The objective existence of evil in the early theology of Karl Barth

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the early theology of Karl Barth. That means all the material published between 1911 and 1931. Any work outside this period is referred to only in order to clarify a point under discussion.

This is not an historical study, although reference is made to Barth's changing circumstances when appropriate. Primarily this thesis aims to be a discussion in systematic theology. It addresses the problem of theological objectivity, that is, how can the theologian when speaking of God say "this is the case". The thesis concentrates upon Barth's understanding of ontology as it fuelled his thinking during the early years. It highlights the way in which Barth's growing awareness of God's freedom, sovereignty and subjectivity formed the foundation of a theological approach.

The thesis is selective in the material on which draws. Strong emphasis is placed upon the influences of Holy Scripture, the writings of Christoph Blumhardt and Franz Overbeck, along with the debates in which Barth engaged with the thinking of Schleiermacher and Harnack. Finally attention is drawn to the way in which Barth's study of the works of Anselm helped him overcome the weaknesses of his early thinking and move towards his Dogmatic approach.

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PREFACE

Some years ago I found myself, through a complicated series of events, working in one of this country's largest cities. Through my experiences of people and circumstances I became aware in the most frightening way of the existence and presence of evil. I say frightening because while the exact details of events have faded with the years the memory of dread and fear has not. I still remember with disturbing clarity the ferocious and malicious force involved in those events, a force driven by a mind both malignant and cunning. The events themselves have no baring upon this thesis. However, my own sense of theological inadequacy at the time most certainly does.

As a theology graduate I began to think as deeply as I could about the nature of my experiences. I tried to make sense of them in relation to my own understanding of the Christian Gospel. I found this frustrating and difficult.

At the time I had two primary theological sources on which to draw. One was the foundation laid as an undergraduate in a self-confessed 'liberal' theology department. The other was the whole theology of charismatic renewal with which I was involved at that time. Both were of only limited help in my search for a clearer theological perspective.

Some years later, while training to be ordained in the Church of England, I vowed to discover a more helpful understanding of the nature of objective evil. In this I was greatly helped by Professor Daniel W. Hardy, then teaching at Durham University. It was he who first introduced me to the thinking of Karl Barth.

Initially I read sections from the "Church Dogmatics" and was immediately gripped by the power and intensity of his writing. But before long I realised that Barth had based his approach on a set of theological premises which had been laid down many years before. I also came to understand that specific questions surrounding the objective existence of evil could not be separated from broader issues concerning the whole basis and possibility of Christian theology.

So it was that I found myself, with the help of Professor Hardy, drawn into a debate which began some fifty one years before I was born and has as yet reached no satisfactory conclusion. Studying Barth has been difficult, disturbing and hugely rewarding. I hope that this thesis, while it brings no profound new insight to the arena of debate, might at least encourage those who read it to study for themselves a man who has for me been an inspiration and whose vision I will most certainly carry with me for the rest of my life.

THE BASIS OF DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis is to explore some of the theological problems surrounding the objective existence of evil. To this end all of the issues discussed will be drawn from, and illustrated by, the early theology of Karl Barth.

Barth has been chosen for a number of reasons. It is clear from the most cursory examination of his theology that he treats the existence of evil, and the occurrence of human sin, with the utmost seriousness.[1] These two themes are never far from the forefront of his thinking. However, he presents them as part of a broader 'scheme', which is itself built upon both subtle and yet substantial theological foundations. This fact should not be obscured by the powerful polemic which provided the form for so much of his early theology.

From first to last Barth is struggling with weighty theological problems. It is now a matter of historical fact that European theology experienced a period of upheaval at the turn of the twentieth century. It is also true that Barth stood at the centre of that disturbance.

While the outbreak of the First World War provided the necessary force to start the intellectual avalanche that followed, the roots of the disturbance lay in the theological and social developments of the nineteenth century.[2] Barth's great attack upon the theology of that period was never purely partisan, although figures such as Schleiermacher and Harnack suffered particular

criticism. Barth's great concern always remained the nature of theology itself, the 'problem' of theology, the 'possibility' of theology, the 'necessity' of theology.[3]

As someone who brooded "alternatively over the newspaper and New Testament"[4] Barth can only be understood correctly within the larger context of world history. He saw himself not as the founder of a particular 'school', but as both a player and observer in the great quest of humanity; that is, the search for 'truth'. Eberhard Jüngel said of Barth,

> When a serious illness forced him to face his own death, he gave it the same sideways glance that he had given theologically to the powers of darkness. The light which shines in the darkness interested him more than the darkness. He thought it more important to dwell on the riches of the eternal God than on the sombre dominion of death.[5]

It is indeed true, as will be shown, that Barth allowed evil only a "sideways glance". The greater drama draws his attention. The would-be student of Barth cannot help but be drawn into the self-same drama, or else run the risk of losing the only realistic perspective upon Barth's theology. It was to the greater "vision"[6] that he felt called in the early years of the twentieth century and to which his students must also give their minds. The partisan, standing as he might upon any single point of the theological spectrum, will surely fail to grasp the breadth and scope of Barth's theology. It can be said of Barth, as he himself said of Schleiermacher, that

> we can grant... what even the most negative judgement upon the theological content of his work must grant... the

> trouble he took to safeguard the specifically theological quality of his theology.[7]

What this means in practice is that the scope of this thesis must be broader than its title might suggest. While it will indeed concern itself with the nature of evil, and in particular that which has a direction and existence all its own, it will do so only from a particular perspective.

The interest behind what follows is not primarily historical. Obviously Barth's theology was influenced by the events of his day, but these events in themselves cannot explain what Barth thought and a simple retelling of the story will not suffice. Therefore, what follows is an exploration of Barth's approach to a fundamental theological problem; the nature of 'objective truth'. How can the theologian say with any degree of certainty "this is the case"?

The world is full of various sorts of 'objects'. The ways in which they are understood and investigated are numerous and diverse. The question which the theologian must answer is what kind of 'object' is it appropriate for him to study and where might that 'object' be found? This is Barth's basic problem. It is a question which concerns the nature of God. What will be shown is that in Barth's thinking this problem is inseparably linked with the relationship which he sees as existing between ontology, rationality and revelation. It is only in this context that his thinking on objective evil can be understood.

However, before the discussion proper can begin, a number of things need to be said. The most obvious of these is that, before the student of Barth

can begin his work, he must find a 'way in' to the material. For although Barth was someone opposed to any attempt at systematizing theology,[8] his writings provide an almost seamless piece of finely woven theological cloth. His method of construction is so detailed that, while it is possible to discover various motifs and ideas, it would be a mistake to isolate them from the larger pattern which they make.

