speech' about the natural world and its relationship to its Creator is drowned out by its singular 'proclamation' of the covenant between God and humanity.

d. The heavenly lights (Gen 1.14-19)

Every textual unit we have examined – in the expression 'heavens and earth', the image of a dark and uncompleted world, and the separation of light and darkness – has said 'one thing': the covenant between God and humanity. This very consistency and uniformity of the text's *Christuszeugnis* raises the question of how adequately Barth is able to address textual development and variation. Though he claims in the introduction to his exegetical treatment that '[t]he connection and the succession of the individual events of the history of creation and these individual events themselves – each in its own place in in its own way – points to this last event', these individual events and their connection in sequence actually prove to be something of a liability for his interpretative efforts.[98] The prefigurative character of any given textual feature derives from structural analogy between that feature and God's covenant, and thus is minimally dependent on the cumulative sense rendered by the unfolding of the

[97] *KD* III/1, 182; *CD* III/1, 163. Among many other examples, see also Barth's comments on Gen 1.6: the 'waters' on view here are apparently not 'allegorical or imaginary waters [*aquae allegoricae vel phantasticae*]', and yet the entire focus of the text (or that of the interpreter, at least) is on these waters as a signifier of the '*metaphysical* danger' averted by God's decision (*KD* III/1, 153, 154; *CD* III/1, 137, 138). 'So little is our text interested in the world as such, so much only in the history which occurs in the world [i.e. the *Bundesgeschichte*] and in its presuppositions, that it simply omits the report concerning the creation of the waters above and under, or rather implies this in reporting the creation of the barrier erected between both.' (*KD* III/1, 152; *CD* III/1, 136). There is a further indication that Barth thinks a proper exposition of the text can be conducted in abstraction from its description of the natural world when he affirms Luther's serene perplexity about the 'waters above the firmament' over against Calvin's 'rationalistic' attempt to square the text with everyday human experience of the world (*sensus communis*) by equating these waters with clouds (*KD* III/1, 153; *CD* III/1, 137; cf. *CO* 23, 18.
[98] *KD* III/1, 108; *CD* III/1, 98.

narrative.[99] In Barth's interpretation, each textual segment offers its own largely self-contained testimony to the covenant. In fact, because God's covenant is the singular object or event to which every textual feature bears witness, and the meaning of the text is exhausted in the object of its witness, it becomes increasingly difficult for Barth to negotiate the growth and development apparent at the level of the textual surface. Though the text apparently moves from describing the creation of heavens and earth to the establishment of various distinct spheres to their creaturely population and blessing, the 'one thing' – God's covenant – is always the true matter at hand.

This tension between variation and singularity is apparent at numerous points in Barth's treatment, but is perhaps clearest in his discussion of God's activity on the fourth day (Gen 1.14-19). Barth discerns a structural division in the text between days 1-3 and days 4-6, assigning this division a theological significance which is, once again, concerned with the covenant, under a new aspect. The first half of the narrative, in outlining the establishment of the created cosmos, speaks of the divine decision; the second half, in outlining the furnishing of the cosmos, speaks of humanity's responsible participation in the 'history' of the covenant. The heavenly lights and stars of Gen 1.14-19 serve humanity, enabling this responsible participation by mediating God's light. But this line of interpretation involves Barth in some difficulties. That there should need to be another division of day from night (v. 14) after God has already decisively performed this work on the first day is enough to give the interpreter pause; another delineation of the boundary between God's 'Yes' and 'No' would be redundant.[100] The ministry of the heavenly bodies cannot be a 'repetition [*Wiederholung*] of the divine work, because this work needs no repetition and is also not capable of it, because it occurred completely once for all.'[101] The solution, apparently, lies in understanding the function of the lights and stars as essentially mimetic: in the form of an 'imitation and representation [*Nachahmung und Abbildung*]' of the divine original, they offer humanity 'a *sign* of what *God* did on the first day.'[102] And yet, Barth writes only a few pages later that this service to humanity consists not only in a 'representation [*Abbildung*]' but also a 'repetition [*Wiederholung*]' of the divine creation of light.[103] This uncharacteristic verbal slip (i.e. that the

[99] This is the case even where a textual feature's *Christuszeugnis* is derivative of the 'explicit' reference to the covenant in Gen 2.1-3 – that is, where the text is understood as a prefiguration of a prefiguration of the covenant. Here too, the capacity of the text to prefigure the covenant operates at the level of structural analogy, and while these second-order prefigurations add a greater degree of variation in exactly *how* the covenant is attested, the object attested nevertheless always remains the same.
[100] *KD* III/1, 179; *CD* III/1, 160.
[101] *KD* III/1, 179; *CD* III/1, 160-61.
[102] *KD* III/1, 179; *CD* III/1, 161.
[103] *KD* III/1, 181; *CD* III/1, 162.

ministry of the heavenly lights is not, cannot be, and yet is a 'repetition' of God's work) indicates not theological confusion on Barth's part so much as the strain of exegetically maintaining his theological consistency in the face of textual variation.[104]

In Barth's exposition, the work of the first day and of the fourth refers to the same theological reality: God's unrepeatable 'Yes' and 'No'. But where the divine decision – according to Barth – is a singular event, the work of creation – according to Gen 1.1-2.3 – is not. The created world is not the work of a moment: 'day one' (v. 5) is followed by 'the second day' (v. 8), and 'the third day' (v. 13), and so on. Through Barth's exposition, therefore, he is locked in a continual silent struggle with that feature of the text which proves the most stubbornly intractable: the ordinal numbers marking the conclusion of each day, securing the distinction of each day from that which precedes and follows, inscribing an unfolding temporal succession – the linear time which 'keeps everything from happening at once'.[105] While Barth refers to the first creation saga as the 'history' or 'story' of creation (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*), and stresses the importance of its narrative form, in his exposition of this text its extensive and cumulative dimensions – its *narrative* characteristics – are effectively suppressed by the singular emphasis of his christological interpretation.

Barth's christological interpretation combines the fragmentation of the narrative text into a series of images or figures with a convergence of the meaning of these textual fragments into a singularity. The former serves the latter. By interpreting each textual feature at a remove from its literary context, and downplaying the text's interest in the natural world as such, Barth is able to elicit every feature's meaning with direct reference to the theme of all Scripture: God's covenant with humanity, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.[106] Thus the covenant becomes the meaning of the creation saga in every part: 'God's covenant of grace is the meaning of this world'.[107] For all Barth's insightful (and ingenious) engagement with the fine grain of the text, and his professed commitment to the inherence of christological witness in creaturely particularity, his exegesis reveals a strong tendency to treat the saga's non-identical statements about the various

[104] Likewise, primal chaos, once reinserted at the narrative in Gen 1.2, proves disconcertingly tenacious: its apparently definitive banishment in the parodic rejection of v. 2 seemingly needs constant reiteration in the separation of light from darkness, and in the establishment of the רָקִיעַ, and again in the gathering of the waters, and so on. Here Barth's interpretative difficulties adumbrate broader theological problems: if this 'No' is the shadow of God's 'Yes', can it ever be truly lifted from the creation which exists in virtue of this 'Yes'?

[105] See Susan Sontag, *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*, ed. Paolo Dilonardo and Anne Jump (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 214. The origination of this phrase has been variously attributed.

[106] More precisely, the text's christological reference is mediated by the literary context of *Church Dogmatics* itself, which establishes the structural features of God's covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

[107] *KD* III/1, 159; *CD* III/1, 142. Cf. Berkouwer's comment: 'Everywhere we meet the same prefiguration of the triumph.' (*The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 59.)

realms of the created world and their creaturely inhabitants merely as the dispensable form; at every point the substance of what is said concerns the singular reality of the covenant.