This method of construction means that the student is faced with a vast amount of material. For this reason the scope of this thesis will be limited to what might be called Barth's 'early theology', that is to say, the material produced between the publication of the first edition of The Epistle to the Romans[9] and the publication in 1931 of Barth's work on Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum.[10]

The particular thread which this thesis will follow is his developing and deepening perception of the importance of ontology in the theologian's search for objective truth. It will be shown that it was this awareness which led Barth to turn away from the theology of his teachers and develop a unique theological perspective. For this reason large areas of his thought and writings will not be treated directly in the thesis. What is primarily under discussion is a problem of systematic theology. How can the theologian say, when speaking of God, "this is the case"? And if he cannot speak of God in this way, then how can he speak of morality, society or any other sort of human endeavour?

For the same reason other sources will also be used in a selective way. Barth crossed swords with numerous contemporaries in his search for a new theological perspective, but again, the discussions which grew out of these disagreements will be used only in such a way as to reflect the particular emphasis of the thesis. This means that special attention will be drawn to the theology of Schleiermacher and Harnack because they provide pivotal examples of Barth's changing and growing theology.

THE BEGINNING

This opening chapter will be concerned with the early years of Barth's theological development. It will briefly trace his time as a student and the influences upon his thinking. It will then move on to his first experience of full time parish ministry which began in 1911. The great change which occurred in Barth's theology has its roots in this period and owes its power to a combination of spiritual, theological, human and practical experiences. Therefore, a preliminary examination of these influences is important to the theme of this study.

A brief reading of the biographical material for this period[1] reveals an individual thoroughly at home with environment and thought. Barth's early years as a student in various university departments quite clearly laid a theological foundation which carried him through this period to the beginning of his pastorate. It would be a mistake to underestimate the impact which Barth's theological training had upon the course of his life.

Barth was a student in the those years when theology in Switzerland and Germany was dominated by a legacy of nineteenth century thought.[2] During this period the scholarship of Harnack was prominent, building upon and expanding that legacy with enthusiasm. Few could foresee the great turmoil that the next two decades were to bring.

History shows that the great age of Enlightenment theology had passed its zenith. During Barth's student days it was still vibrant, but on the decline. As a child of his age Barth was gripped by the great confidence of the period. He drank it in with gusto, happy to associate himself with the powerful and influential faculty at Marburg.[3]

The great challenge which faced the theologians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to discover an alternative to the scientific scepticism of preceding generations. Whilst it was obvious to everyone concerned that many of the certainties of medieval theology had not been able to withstand the serious challenge of men such as Hume and Kant, the Christian faith was not without its champions. Of these the greatest was undoubtedly Friedrich Schleiermacher. Even towards the end of his life Barth was never able to free himself from the influence of Schleiermacher, nor would he have wished to. This man, who fuelled so much of Barth's early thinking became his greatest adversary.[4]

The Theology of Schleiermacher.

Schleiermacher was a man of his age and never made any pretence at being anything else.[5] As such he embraced the thought forms in use during his life time and used them as a critical tool with which to examine both existing religion and the cultural milieu in which he lived. For this reason his theology is based upon an "ontological substructure"[6] borrowed from his cultural background and then re-applied in his own distinctive way. The application of

this rationale is used to create a preliminary understanding of the nature of reality.[7] Theological structures are then built upon that understanding.[8]

In the first of his 'Speeches'[9] Schleiermacher defined the nature of reality "only as an eternally prolonged play of opposing forces".[10] The nature of reality was determined by two differing forces constantly at play within each life.[11] Schleiermacher saw in this play of opposing forces an inner unity which transcended any external diversity. While he acknowledged the extremes of experience at either pole,[12] he concluded that such extremes held a place within the whole by virtue of an innate necessity, that is, an inherent structure built into the nature of reality . This idea was based upon an accepted ontological framework borrowed from the literature and philosophy of his own day.[13] On this basis Schleiermacher asks the question,

> How shall these remote extremes be brought together in order to shape the long series into that closed ring that is the symbol of eternity and perfection?[14]

It follows that Schleiermacher saw the world as a closed system in which perfection was attainable through the correct balance of finite and infinite aspects of reality. Therefore, a "common bond of consciousness"[15] unified the diversity of humanity in such a way as to make the inherent nature of reality clear to all. Unity was brought about by the "deity"[16] who combined in certain people the play of finite and infinite in a more creative way.[17]

This means that certain individuals were able to draw to themselves the baser things of life, and then fill them with the spiritual nature of the infinite, so

creating a point of equilibrium between two contrasting states.[18] This point showed itself most clearly in the creative parts of human life because an individual's creative drive was a direct result of "the flight of their spirit to the infinite".[19]

What Schleiermacher was expounding in these terms is a unification theory.[20] Perhaps it might be called a principle of inherent ontology. Clearly the underlying premise was that the world was a closed system in which diversity was overcome by the presence of the infinite. Such a unity was brought to Man's awareness through the actions of gifted individuals. Everything, therefore, had a place. There was always an inherent, if unperceived, unity within diversity. The role of the gifted individual was to explain to the individual "the misunderstood voice of God, and reconcile him with the earth and with his place in it.[21]

Underlying this understanding there is quite clearly a governing conception of the way in which God and Man related to each other. Schleiermacher saw this as characterised by what he came to term Man's "feeling of Dependence".[22] God and Man were related by virtue of the latter having been created by the former.[23] Therefore, Schleiermacher could find no area of human life which is not religious because each moment was governed by this basic relationship of dependent need.

Religion was seen exclusively in terms of relationship. Man was in relationship with God whether he chose to be or not. This was the overriding

factor which gives rise to the closed nature of Schleiermacher's thought. As he said himself,

> To these propositions assent can be unconditionally demanded; and no one will deny them who is capable of a little introspection and can find interest in the real subject of our present inquiries.[24]

Therefore, Man's relationship with God, because it was determined by a profound dependency, could never be broken. God was the "correlate"[25] of Man's inherent religious self-consciousness.[26] This meant that in Schleiermacher's theology there was a strong sense of continuity. Salvation history was characterised by a deepening awareness of this continuity and therefore of dependence. Sin is seen as anything which has "arrested"[27] the development of Man's God-consciousness.

What this meant in practice was a movement by the individual away from the desire for simple self-gratification towards a state in which every action was determined by the overriding impact of the infinite. Man's sense of sin was created by his inability to be governed by his higher state of conciousness.[28] Schleiermacher's understanding of sin was dictated by the ontological sub-structure upon which he built his theology. This meant that sin could never become an absolute, a force in itself, because the consciousness of Man was never totally a monologue. There always existed a dialogue between two levels of awareness. In this way life was governed by a schema of "finite-infinite".[29]

An important aspect of the relationship between finite and infinite was that the point at which the finite became filled with infinity was not a point accessible to science. That is, that while such a point existed, only those of a higher nature could be aware of what was taking place. So Schleiermacher could say

> Only the thoughtful expert penetrates into the secrets of such a combination brought to rest; the individual elements in it are completely hidden for every common eye...[30]

What this did was to remove the point of theological enquiry from the normal realm of scientific knowledge. Therefore, theology as a scientific endeavour had to be allowed to dictate its own methods and frames of reference. This alternative realm of "knowledge" Schleiermacher designated as the realm of piety, being accessible only to the Christian as a man of piety.[31]

Therefore, the 'object' which presented itself to the theologian to be investigated was the "feeling" of religious piety which marked the life of the true Christian.[32] It was this feeling which characterised Man's highest endeavour because it denoted the point at which finite and infinite met. However, since the aim of culture was the exaltation of Man, how could this exaltation be achieved if its possibility was denied by the culturally enlightened in their rejection of religion?[33]

Schleiermacher saw secular scientific investigation as of necessity concerning itself with the physical world. In his view any real moment of

human fulfilment was related not solely to things physical, but to their inter-play with the spiritual. Man's salvation rested upon his ability to pass beyond the particular and the physical, to the Universal and the Spiritual.

> It is the holy wedlock of the Universe with the Incarnated Reason for a creative, productive embrace. It is immediately raised above all error and misunderstanding.[34]

The moment of unity between the finite and infinite was "above all error".[35] It occurred within the individual self-consciousness and therefore purely within the realm of feeling.[36] As such it was a sub-rational experience which bore no necessary resemblance to any thought or description.[37] So, for Schleiermacher, objects and their natures were not the sphere of religion. It was the effects these objects cause in the individual which were at issue.[38]
What this meant was that no external system could be imposed upon religion;

> it knows nothing of deducing and connecting... Everything is to be found immediately, and not proved from something else.[39]

The realm of religion, and therefore of the theologian, was designated as an area accessible only along one very particular avenue of approach. This avenue was the life of religious piety.

If this understanding was correct then the role of Christianity in culture was to re-awaken those who have not experienced the spiritual unity which underlies external events. Man would remain ill at ease as long as he was unaware of the ontological bond of finite and infinite. Christianity was a

message of salvation because it was able to correct this misunderstanding and direct the individual towards a deeper, inner, awareness of the Other.[40]

In an age which prided itself on being of the highest cultural standing, it is easy to see what Schleiermacher was trying to say. If the aim of all culture was the exaltation of Man, then how could this be achieved while Man remained trapped inside the finite aspects of life? Because the nature of Man was governed by the eternal dialogue of finite with infinite the quest for cultural exaltation was a religious quest whether or not it was acknowledged to be so by the champions of culture.

This meant that Schleiermacher could advocate the road of religious piety as a route to exaltation. Christianity represented the zenith of cultural development, while culture represented the correct context of all truly religious endeavour.

> Religious awareness is irreducibly also self-awareness. And man, at the deepest level of his existence, is religious.[41]

Therefore, exultation of the human spirit, in whatever context, is a religious theme.

If Schleiermacher was correct and Man does possess a natural disposition towards religious piety, what place is there, in this theology, for the person and work of Christ? Barth finds in Schleiermacher a definite Christology. But this does not mean that he remained uncritical.

Placed in the context of his own age Schleiermacher's thought clearly provided both an affirmation and a critique of culture . On the one hand he embraced the understanding of reality prevalent during his life time, giving to it a fresh interpretation. On the other, he admonished the cultural elite for imagining that true artistic expression could be attained without an awareness of the infinite.[42]

Schleiermacher was not willing to turn his back upon God in the glorification of the secular. His aim was to defend the Christian faith as the highest possible expression of all that was good in man and encourage his contemporaries in that expression. He wanted to unite the aspirations of man and the faith of the Church in such a way that neither was denigrated and both were enriched.

In this sense he was, as Barth was later to point out with admiration, a man bound and committed to the world.[43] That is, he was a man of "culture" in an age when cultural development was held to be the highest of human ideals. As such he was both the product and master of his social heritage. For this reason Barth's feelings towards Schleiermacher are ambivalent. There is no doubt that he saw Schleiermacher's work as ultimately fruitless.[44] But in all of Barth's writings there is a deep respect born out of an appreciation of what Schleiermacher achieved in an age when religion was considered irrelevant to all but the most superstitious.

Barth saw in Schleiermacher an honest attempt to remain a "theologian" when such an endeavour was to be an unworthy occupation.[45] Barth's great criticism of nineteenth century theology was that in an attempt to prove itself relevant to its age, it brought together in an unrealistic fashion two disparate worlds. This might be attempted within the realm of the historical, psychological, or sociological. But wherever this was attempted it created what Barth came to see as an artificial and man-made symmetry.

> In the history of Protestant theology the nineteenth century brought with it the none too dignified sight of a general flight of those heads that were wisest, into the study of history.[46]

In Schleiermacher, Barth found a willingness to include God in the equation,[47] even though he could not help but see these attempts as inadequate.

What also impressed Barth about Schleiermacher was, that while he gladly borrowed from his culture an ontological framework on which to build, he nonetheless tried to remain Christological in his thinking. In later years Barth was increasingly dissatisfied with the figure of Jesus who appeared in Schleiermacher's theology,[48] but he was always impressed that he was there at all;[49]

> The Christology is the great disturbing element in Schleiermacher's doctrine of faith, not a very effective disturbance, perhaps, but a disturbance all the same.[50]

In the acceptance and application of an ontological framework prior to any theological thinking Schleiermacher was clearly beginning with the

universal before moving on to the particular. By doing this he was able to include in his thought the whole panorama of social and cultural development, as well as the thread of religious piety which expresses the zenith of that development. It also meant that in subsequent theological thinking any form of Christology must be subject to the same universal conditions.[51] Therefore, in Schleiermacher's thinking there had to exist in all circumstances, whether cultural or theological, a relationship between Jesus and ordinary men and women.[52]

In this context any movement for the 'Kingdom of God' meant the development of culture, since both were governed by the movement of Divine Providence experienced as historical necessity.[53] In this context Christ stood as one amongst many. His exaltation consisted in the degree of his own religious piety, the extent to which he contained within his own person the unity of finite and infinite. His role as Redeemer was that of "assuming"[54] Man into his own exalted state of religious piety. The role of Christianity was to make such a state of union possible.[55]

> Each one of us discerns in the birth of Christ his own higher birth through which nothing lives in him except love and devotion, through which even in him, the Eternal Son appears.[56]

Salvation was characterised as a state of unity existing between the 'world' and the 'Kingdom'. The point of unity was within the person of Jesus. The individual might come to share this unity. As such, piety as the outward sign of unification was the only true point of human and social exaltation.

While in Schleiermacher unity was only to be found through the Spirit,[57] he also saw faith as having a social and cultural impact.[58] So it is that Barth can describe Schleiermacher's understanding of prayer as:

> ...a crystallization of religious life into a particular act of life as such, which is forthwith dispersed and dissolved again after this concentration,[59] so that.., the prayer of this moment is the anticipation of the enhanced will for civilization of the next.[60]

As has already be shown, Schleiermacher's ontological scheme circled around the possibility of a unity between the finite and infinite. This point exists only within the realm of piety. As such it has a sub-rational content which denies any possibility of rational reflection because the spiritual must always be experienced in its immediacy.