4. Conclusion

Barth's effort to construct a christological basis for the doctrine of creation and his christological interpretation of 'the first creation saga' are one and the same. As with his interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son, Barth recognises the absence of explicit christological reference in the text, but argues for the necessary identification of a textual feature with the personal work of Jesus Christ by highlighting structural similarities between that feature and the event which occurs in Jesus Christ (i.e. the fulfilment of the covenant). This christological link is not mediated by the location of the text within an overarching narrative context operating at the canonical level. Nor is the text's *Christuszeugnis* a function of its narrative as such: whereas the christological witness of the parable of the Prodigal Son emerged from the narrative as a whole and depended on the artistic integrity of that narrative, Barth's christological interpretation of the first creation saga depends on the fracturing of the text into a series of discrete images.

As with the 'allegorical' patristic exegesis of the parables, in Barth's christological interpretation of the first creation saga virtually no textual detail is too small to declare a theological reality beyond itself. Careful examination reveals that the tiny details of the text testify not only to the text's direct factual and thematic content, but also to more profound and weighty spiritual matters. But where the Fathers might conceive of the divine grace attested in a parable more expansively as a variety of related but distinct activities, for Barth this text's spiritual referent is more tightly focused. Speaking parabolically, the first creation saga utters a single theologoumenon: God's elective will, along with its attendant converse, the non-election of that which God does not will. Various expressions in the narrative may highlight different aspects of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but this covenant is always the singular referent. Thus Barth's parabolic christological interpretation combines density with uniformity: every tiny detail means the same thing.

This kaleidoscopic or fractal interpretation of the first creation saga treats the text, in effect, as a collection of parables. In the allegorical interpretation of a single parable, the network of relationships established in the narrative analogically determines – at least to some extent – the

parable's theological or christological interpretation.[108] In Barth's christological interpretation of the first creation saga, however, the fact that the textual features which testify to the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ are integrated into a narrative plays only a limited role. Where the narrative describes a cumulative shaping of the created world by the successive activities of the first three days, Barth perceives not succession but reiteration in the object of the text's witness: the re-inscription of God's 'Yes' and 'No'. At the level of the christological *Sache*, the cumulation depicted in the narrative is restricted to a vague and rather slippery suggestion of a 'further fulfilment' of God's single decision.[109] Here Barth treats the text of Gen 1.1-2.4a less as a depiction of a sequence of events which, in their total interconnection, ostensively signal a spiritual reality beyond the text (i.e. a parabolic narrative) and more like a collection of discrete parabolic images, each singly depicting the same singular reality. We may find an instructive analogy, then, between Barth's christological interpretation of the first creation saga and a collection of brief parabolic images like that found in Chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel. For all the textual adjacency of these images, and the uniformity in the object of their parabolic reference, they are largely uncoordinated, and their parabolic sense is not determined by their integration in a cohesive narrative.

These findings regarding Barth's handling of biblical narrative can enrich a critical and constructive engagement with Barth's dogmatic theology: a task which, if it is to be truly 'scientific' in the Barthian sense – a mode of inquiry determined by the object of study – cannot be undertaken without reference to his biblical exegesis.[110] This is true everywhere in *Church Dogmatics*, but nowhere more so than in the doctrine of creation, where dogmatic construction and biblical interpretation coincide. Our examination of Barth's christological interpretation of Gen 1.1-2.4a has suggested a number of avenues for theological reflection, including the remythologisation of the text and Barth's concept of *Das Nichtige*, and his emphasis on the Word at the expense of the Spirit in the creative activity of the Triune God. The central theological issue, however, is the relationship between creation and reconciliation.

Barth's chief concern is to establish an indissoluble relationship between creation and covenant. As ever, he is anxious that any relative independence of this dogmatic locus will inevitably result in a doctrine of creation abstracted from God's definitive self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. That Barth is able to formulate a distinctively and robustly *Christian* doctrine of creation, and to do so through a Christian reading of the key Old Testament text concerning

[108] See e.g. Matt 13.40-42.
[109] *KD* III/1, 148; *CD* III/1, 133.
[110] See *KD* I/1, 8-9; *CD* I/1, 10.

creation, are the great achievements of his theological work in this dogmatic locus. A doctrine of creation constructed on this basis cannot become estranged from God's reconciling activity in Jesus Christ. Barth's Christian doctrine of creation, however, runs the opposite risk: that of subsuming creation into reconciliation. Theological analyses have remarked on this bent in Barth's doctrine of creation; with the preceding examination of Barth's christological exegesis, Barth's parabolic reading strategy may be identified as a key factor in this theological tendency.[111]

Barth attempts to distinguish creation from the covenant through both explicit statements regarding their proper dogmatic ordering and the concepts he deploys to describe their relationship (e.g. 'prefiguration'). Nevertheless, these formal delimitations are undercut in the doctrine's exegetical construction. In Barth's interpretation of Gen 1.1-2.4a, God's creative work prepares for and anticipates God's reconciling work because the structure of the covenant is *already* perceptible in the structures of the created world, weakening the force of Barth's reminders that in the work of creation, the work of reconciliation is still 'not yet' fulfilled.[112] Thus the theological significance of creation becomes virtually equivalent to its testimony to God's covenant with humanity; whatever may be learned from creation may already known *in nuce* from reconciliation.

This tendency for the theologically distinct character of creation as such to be drowned out by creation's testimony to God's reconciling work is only reinforced by the interpretative decision to treat the narrative in Gen 1.1-2.4a as a series of parabolic images which are to be understood allegorically. The risk in allegorical interpretation is that once the reader's ear is tuned to what the text 'really' proclaims, she becomes deaf to what the text actually says. Either the particularities of the text are elided, or they become mere ciphers for aspects of the allegorical referent, and are thus dispensable once the code has been broken. This danger is heightened by the relentless theological consistency of Barth's interpretation: if all the different elements and relationships presented in the text finally attest the same object (i.e. God's 'Yes' and 'No'), it is difficult to alleviate the suspicion that their diversity is hardly significant. Textual plurality is swallowed up by the singularity of the theological referent.

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[111] See e.g. Susannah Ticciati, 'Anachronism or Illumination?: Genesis 1 and Creation Ex Nihilo', *Anglican Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (2017): 706; Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 165; and especially Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 250–53; but cf. John Webster, *Barth*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 97–98.

[112] 'In creation this is all a *prefiguration*. The *act of reconciliation* had still to follow. But in the prefiguration of the triumph (the separation of light from darkness), the triumph lies apriorily enclosed.' (Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 82. See also Berkouwer's various comments on the functional identity of creation and reconciliation or election, e.g. 60, 76 n.8.)

Because the particularities of this text are concerned with the concrete realities of the created world, Barth's parabolic reading of the text risks implying a relationship of supersession between these created realities and the christological event to which they refer. The Bible's word in all its words is the one Word of God: Jesus Christ, the fulfilment of God's 'Yes' and 'No'. In everything that the creation narrative has to say about the created world, Barth hears this one Word ringing out. In Barth's interpretation, however, the witness's voice begins to take on an unreal timbre, as if sounding in an anechoic chamber. The tighter the interpretative bonds between the various elements described in the text and the singular object of their witness are drawn, the looser the connection becomes between what is described in the text and the 'natural' elements of the world in which we live and move and have our being. Is the 'darkness' and 'night' of Scripture's first chapter the same thing that the reader experiences when, after sundown, she puts down her Bible and steps outside? Is God's will for humanity attested by her lived reality as mediated by the scriptural text, or is the covenant visible only in a purely intratextual world whose 'night' is not her night, and whose 'stars' are not her stars?[113] If the Bible is true, does it tell the truth about our world, the world of lived human experience? If not, an uncomfortable gap begins to open up between the Bible's truth and our truths. We can no longer be certain that the creation of our daily experience is the one addressed by God's reconciling work. Creation and reconciliation may not be separated, but if they cannot be properly distinguished, both are adversely affected.