Schleiermacher himself acknowledged that any attempt to consider the nature of evil must involve the comparison of different aspects of the world.[61] However, to follow the logic of his ontology any such comparison is still-born since the very act is enough in itself to rob the knowledge so derived of its immediacy. To compare is to balance in a rational way two differing things. This means that because Schleiermacher's understanding of true knowledge about the world is only obtained within the realm of feeling, if knowledge of evil is of necessity always comparative, then it must always be incorrect.

> Only by comparing details could such an opposition appear to you. You must not contemplate anything alone, you must rather rejoice in everything in its own place.[62]

It follows that the existence of evil is only an apparent existence, caused by a failure to perceive the world, both physical and spiritual, as a 'Whole'. In this sense Schleiermacher could find no place in his theology for a truly radical conception of evil. This was for the same reason that Barth criticised his Christology, namely, that his presuppositions about ontology denied the possibility of evil existing as an independent reality.

> If a loftier unity is to be suspected, along with the general tendency to order and harmony, there must be here and there situations not fully explicable.[63]

The world is actually in a process of refinement. The irrationalities which present themselves to Man as aspects of evil are part of this process. A life, to be worthwhile, need only provide one meagre and fleeting moment of beauty. What is important is the overall pattern, of which this is but a part.

> The rude, the barbarian, the formless are to be absorbed and recast. Nothing is to be dead mass that moves only by impact and resists only by unconscious collision; all is to individual, connected, complex, exalted life.[64]

Underlying this approach was a basic assumption that there existed a 'Whole'. But of course, for this to be the case, Schleiermacher had to be able to perceive the unity of the world as an immediate experience. The idea of a 'Whole' could not, according to his own standards, be a derived concept. Such knowledge had to grow out of an experience of unity. Perhaps, as Barth admitted, Schleiermacher did possess such a deep spirituality that for him this was indeed the case. But to share this point of view the individual had first to lay claim to an authoritative position over and above all others, and then insist

that such a position was accessible only along those lines which are 'visible' from where he stood.

This was to all intents and purposes a closed argument, even if its proponent claimed that the path of religious piety was in principle open to all. To accept this was to accept the opinion of one who was already 'above'. It is clear that Barth also saw this difficulty.[65]

Since the culture of Schleiermacher's day did not understand the relevance of Christianity the primary need was for apologetic.[66] To use apologetic in this context the individual had to adopt a position not only 'above' those to whom he spoke, but 'above' that about which he spoke. To quote Barth,

> Schleiermacher attacked the task of apologetics in the confidence that he knew what Christianity was, and could not be brought to depart from this basic feeling by Church doctrine, no matter how well established the latter was.[67]

In this Schleiermacher expressed the confidence of his own age. But what of the individual who finds that he is not the master or "virtuoso"[68] of his world, but the victim and slave? It is a point of historical fact that this particular form of cultural confidence was brought into question by the happenings of the early twentieth century. The idea of Man 'above' was eclipsed by the horrors of war.

The Change of Direction.

Karl Barth experienced both the confidence of the nineteenth century, and the devastation of the twentieth. The criticisms and comments just cited belong to Barth the great opponent of his theological forefathers. As such they came to expression some years after the beginning of the period under consideration. They are retrospective comments. To understand Barth in the decade beginning with the year 1910 he must be seen as a young pastor in the parish of Safenwil. The biographical material for this period[69] shows that the young pastor came under the influence of two overriding factors: the pressures of pastoral care, and the need to preach.

Safenwil was an industrial parish. As such it was dominated by the various social issues associated with industrial work; conditions, wages, workers rights and so on. It was, by his own admission, the first time Barth had experienced "the concrete class conflict".[70] To begin with he tackled the problems he faced with the tools he had to hand, the theological methods and insights learned during his student days.[71] He was by his own admission a "whole hearted Marburger",[72] and this meant adhering to the two basic principals of "religious individualism" and "historical relativism".[73] The legitimate plurality of theological formulations corresponded to their verifiability through a present "personally experienced reality".[74]

It is not surprising that his early sermons were dominated by the theological ideas of Marburg; "life" and "experience".[75] In one of his early

sermons he described himself to his congregation as "a guide to the sphere of the inner life".[76] Like many of his contemporaries he became interested in the Swiss religious socialist movement.[77] This meant that he came into contact with the two theologians Hermann Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz.

By the first of these two he was reminded to speak the word " 'God', earnestly, responsibly, and momentously".[78] The power of God may confront and influence men in the midst of the secular and profane, as well as in the realm of the ecclesiastical.[79] In a different but similar form we see here Schleiermacher's conception of the 'Kingdom' as something which is synonymous not only with the life of the Church, but with society and culture.

In this vein, Barth could associate himself with some of the views of Ragaz in his suggestion that the acceptance of socialism was at least a preliminary step towards the embracing of God's Kingdom: "Jesus is the social movement, and the social movement is Jesus in the present".[80] Barth did not hold on to this position for long. To discover *why,* it is necessary to look at the other great influence upon him at this time; the need to preach.

Barth's outlook on preaching he expressed in a lecture which he gave some years after becoming the Pastor in Safenwil. It illustrates the dilemma he faced in those early years;

> The question will no longer down, but breaks out in flame: is it true?.... Is it true, this talk of a loving and good God, who is more than one of the friendly idols whose rise is so easy to account for, and whose dominion is so brief? What people want to find out and thoroughly

> understand is, Is it true?.... So they come to us, entering into the whole grotesque situation of Sunday morning, which is only the expression of the possibility raised to a high power.[81]

The question would no longer down. 'Is it true?' This quotation shows how problematic this question had become for Barth .

Previously he had defended, with great gusto, the pastoral strengths of the theology he had learnt in Marburg.[82] But it is quite clear that when the pressures of pastoral care became real in a new and challenging way, the old learning simply would not do. For the first time in his life Barth was confronted by the sheer tedium of everyday existence.[83] There was a realisation that salvation is not only the exaltation of humanity but also the overcoming of humanity;[84] and what this viewpoint required was an understanding of a God such that this could be achieved.

In Schleiermacher's conception of the universal nature of religion, salvation, as with other aspects of the religious life, had become a matter of degree. No man ever stood quite outside the circle of religious consciousness or was incapable of playing a part in the continuing dialogue of finite and infinite. All men stood in relation to God because they always stood in relation their own religious 'feelings'. Faith was but a particular form of the developed human spirit.[85] This was Schleiermacher's religious *a priori*.

The problem which this approach caused is basic to the ontology which Schleiermacher chose to apply. If a theology is developed from the viewpoint of

the 'universal' and has as its aim the exaltation of Man, then evil takes the form of a negation. In other words, men do not choose evil, they simply fail to choose what is 'best'. To belong to a universal scheme to which all possibilities must correspond means that whatever decisions are made, both they, and the individual that makes them, remain within the scheme. While decisions might prove to be negative in a limited context they can never take the form of a decision outside the universally applicable rule. They may be a negative eddy in the flow of things, but they will not overcome it. As subject to the whole, decisions can never be positively destructive.

For Barth, in those early years in Safenwil, struggling as he was with the social and political issues of his small industrial town, the impression of evil as a positive force had become an overriding consideration. He realised that his parishioners needed a God who could not only exalt their own humanity, but also overcome the inhumanity of those who managed the factories in which they worked. In the face of pastoral issues in Safenwil, Man had become a problem: "Man is a riddle and nothing else, and his universe, be it ever so vividly seen and felt, is a question.[86]

The question would no longer down. "Is it true?" Is the average experience of people good or bad? Is it true that the movement through life is one of exaltation and development? Is it one of struggle and hardship? The 'universal' nature of the world so often seems to enslave and not exalt. Corrupt governments destroy human rights and dignity. People are forced to live in slums and work in slave shops. So often Man's relationships enslave and deface

what is good. If Man is indeed wrapped in a universal movement then it is at best problematic as to whether that movement will result in His exaltation. On occasion, even to suggest such a thing is in itself an obscenity.

Barth met in Safenwil people for whom the question "Is it true?" was a living and important question, a question to which there could be no easy answer. The young Pastor struggled to find in the socialist movement of his day a suitable remedy for the hurts of those under his care.

What becomes clear is that Barth knew himself to be surrounded by the "realm of the imperfect".[87] Any theology which he subsequently developed was never intended as a means of escape. Even at this stage he was concerned with the "particularity"[88] of history. His parish experience forced him to move away from any idea of the 'universal'.

The weakness of Schleiermacher's theology lay in its underlying doctrine of God. In his emphasis upon the spiritual and infinite, Schleiermacher had created a God incapable of identifying with the imperfect. His God was the God of "an uneschatological 'Christianity of the present'",[89] a universal principle,[90] "not a God who can have compassion".[91]

Barth's affiliation to the Social Democratic Party[92] illustrates his growing desire to address the whole of Man's existence.[93] Pietism had given rise to a purely individual hope,[94] and so presented Christianity as a

development of culture.[95] Its only frame of reference was the human spirit and those forms of reality "co-existent with it in its self-consciousness".[96]

The greatest weakness in Schleiermacher's theology was caused by its creators desire to identify so closely with the ontology of his age. The theology which developed in both Germany and Switzerland shared this weakness.[97] Barth ultimately rejected the Social Democratic movement because he saw it leading back to its own form of secularization.[98]

The beginning of the First World War was a deeply upsetting moment for Barth. But worse was to follow.[99] On 1st August 1914 ninety three German intellectuals issued a manifesto supporting the war policy of Wilhelm II. Amongst these were some of Barth's theological teachers. In this one moment the growing discontent which he had been feeling came into stark focus. Things simply could not go on as before.[100]

> It was like the twilight of the gods when I saw the reaction of Harnack, Herrmann, Rade, Eucken and company to the new situation,... and discovered how religion and scholarship could be changed completely.... into intellectual 42 centimetre cannons.[101]

Barth saw that all these men had become hopelessly compromised by the political situation. Their "ethical failure" indicated that "their exegetical and dogmatic presuppositions" could not be in order.[102] It was the ethical failure of the existing theology which finally pushed Barth beyond the point of no return.[103] Surprising, then, that in later years he was accused of being uninterested in the world and its problems.[104] Barth needed a fresh start.

The War highlighted the weakness of Schleiermacher's method in applying a universal ontological principle. He had claimed the rights of a virtuoso of religion, the right to express in his own terms and medium the content of religion. The right to stand above religion as the master of its meaning and expression. But to suggest the existence of a universal framework meant that an explanation for all situations could be found. Barth felt that the theologies of Schleiermacher and his other teachers failed conclusively at the point where ethical responses were required to face the horrors of war. The war could not simply be explained as a temporal 'blip' in the relationship of finite and infinite. Man as a question loomed large, and as a corollary, the question of God loomed larger.

Together with his good friend Thurneysen, Barth realised that what was needed was a 'wholly other' theological foundation,[105] but in the beginning neither of them had any real idea what this might mean. They thought of exploring Kant and Hegel,[106] but rejected both. Eventually it was the 'obvious' which suggested itself. Together they turned to the Bible.

> In preparation for this work of preaching he sat down before the Bible each day of the week and in his own new way ploughed it like a farmer who goes out into his fields in the early morning and makes furrow after furrow.[107]

The impact of reading the Bible was enormous. Into the theological vacuum, created for Barth by the Great War, poured the witness of Holy Scripture. He felt gripped by the Bible in a new and powerful way.[108] But then

what did he discover that he had not already seen? Thurneysen explains it in this way:

> Karl Barth read from the Scriptures the message of the holy, gracious and righteous God who needs no defence, who lets his Word go forth in its sovereignty and who can and will be known from this Word of his, and from it alone. But this Word of his is called, and is, Jesus Christ, the one around whom the years in their thousands stand still because he is the centre of all time, the bringer of the kingdom which with him dawns in the midst of this time as the new world of God.[109]

In two lectures which he delivered in the years 1916-17, "The Righteousness of God", and "The Strange New World Within the Bible",[110] this theme of the 'otherness' of God was explored.[111] What Barth discovered was the 'subjectivity' of God. That meant God's freedom not to be conformed to any human structure or pattern of thought. This was essential to his nature as God.[112] If Man imposed his own identity upon God then He simply spoke of himself, "in a loud voice".[113]

Barth chose, as a direct result of his Biblical studies, to suggest the existence of an independent world. The Bible simply presented mankind with a radically different understanding of reality. In this sense the 'Righteousness of God' was quite independent of any human righteousness. The Bible said nothing of man's goodness, but a great deal about his arrogance. Properly understood, it did not allow itself to be questioned by Man.[114]

> It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God, but what he says to us.[115]

Barth began to build upon the basic premise that there existed in Man no natural religious capacity. The world of God was not simply the human world drawn large. What struck home was the very questionable nature of the world.[116] Schleiermacher's confidence was not the norm. The norm was a life of uncertainty, change and decay. The world was characterised by the one impossible and yet all important question; "Is it true?" Is it true that amidst the storms of life, the vagaries of relationships, the duplicity of governments, there was a spirit and existence which was still, and peaceful and true to itself? The answer which Barth discovered in the Bible was a resounding and deafening "Yes".

> But now into the midst of this sense of need and apprehension, as restless and unbroken as the theme of a Bach fugue, comes the assurance of conscience - No, it is not true! There is above this warped and weakened will of yours and mine, above this absurd and senseless will of the world, another which is straight and pure , and which, when it once prevails, must have other, wholly other, issues than we see today.[117]

What was expressed in this passage was the realisation for Barth of the subjective freedom of God. Schleiermacher had considered the nature of God only as it related to the finite-infinite schema of thought which he used. In this sense God became a dominant principle inherent in the ontological structures of life. In contrast, Barth found in the Bible a God who speaks in freedom and authority out of his own inner nature.