If attending to the way that Barth handles biblical narrative enhances our critical engagement with Barth's doctrine of creation, it also suggests possibilities for the creative reformulation of the doctrine through theological exegesis which is more attuned to Scripture's narrative dimension.[114] Those who urge that Genesis 1 is to be read with reference to God's pattern of redemptive activity towards Israel often appeal to a compositional sequence discerned by historical-critical study: the Priestly creation narrative appears late relative to other Old Testament texts, and what is later must be read in light of what precedes.[115] Barth

[113] The intratextual 'world' of Genesis 1 'bodies forth Christ', but it is less clear that 'the simplest facts and the most mundane experiences of life in this world, from the rising of the sun that conquers darkness to the land that keeps back the sea, reflect God's victory in Christ over what threatens us through our own fault.' (Tanner, 'Creation and Providence', 119.)

[114] In addition to the possibility described here, a greater commitment to the narrative unity of Gen 1.1-2.3 itself might permit a genuinely *trinitarian* doctrine of creation: if the mention of רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים in Gen 1.2 is brought into relation with the gradual forming, shaping, and 'bringing forth' in the remainder of the narrative, the result might be a doctrine of creation more thoroughly conditioned by the work of the Holy Spirit who enables the creation to be itself, bringing created particularity to perfection, through time, in relation to the Father through the Son. Cf. Gunton, *The Triune Creator*.

[115] See e.g. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, Rev. (London: SCM, 1972), 23–24; Tanner, 'Creation and Providence', 113.

offers a similar argument on theological rather than historical-critical grounds. God's covenant will, his 'Yes' and 'No', precedes God's activity in creation, and what precedes must guide our understanding of what follows. From a Christian theological perspective, both arguments underplay the theological significance of the shape of the Scriptural canon.[116] The canonical decision to retain Israel's Scriptures as 'Old Testament' necessitates that Christian readers understand these texts as testimony to Jesus Christ. But the decision to place Genesis 1 (and 2) at the beginning of the canon – to make this 'beginning' the beginning of the scriptural salvation history – also requires that what comes after be read in light of this beginning.[117] The canonical structuring of the scriptural testimony to Christ – the extensive unity of the traditional story of creation, fall, and salvation – enables a genuinely 'prospective' and 'retrospective' interpretation which could provide a structured interrelationship between creation and reconciliation, preventing both abstraction and collapse.[118] If creation is the beginning of a story that climaxes with the coming of Jesus Christ, creation may and must be understood retrospectively in light of what God has done in Christ. If Christ's coming falls in the middle of a story that begins with creation, then what God does in creation may and must also play an important role in shaping an understanding of Christ's redeeming work.

[116] See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), 154–55.
[117] This remains true regardless of whether the 'canon' on view is the Jewish or the Christian canon.
[118] Cf. the unrealised promise of Barth's comments at *KD* III/1, 24; *CD* III/1, 24.

Conclusion: Christology and interpretative christocentrism

In this conclusion I aim first to briefly summarise the preceding analysis of Barth's theological interpretation of biblical narrative, and to sharpen its critical aspect by reflecting on the relationship between dogmatic Christology and christocentrism in biblical interpretation. Endeavouring to conclude on a constructive note, I will then engage with the biblical text directly once more, attending in particular to the way that temporal sequence – and especially the sequence of Old and New Testament which is the most basic feature of Christian Scripture – is indispensable to the scriptural presentation of the being and activity of Jesus Christ. This conclusion, then, is intended to further a critical appropriation of Barth's theology, with all its promise and challenge, by tracing the outlines of an alternative approach to interpretative christocentrism which differs significantly from Barth's own.

I.

To truly know and thus truly speak of God, the theologian must yield to what God has said of himself. For Barth, of course, this means that theological epistemology is fundamentally *christological*, for the Word of God, God's self-revelation to human beings, is Jesus Christ. Christology, then, is not merely one dogmatic locus among others, but serves as a perpetual touchstone in dogmatics, for all in all human discourse *de rebus Dei* we are dependent on this Word. Christocentrism is the rule not only in dogmatic construction and organisation, but also in the biblical interpretation which precedes and follows dogmatics. Barth construes Scripture as the indispensable witness to the Word of God; to read the Bible rightly is to seek the Word in the words. Barth's interpretative christocentrism is not an arbitrary aesthetic choice; it is the implication of his material discernment of the meaning and significance of the reality named 'Jesus Christ'. Christocentrism is prescribed by Christology.

Yet 'christocentrism', like 'Christology', names a cluster of divergent proposals, and different Christologies will produce different kinds of christocentrism. Barth's christological or christocentric hermeneutic for biblical narrative derives its distinctive stamp from the peculiar character of his Christology. Though Barth's dogmatic Christology develops significantly from his initial break with the liberal Protestant theological tradition through to his mature dogmatic theology, his emphasis on the singularity of God's activity in Jesus Christ – whether conceived as the intensely punctiliar revelation of history's intersection by an unknown plane, or as the reconciliation-occurrence which fulfils God's eternal covenant

– constitutes a line of continuity within this development. In accordance with this characteristic stress, both Barth's earlier and later efforts in christocentric biblical interpretation are marked by difficult negotiations with the sequential and cumulative dimension of biblical narratives, and a corresponding tendency to render these texts theologically tractable by compressing the variegated import of a temporally extensive sequence of events into the single meaning of a singular event. This interpretative tendency has not been sufficiently appreciated by those who regard Barth as an exemplary theological reader of biblical narratives, and helps to account for some of the points at which his concrete exegetical efforts produce results which other interpreters may find unconvincing.

Old Testament texts pose a key challenge for any christocentric hermeneutic, and Barth's specific form of christocentrism involves a correspondingly distinctive approach to this interpretative challenge. Barth's stress on 'Jesus Christ' as the name of a single, complex event and his resistance to the notion of locating this event within an unfolding biblical history problematises typological interpretation in its traditional form. Barth's christological interpretation of the Old Testament is *parabolic* rather than typological; the New is concealed in the Old (*Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet*) as Christ is hidden in a parable. The relationship between textual 'type' and christological 'antitype' is *not* mediated by an appeal to the literary context of an unfolding canonical story which embraces the activity narrated in the type-text and the narrated activity of Jesus Christ and structures these distinct activities as 'Old' and 'New'. Instead, Barth's christological interpretations of the Old Testament are sustained by appeal to the characteristic structure of his dogmatic account of Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of God's covenant with humanity; the decisive literary context for Barth's christological interpretation is *Church Dogmatics* itself. Through this distinctive parabolic form of interpretative christocentrism Barth is able to produce christological interpretations of christologically anonymous Old Testament narrative texts, which contribute to the task of christologically-determined theological construction, but these interpretations tend in effect to prise the narratives from their larger literary context, and to erode the particularity and integrity of these self-enclosed narrated worlds.

Just as the specific character of a Christian theologian's understanding of 'Jesus Christ' will determine the shape of that theologian's christological biblical interpretation, so too particular acts of biblical interpretation mutually shape and sustain a theological perception of the meaning and significance of Jesus Christ. In evaluating a theologian's efforts to interpret the Old Testament christologically, the concern for preserving textual particularity is not only aesthetic or political, but is a matter of attending to the canonical dynamic of Old and New, in

which the text retains its particular integrity even in its retrospective perception and presentation as testimony to Jesus Christ, and precisely in this particularity offers a testimony which is indispensable in enabling and informing a true perception of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament and the Christ of the New Testament stand in a dynamic relationship of mutual intelligibility; any impairment of one moment in this interplay will effect a reciprocal distortion.

Barth's parabolic mode of christological interpretation risks just such an impairment. The canonical sequence of Old and New Testament inscribes the genuine temporal priority of the divine and human activity depicted in the Jewish Scriptures to the divine-human activity proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the non-identity of these two activities. The adoption of the texts comprising the Jewish Scriptures as the Christian 'Old Testament' represents the positive recognition that Jesus Christ is who he is and does what he does 'in accordance with the Scriptures', and equally that 'the Scriptures' are interpreted rightly when received from Jesus Christ, in their totality, as 'concerning himself' (Luke 24.27; 1 Cor 15.3). Viewed negatively, this adoption is also a decision *not* to rewrite these texts in a 'Christianising' assimilation. The manifest eagerness of early Christian exegetes to seize on textual features in the Old Testament which appeared to refer transparently to Jesus Christ only underscores the remarkable fact that the texts' apparently baffling and problematic features were left undisturbed. Of course, some allegorical forms of interpretation nevertheless amounted effectively to the overwriting of these textual features. Barth's parabolic interpretation – which approximates allegorical interpretation in some respects – similarly erodes the force of the canonical decision. Having minimised the significance of the irreversible linear sequence implied by the canonical designations 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament', the direct proximity of the christological antitype to the type-text creates another kind of interpretative compression, threatening the integrity and particularity of the type, which stands in relation to the antitype not as 'old' to 'new', but as a derivative stands in relation to its original. Thus the christological sense of the type-text becomes, in effect, simply equivalent to the understanding of the Christ-event which the interpreter already had in mind prior to the interpretative encounter with the text. This is not the practice of the *optimus lector.* If the Old Testament is permitted to supply to the New Testament only that which it has already received from the New Testament, the theological reader risks carrying away only what he brought to the text. If an Old Testament 'type' cannot be meaningfully differentiated from its christological 'antitype', then the type cannot serve to genuinely inform and enrich the interpreter's understanding of the antitype. On these terms, the Old Testament cannot play its

proper role in shaping and sustaining a theological perception of the meaning and significance of Jesus Christ; the *circulus virtuosus* of Christology and christological interpretation will tighten into a spiral.

At the outset of this study it was suggested that the promise of Barth's theological project for contemporary efforts in constructive theology was to be gained through an evaluation and critical appropriation of the theological interpretation of Scripture sustaining his own vastly ambitious and influential articulation of dogmatic theology. We have taken up one aspect of this challenge, focusing on Barth's interpretation of biblical narrative. Contrary to the perception – deriving primarily from the work of Hans Frei – that biblical narrative, and especially its figural interpretation, plays a central role in the construction of Barth's mature theology, we have found that his distinctive form of interpretative christocentrism entails real difficulty in attending receptively to this aspect of the biblical witness to Jesus Christ. By way of conclusion, I will attempt to indicate one way in which a critical engagement with Barth's theology – seeking to appropriate the strengths and ameliorate some of the weaknesses we have highlighted – might proceed. Obviously, nothing like a full critical engagement with Barth's dogmatic Christology nor a developed counterproposal for interpretative christocentrism can be offered in the present context. Instead, inspired by Barth's best instincts, what follows is an attempt to return to Scripture, emulating that reader who comes to the text in the hope of learning what cannot be known in advance of this encounter.

The Bible's own preeminent account of the person and work of Jesus Christ is the fourfold Gospel: the story of Jesus, told in unfolding narrative sequence four times over. In the construction of these narratives, the fundamental sequence of Old and New is of prime importance; the narration of Jesus' story proceeds by way of locating him at the climax and decisive turn of a story already in train, the scriptural story of Israel and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The personal activity of Jesus Christ is meaningfully rendered by the evangelists in the interplay between these stories, in 'the catalytic fusion of Israel's Scripture and the story of Jesus', in the fulfilment of the Old by the New.[1] Our final effort, therefore, to indicate another possible mode in which Scripture might be read, feeling for the theological weight of its sequential and cumulative dimension, looks to the interface between the Old and New Testaments in the canonical arrangement of Christian Scripture, where Jesus Christ first emerges into open view as the one who fulfils what the Lord had spoken by the prophets: the beginning of the Gospel according to Matthew.

[1] Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 8.

II.

Ancient Christian reflection on Matthew's Gospel offers two important and closely related insights: here the identity of the church's Lord is given definitive shape, and this shape is exemplified in the evangelist's decision to begin his portrayal of Jesus Christ by relating the story of his origin as a Jewish man.[2] In patristic writings, Matthew is presented as the first and foundational Gospel.[3] If the historical dimensions of this claim appear dubious to modern scholarship, it nevertheless remains accurate and illuminating in its perception of this Gospel's special role in the canon of Christian Scripture. As just four Gospels – and yet *four* distinct Gospels, no more and no fewer – came to be accepted as the authoritative presentation of the one gospel of Jesus Christ, the four faces of the cherubim upon which the Lord is enthroned offered an apt biblical image for this fourfold unity.[4] The distinctive character of each Gospel was perceived to be most evident in its beginning, and thus the Gospel placed first in the canonical collection, the Gospel 'according to Matthew', was assigned the face 'as of a man'; opening with the genealogy tracing Jesus' human lineage back to Abraham and the story of his birth, this Gospel is especially concerned to portray the Messiah as a human figure.[5] In the canon of Christian Scripture, when readers catch their first glimpse of Jesus Christ, they are shown the human face of a man born into a Jewish family. Displaying this visage, Matthew's ordinal status as 'first' in the New Testament's Gospel collection is justified by its qualitative character: here is the bedrock of the fourfold Gospel. 'Matthew comes first in the canonical collection because – in the view of his early readers, who put him there – his emphasis on Jesus' Jewishness is the key to understanding who Jesus is.'[6]

This Matthean emphasis is, of course, not merely concerned with Jesus' ethnic identity as such. The opening of this Gospel presents the reader with a human Christ, Jesus, located in a specific human lineage; Jesus is a Jewish man, 'son of David, son of Abraham'. But this 'sonship' of Jesus is not simply identical with his patrilineal genetic inheritance. Matthew

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[2] In the following, 'Matthew' refers both the text of the first Gospel and to the implied author of that text (i.e. the first evangelist) .

[3] With the likely (though not certain) exception of Papias (see Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.39.15-16). On this and the following, see Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 21–42.

[4] See Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.11.8; cf. Ezek 1; Rev 4.

[5] Citing Matt 1.1, 18a, Irenaeus concludes: 'ἀνθρωπόμορφον οὖν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦτο' (*Adv. haer*. 3.11.8). Cf. Jerome's preface to his *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, FC 117 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 55. Augustine, despite his dissent on other grounds, recognises that those who assign the human face to Matthew's Gospel have its beginning especially in mind (*De Consensu Evangelistarum* 1.6.9).

[6] Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel*, 27.

labels the textual unit by which he relates Jesus' descent from Abraham through David 'Βίβλος γενέσεως' (Matt 1.1). 'Birth record', one possible translation, aptly describes the initial impression a reader may receive of a simple series of progenitors by which Jesus can be securely assigned to a particular *ethnos*. Yet the reader's effort to trace more closely along this line reveals not smooth straightness, but perplexing knobbles and notches. These disclose, among other things, that Matthew's genealogical account is in fact a carefully crafted miniature version of the unruly story wending its way through Israel's Scriptures, trimmed and padded and moulded into meaningfulness, beginning with the figure of Abraham encountered in the first book of the Jewish and Christian canon alike – the biblical source of the phrase βίβλος γενέσεως, which might also be translated 'the book of genesis'[7] – and finding its climax in 'Jesus, who is called Christ' (Matt 1.16). The currents and contours of Israel's history with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as told in Israel's Scripture, enfold and frame the story of Jesus. This history, according to Matthew, tells how 'Jesus Christ' came to be: he has his 'genesis' in the 'book(s)' of Scripture.