What Barth discovered in the Scriptures, as Thurneysen explained, was a God who "spoke". From this moment on his theology was governed by a desire

to hear the "Word of God" addressed to Man before it had been sifted and diluted by a predetermined interpretative model.[118]

In Schleiermacher's theology the freedom of God had been sacrificed on the altar of cultural necessity. His idea of a Platonic[119] 'principle' was so different to Barth's growing perception of the "righteous God who needs no defence". In Schleiermacher's scheme there could be no real freedom because all considerations were subservient to the rational necessity of a particular ontological model built around the understood relationship of finite-infinite.

Schleiermacher's commitment to the principle of cultural exaltation meant that, ironically, his understanding of Man proved restrictive. He produced a "dogmatics of the religious man"[120] which had its starting point in the depths of Man's own soul. This in turn produced a "Protestant to Roman semi-Pelagianism".[121] In contrast, Barth came to see the life of Man as intelligible only at the point where he heard himself addressed by God. There needed to be a clarification of the relationship between Man's piety and the Word of God.[122]

The discovery which Barth made set him free from the need to create his own interpretive ontology.[123] He set out upon a theological journey which was to occupy the rest of his life. It was a journey committed to the world, but also, and most importantly, to the sovereign Will of God as expressed in his Word.[124]

Overbeck and Blumhardt.

Perhaps in this expression of Barth's understanding there is a trace of hindsight. The mature expression of this theology was to lie many years ahead. In the period of his pastorate, and with the writing of The Epistle to the Romans, he began the struggle to free himself from the burden of nineteenth century theology.[125] This task involved him in an attempt to articulate afresh the freedom of God, in distinction to the world which he had made. To this end he was greatly influenced by the thought of Franz Overbeck and Christoph Blumhardt.

As a New Testament scholar, Overbeck cut a strange figure in the academic world of the nineteenth century. As a great opponent of the liberal theology of his own age he insisted that its development signified not growth but painful demise. What Overbeck provided for Barth was a clear articulation of the impotency of culturally bound Protestantism. Barth had sensed it in its ethical failure of 1914. Overbeck illustrated it in large, bold letters. It was the diagnosis of the end of Christianity which captured Barth's imagination.[126]

The central point of Overbeck's theology concerned the early expectations of those who proclaimed the Gospel. His premise was that all New Testament proclamation had to be understood as hinging upon the expected immanent dissolution of both history and culture.[127] Therefore, modern theology, if it was to express the character and beliefs of early Christianity, had to contain a powerfully eschatological element.[128]

From this standpoint it is obvious why Overbeck should attack the theology of his day. Schleiermacher had tried to unify theology and culture with the common thread of human exaltation. To fulfil such an aim he had become a "virtuoso" of his subject. To Overbeck such attempts simply illustrated the basic denial of the eschatological nature of faith. This was a "betrayal"[129] of Christianity by subordinating it to historical necessity.

Overbeck argued that if there was to be a point of unity in the relation of God to Man, it could not be created in an artificial way by making "faith" and "knowledge" synonymous terms:[130]

> The nature of modern Christianity... is therefore denatured, because in it the tension of contradiction is transformed into a normal relationship which must result in the corruption of both parts - humanity and Christianity.[131]

He accused contemporary theology of measuring the strengths of a text against its relation to a particular historical method[132] (a theme which will be considered in Barth's debate with Harnack). As Overbeck put it,

> It pretends to preserve the life of the holy texts from which it draws its life, and by so doing only throws sand into the eyes of the world. But this is precisely what true scholarship would never pretend to do, since it cannot ever create life.[133]

For Overbeck the Christian witness could not gain its strength from any cultural, exegetical, or historical source. Rather its vitality came from the power at work in God's purposes for the world, even if that power meant the dissolution of the world and all things "theological". In this regard Overbeck

saw the role of exegesis as freeing the individual "from the text"[134] so that he might hear what lay within it.

In asserting the eschatological nature of faith, Overbeck denied the existence of an inherent point of contact between God and Man within society, culture or history. All these in themselves proved irrelevant to true Christianity. There could be no inherent point of correspondence between the world and the salvation of God. In these terms salvation meant the dissolution of the world in order that it might be re-established on a different basis. Therefore, rightly understood, Christianity stood as a radical contradiction, not only to the Church, but also to the world.[135]

Therefore, the world was characterised by two things; death[136] and 'Urgeschichte'.[137] The second of these two terms Overbeck used to describe the distant eschatological realm towards which the world was moving. 'Super-History' formed the boundary, the contradiction and the hope of the world. Death as the characteristic feature of life likewise formed a boundary, but a boundary which could also become a doorway. Therefore, Christianity provided a radical hope for the world only in so far as it allowed the contradiction inherent in the relationship between the world and Urgeschichte to be heard as a deep and unequivocal "No!".[138]

If this understanding is developed then eschatology is not simply concerned with a future historical event, but with an inherent contradiction, an ontological disparity, between the nature of God and the world he has made.

The dissolution of the world is not simply a future event towards which the world is moving, but a current event which takes place at the points where Man allows himself and his world to be contradicted by the living presence of God.[139]

Overbeck saw the role of the Church as nourishing and maintaining this metaphysical contradiction. Unfortunately, it was a role which he felt the Church failed to perform. Instead he saw it as becoming another aspect of the temporal realm. As such it was dead.

> If Christianity, then not history; if history then not Christianity. Historic Christianity - that is Christianity subjected to time - is an absurdity... And... History is an abyss into which Christianity has been thrown wholly against its will.[140]

In the attempts of nineteenth century theologians to defend the Christian faith Overbeck saw an increase in its decline;

> Do the modern theologians think that they can put off much longer with their absurd delusion that Christianity's best defence to ensure continued existence is its unlimited capacity for change?[141]

What Barth found in Overbeck was the clear articulation of an eschatological theology. The problem with this was that it stressed the otherness of God to the exclusion of any relational aspects of his nature. Because Barth had discovered in the Scriptures a God who addressed the world through his living Word, a God who sought a relationship with his creation, the idea of ontological distance could not provide the only content of theology. What he

needed was a theology that could unite the ontological freedom of God and the limited aspects of humanity.

In these terms it was the Blumhardts, father and son, who provided the theological impetus needed to overcome the restrictive aspects of Overbeck's thinking. He was introduced to their thinking by his friend Thurneysen.[142]

Overbeck's critique of nineteenth century theology had been aimed at its easy marriage of eschatology and history. His critique was essentially polemical and retrospective. The force of his argument grew out a study of early Christianity with its eschatological preaching and teaching. What he failed to do was provide any form of positive statement to fill the crater his own arguments had made.