Matthew's account of Jesus' origin draws on Israel's Scripture not as a collection of anecdotes or merely a historical record from which a series of 'fatherings' can be culled and linked together, but as a single story, representing this story in condensed form as an unfolding linear sequence which is coherent and meaningful in a definite, tripartite shape, summarised in v. 17: 'So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.' This schema constitutes an interpretative decision – deliberate but not arbitrary, and constructive but not artificial – on Matthew's part, and in it the interpretative interplay between the story of Israel and the story of Jesus – between Old and New Testaments – is clearly perceptible. The structure of three fourteens cannot be discerned in Israel's Scriptures prior to the advent of 'the one called Christ'.[8] This is true not only in the sense that the fourteen generations of the story's final stage 'from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ' cannot be counted until the Christ is born, but of the structure as a whole. The coming of 'the Christ', and Matthew's identification of this 'Christ' with a certain person – Jesus born of Mary – whose story itself has the particular shape conveyed in this Gospel, has enabled the judgement within a wide field of interpretative possibilities that the sequence of 'Abraham', 'David', 'the deportation to Babylon', and 'the Christ' constitutes the basic

[7] Gen 5.1 LXX.

[8] For a convincing explanation of the double-counting of Jechoniah (Matt 1.11, 12), without which the third 'fourteen generations' amounts to only thirteen, see Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel*, 38–39.

structure within which the story of Israel's history is meaningful. If the Jesus of Matthew's Gospel is truly the Christ, then Israel's story can be told as a coherent whole, with a beginning, middle, and end, and therefore with a determinate meaning. Christ is the interpretative key to Scripture. With the genealogy, Matthew embarks upon the project of inculcating a christological hermeneutic for Israel's Scriptures, which will continue throughout his Gospel.

Yet reverse moment of this interplay is equally important. According to Matthew, the proper sense of 'Jesus Christ' is not apprehended – and should not be imagined – independently of the meaning of Israel's history as given in Israel's Scriptures. Jesus' story cannot be told except as an integral part of the scriptural story of Abraham's God and his people. The fabric of Jesus' story is woven from the trailing threads of this older and larger story; Matthew's narrative portrait of Jesus' being and activity – his Christology – is identical with his depiction of Jesus as this story's climax. What is impaired in Barth's account of Jesus Christ is vital in Matthew's: *Scripture is the interpretative key to the Christ*. For Matthew, that is, the Scriptures – perceived not as a disparate assemblage of mimetic reflections of a singular event, but as the literary presentation of an interrelated sequence of distinct events unfolding in its own meaningful structure, as the telling of a story which can be retold in brief narrative summary – substantively inform a true understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Matthew's constructed βίβλος γενέσεως draws on and re-presents the biblical narratives, allowing the reader to make sense of the scriptural story and the scriptural story to make sense of Jesus. The event with which the sequence commences – 'Abraham fathered Isaac' – can hardly be understood without reference to God's promises in the Genesis narrative: numerous offspring, enjoying land and blessing embracing all the families of the earth. Without these promises there is no 'son of Abraham', and whoever has Abraham as 'father' stands to inherit these promises. If the association of Abraham with God's promises casts the patriarch in a positive light, eliding the messy details of his personal history, it is not so with 'David the king'. David's kingship stands for the realisation of much that God had promised – absent punctuation in v. 1, David too is 'son of Abraham' – and yet the first evangelist highlights not only the fact but the circumstances in which David came to 'father' Solomon. If the regular sequence of sire 'fathering' son gives the impression of a history proceeding smoothly and with solemn dignity to its inevitable goal, the punctuation of this sequence by the unconventional incursions of female figures recalls the sad missteps and strange side-steps of this story; its startling infamy is attested by how these men treated 'Tamar' and 'the wife of Uriah', its surprising inclusivity by the bold advance of the Gentiles 'Rahab' and 'Ruth' into the heart of the national story and, ultimately, into the Messiah's ancestry. Such material could easily be

omitted from a genealogical outline; its inclusion helps to give this βίβλος γενέσεως its particular theological colour and complexion.[9] Matthew finds relevant, then, not only the names of these figures, but their stories as presented in Scripture, including these stories' darker undercurrents. The line of kings that proceeds from David through Solomon includes those whose biblical narratives occasion negative narratorial judgements, who are said to have done 'what is evil', committing sin and drawing the nation after them (e.g. Matt 1.10; cf. 2 Kgs 1.16). The historical event to which this line leads – 'the deportation to Babylon' – stands out by virtue of both its categorical difference from the list of patriarchal progenitors, and its unambiguous import: it can mean only catastrophe. This event further deepens the accumulating shadows that have darkened the story so far, casting Israel's history as a long slide from initial promise into ultimate disaster. And yet this disaster cannot be truly ultimate, for the story continues, ending not with exile but with 'Jesus who is called Christ'. Thus Matthew's genealogical presentation of the scriptural story of Israel has a meaningful shape: it finds its beginning, middle, and end in promise, ruin, and restoration. It is in this shape and structure, as this unfolding story – and not by an interpretative compression into a singular event and meaning – that Israel's history confers definite sense upon the figure who constitutes its goal and climax. Jesus is who he is as the culmination of this story: son of Abraham and son of David, shouldering the full burden of expectation and disappointment which these figures have accrued in the unfolding story of salvation, inheritor of the promises of Israel's faithful God and the failures of Yahweh's sinful people, and the embodiment of Israel's abiding hope.

Yet this Gospel's opening also offers a crucial qualification regarding this human Christ whose being is constituted by this history. The last and greatest disruption of the genealogical series comes as its essential structural feature, the repeated refrain 'X fathered [ἐγέννησεν] Y', disappears after the series' penultimate step. While 'Jacob fathered Joseph', Joseph is not said to have 'fathered' Jesus; Joseph is identified as 'the husband of Mary, from whom [ἐξ ἧς] Jesus, the one called Christ, was fathered [ἐγεννήθη]' (1.16). The genealogy's key verb is here, but in an enigmatic passive form. Who fathered Jesus? How did Jesus come to be born 'from [Mary]', if he is not the product of the kind of 'fathering' by which his βίβλος γενέσεως is constituted?

Thus Matthew introduces a second and complementary account of Jesus' 'genesis', drawing on another facet of that term's lexical potential: 'The birth [γένεσις] of Jesus Christ took place

[9] Matthew retains and amplifies this feature of the genealogical material in 1 Chron 1-3 upon which he draws; see Watson, 33–37.

in this way' (1.18). Here we learn that Joseph did not father Jesus. Instead he is merely informed after the fact, and in the face of his own reticence regarding the entire matter, that 'what has been fathered [τὸ… γεννηθέν] in her is by the Holy Spirit' (1.20). Joseph is addressed by the divine messenger as 'son of David' (1.20), but this message makes it clear that, genetically speaking, this line of patriarchal heredity terminates with him. Jesus *is* the 'son of David' (1.1); he does not shun or supersede what has come before. Yet a critical equivocation is at play in calling both Joseph and Jesus 'son of David'. Joseph, as son of David, represents an inheritance that Jesus neither flatly evades nor simply receives. Jesus arises from and is formed by the history of Israel, but he is not merely its end-product and is not fated to reproduce its patterns and thus succumb to its deadly inertia. The agency of the Holy Spirit in the birth of Jesus Christ, and his unique 'fathering', constitutes an unprecedented divine incursion into Israel's history, and marks a momentous turn in that history. The chain of 'fathering', the realisation and perpetuation of natural possibilities, does not bind Jesus Christ. His meaning and significance is not solely determined by the continuity and cumulative force of Israel's history, but also by the discontinuity inherent in another crucial feature of the scriptural story, co-emergent with his own being and activity: the sequence of Old and New. Just as Matthew's Gospel stands at the canonical interface between Old and New Testament, the Christ this Gospel introduces is constituted by his location within the biblical history as both its climax and its decisive turn. The people whose history is presented in the Scriptures, the people of Israel, are truly 'his people'; in virtue of the unique mode of his participation in this people's history – as 'God with us' – and only as such, 'he will save his people from their sins' (1.21, 23).

At the beginning of his Gospel, then, the first evangelist's Christological *modus operandi* – in contrast with the Barthian stress on the singularity of the reconciliation-event – is to locate the man Jesus within an unfolding story whose unified meaning is inseparable from its structuring in distinct and temporally sequential stages. By establishing an intertextual relationship between the text of his own Gospel and that of Israel's Scriptures, Matthew impels a bidirectional hermeneutical interplay in which Jesus Christ makes sense of the scriptural story and the scriptural story makes sense of Jesus Christ. The introductory double genesis is the first but by no means the only literary means employed by the first evangelist to this end.

Explicit 'formula-quotations' – scriptural quotations introduced by some variant of the formula 'All this took place in order to fulfil what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet,

saying…' – are a prominent feature of this Gospel.[10] Once again, this characteristic feature is especially pronounced in the Gospel's extended opening. Of the formula's ten occurrences in Matthew's Gospel, fully half appear in its first four chapters. As Matthew shares the events of Jesus' early life, enriching the identity established in the double genesis, the narratorial voice intervenes in the narrated action in the most explicit terms possible to specify that this story is to be understood in relation to a larger story, and to specify the nature of this relationship as 'fulfilment'. Thus the narration of Joseph's flight to Egypt, along with 'the child and his mother', is followed by the narrator's comment: 'in order that the word spoken by the Lord through the prophet – saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son" – might be fulfilled' (2.15).

Matthew's claim that the prophetic word is 'fulfilled' by this episode in Jesus' life has appeared problematic to many readers. In this and other formula-quotations, it seems, Matthew attempts to correlate trivial and incidental features of Jesus' story with texts in the Jewish Scriptures, reflecting an understanding of 'fulfilment' as the mere verification of a prediction, and relying on the tendentious 'use' (indeed, abuse) of these Scriptures.[11] The cited text's immediate context within the book of Hosea makes it clear that 'my son' refers to the Israelite nation. In no obvious sense do the words 'out of Egypt I called my son' predict a particular event in the life of a future individual; on view here is the past redemptive event depicted in the biblical book of Exodus.

Yet it is also possible to see here a sophisticated interaction with Scripture: another instance in which Matthew's depiction of Jesus Christ acquires its meaningfulness in the hermeneutical interplay between Jesus' story and its larger narrative context. The geographical particulars of Jesus' story – his presence in Egypt – offer the first evangelist the opportunity to explicate further links between this story and that of Israel, as conveyed in Scripture, and thus to develop the distinctive concerns of his own presentation of Jesus' person and work.

Filiation, as we have seen, is a central theme of Matthew's christological portrait. At the Gospel's outset, Jesus Christ is immediately declared to be 'son of David, son of Abraham', and located within a long line of 'fatherings'. The unique position of Mary's 'son' (υἱός; 1.23, 25) in this genealogical line has left a lingering question regarding his paternity, accentuated in the narration of the angelic warning and Joseph's response, where three times Jesus is described in relation to Joseph simply as 'the child' (τὸ παιδίον; 2.13-14). This question

[10] Matt 1.22. See also 2.15, 17, 23; 4.14; 8.17; 12.17; 13.35; 21.4; 27.9.

[11] According to C. F. D. Moule, for example, this 'jejune' and religiously outmoded approach 'is the mentality behind most of the Matthaean "formula-quotations"': 'Fulfilment-Words in the New Testament: Use and Abuse', in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 6, 8.

receives a clear answer in Matthew's quotation from the book of Hosea: the words spoken 'by the Lord, through the prophet' designate Jesus 'my son' (τὸν υἱόν μου; 2.15). Jesus Christ is not only 'son of Abraham, son of David', but also son of God.

The full force of the quotation, and its use by Matthew to identify Jesus as 'my son', depends not on the reader's ignorance of the referent of these words in their original scriptural context, but the opposite. Any reader moved to consider the propriety of Matthew's fulfilment-quotation can do so only by assessing the relationship between the figure of Jesus and the figure of 'my son' as formed in its literary context in the book of Hosea. No great literary sensitivity is required to discern tantalising and thought-provoking parallels between the two. Calling on a motif already present in the Exodus narrative, Hosea designates Israel as the 'son' whom God loved and called out of Egypt (Hos 11.1 MT; cf. Exod 4.22-23). The fuller description of this wayward son's indifference to his loving father extends the metaphor, offering a poignant and theologically pregnant interpretation of the nation's history leading up to their present crisis: 'The more they were called, the more they went away […] My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all' (Hos 11.2, 7). The 'latter prophet' has articulated in poetry what the 'former prophet' says in prose: 'They do not fear Yahweh, and they do not follow the statutes or the rules or the law or the commandment that Yahweh commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel. […] They would not listen, but they did according to their former manner' (2 Kgs 17.34-41). These theological interpretations of Israel's history materially converge with the theological perspective operative in Matthew's own portrayal of that history, in significant part, as the movement from 'David the king' to 'the exile to Babylon'. Yet for all Yahweh's exasperation with this delinquent 'son', he declares himself unable to give Israel up: 'for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath' (Hos 11.9). The scattered nation can look forward in hope to a future echo of past salvation: 'they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt [𝔊: ἐξ Αἰγύπτου], and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares Yahweh' (Hos 11.11). Notwithstanding the doubtful realisation of this oracle from his own historical vantage point, Matthew too envisages a hope for God's sinful people beyond 'the deportation to Babylon' in the coming of the Messiah and the saving presence of 'God with us'. The identity of God's son Israel is formed in a determinate sequence of events, each of which depends for its meaning on its relation to what precedes: the salvific Exodus-event, the persistent practice of idolatry in the land, the crisis of foreign invasion, and the prospect of a homecoming. In Matthew's deployment of the

fulfilment-quotation, the identity of God's son Jesus is formed by way of juxtaposition with the entirety of this storied precedent.

Therefore, to the extent that a tension arises between the referent of the words 'my son' in their initial scriptural context and their referent as redeployed by Matthew, this is a productive tension. There is constructive rather than destructive interference between Israel as 'my son' and Jesus as 'my son', deepening and enriching Matthew's cumulative portrayal of the Christ. For the reader of Matthew's Gospel who is familiar with Israel's Scriptures and who does not assume that the evangelist is the most blockheaded interpreter of those writings possible, the quotation draws with it an invisible aura of 'unstated correspondences'.[12] The relationship between a prediction and its verification by events, even if surprising, is simple and precise: Polyphemus is blinded at the hands of Odysseus, as foretold.[13] The 'fulfilment' portrayed in Matt 2.15 is otherwise. There is no prediction seeking verification. The narrator's positing of an intertextual linkage between prophecy and narrated event stirs up various thematic echoes which are, for now, left to swirl indeterminately around the narrative's protagonist. Only the unfolding events of his life will offer a clearer sense of exactly how what is foreshadowed in the Old is bodied forth in the New. It is clear enough, however, that according to the first evangelist, the story of God's 'son' Israel is bound up with the story of God's 'son' Jesus: it is here that Israel's sinful intransigence and Yahweh's deep, abiding compassion attain their fullness. Even as Jesus 'fulfils' what was spoken through the prophet, this prophetic word adds, for the discerning reader, to a growing perception of the divine plenitude of who Jesus is and what he does.