Barth found in the work of the two Blumhardts a no less powerful eschatology, but this time looking forward and not back. He did not see this as a theology as such because neither father nor son showed any desire to enter into the theological debate on any of the accepted theological grounds.[143] Nonetheless, Barth saw in the thinking of the Blumhardts a "direct and penetrating Word from God into the world".[144] His own contemporaries might ignore this "Word"only at their peril.

Barth was deeply impressed with Christoph Blumhardt as a man. This is something which leaps out of the page at anyone who studies what Barth had to say about him. A man "not to be studied but only experienced".[145] So much of

Barth's later theology carries the imprint of those meetings during the early months of 1915.[146] This is a fact which few commentators, with the notable exception of Eberhard Jüngel, seem to acknowledge.

To describe Blumhardt and his thinking, Barth used two words, "priestly"[147] and "organic",[148] which he saw as being interchangeable. In this way he tried to explain how Blumhardt was able to combine within himself the affirmation of the world so sought after by Schleiermacher, with the eschatological critique so powerfully articulated by Overbeck. Blumhardt was able to

> represent God's cause in the world yet not wage war on the world, love the world and yet be completely faithful to God, suffer with the world and speak a frank word about its need and at the same time go beyond this to speak the redeeming word about the help it waits for...[149]

Blumhardt's whole outlook upon life and theology began, as Barth described it, with "God's presence, might and purpose".[150] For this reason theology could proceed from the starting point of God's revelation of himself, but not otherwise.[151] This is a quite unpietistic standpoint[152] because God is not conceived as a religious *a priori*. It is in marked contrast to the theology of Schleiermacher.[153] He saw the object of theological enquiry as being the religious feeling of absolute dependence instilled in Man as the symptom of his correct relationship to God. In Blumhardt Man is not understood in terms of his feelings but in the way in which he relates to

> the great cosmic movements in heaven and on earth, all in the same glory of God. And within these mighty outlines lie the little things too, even those concerning the smallest

> midge, the sparrows, and the flowers. The same great power encompasses them all.[154]

Blumhardt painted with expansive and powerful strokes an enormous picture of cosmic proportions. This was not a theology based upon culturally based ontology. The truth of reality in its relation to God was not understood to be buried within the created order. It existed in the free will and purposes of God as he decided to engage with the world he had created. Therefore, theology was a discipline which at its root was dependent upon the revelation of God as an act of freedom and sovereignty. Blumhardt would never have described himself as a virtuoso of religion.

Because Blumhardt could find the meaning of reality in the will and nature of God he could also perceive a wholeness to the direction and flow of history. This meant that he is able to see the limited nature of the temporal at the same time as perceiving its ultimate fulfilment in the purposes of God.[155]

In the development of Barth's theology, Blumhardt and Overbeck go together.

> They stood next to each other..., back to back, if you like, differing greatly in habit, vocabulary, in their conceptual worlds, in experience, but together in substance - Blumhardt as the forward-looking, hopeful Overbeck, Overbeck as the backward-looking critical Blumhardt, each as a witness for the other's mission.[156]

While Blumhardt provided Barth with the vision to reach beyond the theological limitations of the nineteenth century, Overbeck provided the academic edge he needed to cut himself loose.[157]

The positive content which Blumhardt brought to the theological stage came to be expressed for Barth in the concept of the 'Kingdom of God'.[158] By the use of this phrase he wished to identify

> an Other which not only defines the boundaries of the world and illuminates it from beginning to end in all its dimensions, but which also breaks into the world and shakes it with superior strength and goodness... The Other to which they looked... existed in its coming...[159]

This was the clearest of rejection of any possible theological inherency. God was seen as distinct from the world he had made. He was to be encountered at those points where he broke into the world and never simply waiting within it. Blumhardt understood God as someone who "comes" because of the person and work of Jesus. He saw the risen Lord as a "real, quite specific, agent".[160] The resurrection marked the point at which God defined both himself in his freedom and sovereignty, and the created world in which he chose to be known.

Blumhardt's theology was profoundly Christological because it hinged upon the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

> The crucified one, who is the risen one, is the Lord... Therefore all knees must bend before Him and all tongues must confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord. There cannot be any creature either in heaven or under the earth which is anything beside Him. For this we live and strive.[161]

The whole relationship of God to the world was defined by this single act. The unity of God and Man was given not as a blanket condition, but at a moment of grace and freedom spontaneously created by God himself.[162] The resurrection was a sign of this determining factor.

Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that Schleiermacher found it so difficult to include in his theology the resurrection of Jesus. Before he ever got close to the empty tomb he had defined his terms of reference in respect to his cultural setting. This meant that a happening of such extra-ordinary dimensions came to be expressed in symbolic terms. Because Schleiermacher thought it necessary to use a form of ontological under-pinning, then 'objectivity' as a term of reference had to prove limited. No 'object' could be allowed to define itself. Freedom existed only within the sphere of ontological reference previously defined. Therefore, all 'freedom' was a product of ontology. In this respect evil became only an apparent disturbance within a pre-defined ontological unity.

Blumhardt differed markedly from this because he was not hindered by any pre-existent ontological framework. Indeed his sole point of reference was an act of freedom, an example of an object defining itself; in this case the object being God. This meant that for Blumhardt theological investigation was an act of free will. In Schleiermacher this could not be the case because Man was inherently religious. Like it or not every individual was 'inside' the theological question. The key to understanding was recognition of this truth. For Blumhardt

theology began with the suspension and then re-definition of ontology by an act of God's free grace.

There can be little doubt that Schleiermacher was expressing in his thinking a basic human desire to find a pattern in life. Barth was struggling with this same problem in his early theological essays.[163] But the question remains, in what way does life possess a unity of purpose and meaning? Schleiermacher perceived a spiritual unity. Blumhardt addresses the problem from a wholly different perspective.

Barth expresses Blumhardt's position in this way,

> The contrast was not between Jesus and the unconverted heart of man, but the real power of darkness in which man finds himself. This was what the struggle was about, at it was here that Jesus proved victorious.[164]

Blumhardt's early experience of the deliverance of Gottliebin Dittus[165] had convinced him of the fact that Jesus was the conqueror. The eschatological nature of reality was shown with the coming of Jesus. To Blumhardt, eschatology simply meant the out-pouring of God's power and sovereignty into the life of Man. The breaking in of such power from above exposed both the limitations of creation and God's ultimate determination to rescue that which could not save itself.

> Help will be delayed, and misery will not be overcome, until the barriers between eternity and this world are broken through. A hole must be made from above downwards, and not from beneath upwards.[166]

Blumhardt saw the notion of the 'Kingdom of Heaven' as having three dimensions. There was the reality of the resurrected Jesus working in the lives of ordinary men and women to heal and transform life.[167] Blumhardt found in the concrete events of history signs of the Kingdom. There was also the expectation of a "general outpouring of the Holy Spirit".[168] Finally, there was the looked for final arrival of God's sovereign power within the course of world events.[169]

Blumhardt's theology had the same polemical feel as that of Overbeck but he moved beyond Overbeck with a hope and expectancy that the latter could never share. Overbeck saw with clarity the ontologically unique nature of God and this knowledge provided the foundation of his critique. However, Blumhardt moved beyond this simple recognition to see also the power and purposes of God emanating, not only from his unique ontology, but also from his sovereign will for Mankind. It is this difference in understanding which gave to Blumhardt's thinking its hope and vision.