Matthew's narrative, then, is composed in such a way as to bring Israel's story to bear on Jesus' story as the indispensable context within which the unfolding events of his life are meaningful. The twofold 'genesis' locates Jesus's story within a larger narrative frame; the fulfilment-quotations characterise the relationship between this context and specific narrative events in terms of prophecy and fulfilment. Matthew's narrative depiction of Jesus Christ proceeds by way of the interweaving of stories; the fulfilment of Scripture is the stuff of which Jesus' story is made. Thus Jesus is first declared to be the son of God – a key designation in Matthew's Christology – not by endowment with a title, but in the narrator's announcement

[12] See Richard B. Hays' comments on the poetic trope 'metalepsis': *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 20. For comments along similar lines to the reading offered here, see Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 113–14; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 80–81; Dale C. Allison and W. D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 1.263-64.
[13] Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.507-12.

that his history brings Israel's history as 'my son' to fulfilment.[14] The cumulative rendering of meaning through an unfolding temporal sequence, functionally regarded by Barth as a liability in christological interpretation, constitutes a crucial asset in the first evangelist's christological construction. Consideration of a final literary technique will expose another facet of the role played by sequence and cumulation in Matthew's narrative construction of theological meaning. Through the use of narrative typology, Matthew subtly instructs his reader that in the figure of Jesus, Israel's story is not only carried forward to its consummation, but is radically transformed.

An association between Israel and Jesus is also formed less explicitly than in the formula-quotations, but no less powerfully, at the level of the events narrated in Matthew's Gospel. The evangelist's selection and sequencing of the events related in this early part of Jesus' story indicates a loose recapitulation of Israel's salvific Exodus experience in his personal history: tyrannical oppression, a return from Egypt to 'the land of Israel', a passage through water, testing in the wilderness, and teaching on a mountain. Matthew tells Jesus' story in such a way as to construct a narrative typology: an analogical relationship between his story and that of Israel comprehending both similarity and difference. Yet the establishment of this typological relationship does not yet specify its christological force. Ambiguity persists: does the stress lie on the similarity or the difference between Jesus and Israel? What is the mode of Jesus' representative recapitulation? Will this 'son of God' re-enact the patterns already established by the 'son' who preceded him? Or will he transcend those patterns, not merely embodying Israel's history but transforming her story so far? Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness together constitute the narrative complex in which the meaning of Jesus' sonship is put to the proof. It is here that these questions acquire a sharp focus, and that the transformative force of Jesus' participation in Israel's story emerges.

Immediately after Jesus is baptised, the heavens are opened; he sees the Spirit of God, dovelike, descending upon him, and hears a heavenly voice which nevertheless speaks in the earthly language of Israel's Scriptures: 'This is my son [οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου], the beloved, in whom I am well pleased' (3.17). Here the rediscovery by modern critics that Mark – not Matthew – is the first-written of the canonical Gospels allows a deepening of the patristic

[14] The work of Kingsbury successfully drew attention to the centrality of divine sonship in Matthew's Christology, but its focus on christological titles at the expense of narrative dynamics, and its effort to establish a hegemony of 'Son of God' over other titles, has drawn subsequent criticism. See Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*. Cf. Terence L. Donaldson, 'The Vindicated Son: A Narrative Approach to Matthean Christology', in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 100–121; David Hill, 'Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology', *JSNT* 2, no. 6 (1979): 2–16.

insight regarding the distinctive themes at play in the 'first' Gospel's beginning.[15] Matthew has carefully rewritten Mark's brief baptismal account so as to create an intertextual association with the figure of the 'servant' in the book of Isaiah, thus weaving yet another strand into his portrayal of Jesus Christ as the son of God.[16] The semantic overlap between Matthew's υἱός and Isaiah's παῖς helps to preserve the integrity of the allusive reference to the Isaianic text, but also enables another theologically generative slippage, such that what Yahweh says of his servant in the book of Isaiah, Matthew's voice from heaven says of God's son, Jesus.

Isaiah's 'servant of Yahweh' (עֶבֶד יְהוָה) is, of course, an elusive and protean figure. Matthew's allusion to Isaiah both precludes the reader from confidently reckoning its precise valence and demands that he or she make the attempt. In this reader's judgement, the central chapters of the book of Isaiah, in which the figure of the servant takes shape, are open to an interpretation which resonates with Matthew's developing christological programme, suggesting a hermeneutical interplay in which the shape of the 'servant' helps to mould that of the 'son'. Like Hosea's 'son', Isaiah's 'servant' is also a singular figure representing Israel as a whole; the 'narration' of his story is also the interpretation of her national history.[17] The sequence of this story is promise, disaster, and restoration; its theme is Yahweh's praise among the nations. Israel is the servant whom Yahweh chose, called, and formed: the offspring of Abraham, both recipient and channel of God's blessing for every nation on earth. Yet far from bringing the justice of Yahweh's *torah* to the nations, this nation's sin against her God made her a blind servant, a deaf messenger, and finally a people plundered and scattered across the earth. But those 'who are called by the name of Israel' can still anticipate Yahweh's redemptive help, and the faithful fulfilment of the vocation to be a light to the nations, through the mysterious agency of a 'servant' who is both identified with and distinct from the nation: the one who bears 'our' griefs and the sin of 'many' (Isa 48.1; 53.4, 11). Viewed within their canonical literary context, one can perceive the flickering ambivalence of this disappointment and hope crystallised in the words to which Matthew alludes: 'Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations' (Isa 42.1/Matt 12.18).

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[15] Notwithstanding recent ferment regarding the 'Synoptic problem', neo-Griesbachians have not convincingly overturned the established arguments for Marcan priority.

[16] Matthew converts Mark's second-person address (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου) into a third-person declaration, retaining the key phrase ὁ υἱός μου but making an associative pivot away from Ps 2.7 toward Isa 42.1 (in the form attested in Matt 12.18-21, which corresponds precisely to neither MT nor any extant Greek version). Matthew also adds the injunction ἰδοὺ (x2) and the phrases τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ and ἐρχόμενον ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν (cf. ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου […] θήσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν; Matt 12.18/Isa 42.1).

[17] This is, of course, a story which emerges only implicitly from a number of non-narrative prophetic oracles.

By evoking the figure of God's servant and overlaying it upon the figure of God's son, Matthew offers an interpretative matrix within which to make sense of Jesus' unfolding story. Crucially, these figures offer the framework for understanding Jesus' own personal agency in the story, which emerges at this point in the narrative. With the baptismal declaration, the narrative theme of Jesus' divine sonship not only acquires the inflection of Isaianic servanthood but simultaneously jumps from the extradiegetic level of narratorial discourse, where the knowledge that Jesus is 'son of God' is restricted to the narrator and implied reader, to the intradiegetic level of narrated event, where it is also available to the character(s) participating in the story. As Jesus' sonship permeates this intranarratival boundary, the question for the implied reader becomes sharp and inescapable: how will Jesus actively perform his 'sonship' – a sonship which, as both he and the reader now perceive, is to be conceived as servanthood after the pattern of the 'servant of Yahweh'?[18]

Both the occasion and the material thrust of Jesus' temptation by the devil (Matt 4.1-11) arise out of his baptism. He is 'brought into the wilderness by the Spirit' which has just descended upon him, and the words of 'the tester' (ὁ πειράζων; Matt 4.3), rather than directly denying the heavenly voice's affirmation that Jesus is the 'son' of God, probe (and attempt to pervert) how Jesus himself will interpret this designation and its storied associations. Matthew's narrative is still at work to evoke the experience of God's son, Israel, in the temptation of Jesus, the son of God: his forty days and nights of hunger 'in the desert' echo Israel's anxiety over sustenance in her testing forty years 'in the wilderness' (e.g. Exod 16.2-3; Deut 8.2), and his three responses to the tester refer directly to what 'is written' in Deuteronomy, recalling those years and urging that their lessons be learned (Matt 4.4, 7, 10; cf. Deut 8.3; 6.16, 13).

The enhanced definition given to Jesus' representative sonship in the baptismal declaration clarifies the logic of the threefold temptation or testing. Some interpreters regard the final test simply as a naked appeal to selfish ambition, or as an invitation to receive the Messiah's rightful inheritance from the devil rather than from God.[19] Yet the shift between the first and second tests and the third, signalled by the omission of the initial 'if you are the Son of God…', is no last desperate change of tack on the part of the tempter, but rather the ultimate penetration to

[18] For an analogous treatment of Jesus' baptism and temptation drawing on Greimasian structural analysis, see Donaldson, 'The Vindicated Son: A Narrative Approach to Matthean Christology', 110–20; cf. also Mark Allan Powell, 'The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel', *NTS* 38, no. 2 (1992): 187–204; Hill, 'Son and Servant', 15; Birger Gerhardsson, 'Gottes Sohn als Diener Gottes: Messias, Agape und Himmelsherrschaft nach dem Matthäusevangelium', *Studia Theologica* 27, no. 2 (1973): 83–84.
[19] Matt 4.8-10 cf. Ps 2.8.

the decisive point. The first two tests turn on the general provision and protection a son might reasonably expect from a father – and much more the beloved son of God.[20] The final test touches on the specific and central question of what it means for Israel to be a 'son' to Yahweh, and therefore what it means for Jesus to be the 'son of God'. The prior association of sonship and servanthood helps to specify what is at stake here. Israel's history of resistance to Yahweh's leading, and specifically her failure to worship 'the Lord' alone as God, precluded her witness to the nations. As Yahweh is glorified in the figure of the servant – who both represents and restores Israel in his acquiescence to Yahweh's will – the nations offer homage (Isa 49.3-7).[21] To worship the devil and thus receive the 'glory' of worldly kingdoms represents an utter refusal of the call, through exclusive fidelity to Yahweh, to bring God's justice and salvation to those lost in the darkness of idolatry. In perceiving and rejecting this final proposition as the work of the 'adversary' (σατάν; Matt 4.10), Jesus, the son of God, acts as the obedient servant of God.

Neither the devil's test nor Jesus' obedience, however, is a completed, punctiliar event. As the unfolding scenes of Jesus' life repeatedly present him with echoes of this choice – at Caesarea Philippi, in Gethsemane, and in the decisive climax at Golgotha – the obedience of the son of God consists in continuing acceptance of the servant's vocation, even as it becomes increasingly clear that this will include its most piercing exigencies.[22] In this way the narrative of the Gospel cumulatively renders the meaning of 'the whole course of his obedience'.[23]

For now, having remained faithful in this final temptation, Jesus appropriately removes to Galilee 'of the Gentiles', in fulfilment of what 'Isaiah the prophet' said concerning a light for those in the shadow of death (Matt 4.12-17; cf. Isa 9.2; 42.6; 49.6), and begins to proclaim the advent of the kingdom of heaven. At the last, Matthew's Gospel will close with an inverted echo of the third temptation: in Galilee the disciples encounter Jesus 'on a mountain', and rightly offer him the worship which belongs to the Father with whom he and the baptismal Spirit share a name (Matt 28.16-20). He declares that he has received – not from the devil, but by the agency of God – all authority in heaven and upon earth, and so charges his disciples to go and to make disciples in turn of all nations. This ending is a new beginning; the fulfilment

[20] Cf. Matt 7.9-11; 17.14-15.
[21] This synthetic and maximalist appeal to Isaiah's servant passages resonates with Matthew's sustained and multifarious interest in this scriptural material throughout his Gospel, e.g. 8.17; 12.17-21; 17.5; for allusive references at 16.21; 20.28; 26.24, 28, 54, 56, see France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 631–32, 762–63, 994.
[22] Echoes of the temptation, both verbal and thematic, abound at these key moments in Matthew's narrative (see e.g. Matt 16.16, 23; 27.39, 41; 27.40, 54).
[23] Calvin, *Inst*., 2.16.5.

of the servant's vocation to be a light to the nations bursts the bounds of the narrative and enfolds the reader.

The question posed in Jesus' baptism is answered in his testing. The significance of Jesus Christ must not be understood to consist merely in his story's encapsulation of the story of Israel. To rightly perceive who Jesus is and what he does, the reader must appreciate the difference and discontinuity between the patterns of Israel's story and the personal activity of Jesus. Here the evangelist's literary-theological meaning-making – his intertextual narrative Christology – depends as much on unstated *divergences* as unstated correspondences. When tested in the wilderness, Jesus does not do what Israel did. As such, the story of Jesus constitutes the juncture of Old and New; it is by enacting this decisive turn that his story moves Israel's story forward to its goal. This too, according to Matthew, is what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. He himself is both the fulfilment and the transformation of the patterns of Israel's history with her God. Her story, with its cumulative currents and contours, is neither simply terminated and abandoned, nor, as Barth suggests in his own treatment of Jesus' baptism and temptation, telescoped into his story.[24] Jesus does something 'new', rendering pre-existing patterns 'old'. Matthew's narrative typology elegantly embodies the central thrust of his Christology. Jesus is a genuine participant in Israel's story, and his participation in that story is utterly unique; the being and activity of the man 'Jesus, called Christ' is a transformative appropriation of human life, it is the life of 'God with us'. As such, and only as such, does his story mean salvation for Israel and salvation to the ends of the earth.

The enduring appeal and challenge of Barth's theology lies in his insistence that theology must be 'evangelical': that is, it must treat of the God of the Gospel.[25] Human speech about God properly responds to the word attested by the words of the prophets and apostles, the word spoken in Jesus Christ, who is himself God's Word become flesh. Barth rightly maintains that this Christ of the New Testament must not be abstracted from the Old Testament, and is aware of the classic interpretative strategies for christocentric biblical interpretation that serve this end. Nevertheless, this study has indicated that the specific character of Barth's dogmatic Christology, with its stress on the singularity of God's activity in Jesus Christ, engenders a christocentric interpretative practice in some tension with the priorities expressed in Barth's programmatic hermeneutical reflections, which produces problematic exegetical treatments of specific narrative texts and distorts the interpretative interplay of Old and New Testament. The

[24] See *KD* IV/1, 286-91; *CD* IV/1, 260-64.
[25] Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (London: Collins, 1963), 11.

'evangelical theology' briefly explored above – that is, the narrative Christology of the first evangelist, born at the canonical step from Old to New Testament – sustains and is sustained by an interpretative christocentrism which is innately extensive rather than compressive. Here christologically anonymous Old Testament texts, as formed by their literary and canonical contexts and therefore in their genuine alterity, are newly perceived and presented as diverse anticipatory preparations and prefigurations of God's ultimate activity in Christ; the specific material substance of what God does in Christ is perceived and narrated as the fulfilment and transcendence of the pre-existing patterns inscribed in these texts. The opening of Matthew's Gospel, as a token of New Testament Christology more broadly, demonstrates that thoroughgoing christocentrism in biblical interpretation need not entail a stress on singularity at the expense of temporal sequence, but may find rich theological resources in the extensive and cumulative dimensions of Christian Scripture, offering a starting-point for retaining Barth's commitment to christocentrism while reimagining its form – not only in biblical interpretation, but also in dogmatic construction. Working forward from this point, future attempts at 'evangelical theology' may more fully attain the promise – realised imperfectly, but glimpsed truly – of Barth's theology:

> This whole Word of God in Christ is the word to which theology must listen and reply. It is God's Word spoken both in the relation of the history of Israel to the history of Jesus Christ and in the relation of the history of Jesus Christ to the history of Israel. […] The covenant of God with man consists neither simply in the one nor simply in the other, but rather in the succession and unity of both forms of the history of the work of God. […] Their succession and unity form the whole Logos, and it is this unity of which evangelical theology must hear and speak. When theology fulfils this command, it takes and holds its post.[26]

[26] Barth, 27–28.

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