It also meant that, unlike Schleiermacher who borrowed an ontology from his own culture, Blumhardt saw the rationality of world history as buried within the purposes of God. In other words, reality was only intelligible when seen in relation to God's will, which meant in relation to his power. Therefore, the reality of the resurrection was the point around which all other forms of supposed truth must circle. Barth said of Blumhardt's ideas

> their truth-content breaks into pieces in being applied to the subject-matter with which they are concerned. Neither individually nor in a system do they make sense unless

> sense is sought in the direction in which they are aimed.[170]

Blumhardt saw the world as ontologically distinct from God, but never free from his sovereign will. He accepted the fact of Man's ontological freedom, while seeing that freedom as encompassed by God's ultimate purpose.

In Schleiermacher there was only the one frame of reference; that of ontology. This was because God had already determined that it should be so. The ontological structure of reality was a given. Therefore, Man was already 'inside'. There could be no 'outside', only a failure to recognise the fact.

In Blumhardt's theology Man's knowledge of God was based upon an act of God's self-revelation born of his own freedom. God was free of Man by virtue of his ontological nature and sovereignty. Therefore, while Man shared in this ontological freedom, he was at the same time subject to God's will. In Blumhardt's theology there was both an 'inside' and an 'outside'. 'Outside' in relation to ontology; 'inside' in relation to purpose. The question which Man had to answer was whether he would choose to exercise his ontological freedom to follow the purposes of God.[171]

This was why in Blumhardt's thinking evil could take on harsher and darker forms than in Schleiermacher. There was no form of *ontological* restriction to prevent the growth of evil. Its limits were drawn solely by the ultimate purposes of God's sovereign will and it could grow and expand up to this limit, but never beyond it. So Barth could say of Blumhardt that

> He sees the tragedy of life very clearly, but he does not take it tragically, so to speak. Not for a moment does the tragedy of life become an independent object of his interest; it lies embedded from the very beginning in the peace of God as it were.[172]

Therefore, in the development of Barth's thinking Blumhardt's theology provided an antidote to the culturally limited perspective of Schleiermacher. While Overbeck's polemic gave Barth the critical tools he needed to dismantle the theology of his predecessors, it was Blumhardt who allowed him to move away from mere critique toward the development of a positive theological alternative.[173]

However, the possibility of such an alternative lay well in the future. Before then Barth had to struggle with a problem which Blumhardt, in his theological naivety, had not even considered. To say that the ultimate nature of reality is dependent upon the sovereignty of God is one thing, but to discern the will and purpose at work in the exercising of such sovereignty is something quite different. This has to be determined, otherwise Man must simply accommodate himself to the will of a distant and blank-faced entity whose motives remain uncertain, and whose ultimate purpose need not be good.

THE DEBATE WITH HARNACK

Barth's movement away from the theology of his predecessors, towards a new way of thinking, did not prove easy. It involved him at various times in heated and passionate debate. These debates provide points of reference by which it is possible to assess the changes which his thought underwent during those formative years.

One of the notable conflicts of the 1920's involved Barth in a debate with his former teacher Adolf von Harnack. It took place in the pages of Die Christliche Welt.[1] In the early months of 1923 the two opponents exchanged a series of letters, beginning with Harnack's 'Fifteen Questions to the Despisers of Scientific Theology'.[2]

The debate was spawned by a previous meeting in April 1920 when they both presented papers at the Aarau Student Conference.[3] Barth delivered his now famous piece entitled, 'Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas'.[4] From Harnack's comments at the time,[5] and those he made in future months,[6] it is quite clear that the two men were separated by a vast gulf stretching between two quite different understandings of the role and nature of theology. This gulf was never bridged. But the debate at least provided the occasion for the first real public encounter between Barth's thought and the theological heritage which he opposed.

In Barth's essays written during this period the themes which have already been discussed in relation to Schleiermacher, Overbeck and Blumhardt begin to find expression.[7] The address given at the Aarau conference in 1920 provided the occasion for the ensuing debate. But the ideas in that debate simply reflect theological themes to be found in other pieces of Barth's work.

Reading the early Barth is not unlike studying the writings of Blumhardt. The former is far more critical and the material is constructed differently. But on the whole many themes and ideas are shared in common. Blumhardt "simply tells us the divine truth in the world as it meets him".[8] His is not the world of the theologian. Barth, on the other hand, is arguing a case in the field of academic theology. Therefore, it is not surprising that while Blumhardt is content to concern himself in random form with the problems of life, Barth's thoughts are more accurately and precisely directed. In those early years it was to the Bible that Barth turned his thoughts.

It has already been shown, with reference to the comments of Thurneysen, that Barth found the inspiration for theological growth within the pages of Scripture. What he found clearly disturbed and excited him. With a consistency of purpose he explored in those early years the nature of the Biblical witness and its treatment by his contemporaries. He began his exploration from a simple starting point, a single question: "What is there within the Bible?".[9]

He answered his own question in an essay entitled "The Strange New World Within the Bible".[10] In the course of this piece he examined in the light

of what he had learned from Blumhardt the nature of God's interaction with Man. Not unlike Schleiermacher, he was exploring the whole question of unity, the unity of God with his world.

As in Blumhardt, it is easy to find the idea of ontological distinction, carried and subsumed within the overall sovereignty of God. Barth was articulating in his own way the eschatological dimension found in Blumhardt. By this he meant the 'ultimate' or 'absolute' dimension to life. It is this eschatological character of reality which he found so clearly expressed in the pages of the Bible.[11]

Barth was clear in his own mind that the Biblical criticism of his opponents had foundered upon a failure to recognise this single point. In an extended argument he examined the attempts made by scholars to find in Scripture only the expression of either historical,[12] moral[13] or religious[14] ideas. All these he rejected on the grounds that they failed to see what lay beneath the "crust"[15] of human expression. If there existed in the Bible a unity of purpose, understanding and meaning, then it was not to be found by applying to the text a pre-defined scheme of interpretation. This would in its own way simply reflect the method of Schleiermacher which he had already rejected.

Instead, he insisted that the nature of the eschatological message in the Bible provided both its own question, and its own answer to that same question. It was not Man who should question the Bible, but the Bible which questioned Man.[16] In this sense

> There is a river in the Bible that carries us away, once we have entrusted our destiny to it... The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of all our human limitations. We need only dare to follow this drive, this spirit, this river, to grow out beyond ourselves towards the highest answer.[17]

What Barth was saying is that, as with Blumhardt, there is a sense in which Man is both 'inside' and 'outside' the Biblical question. Inside, in so far as the experiences described in the Bible happened to men and women no different to those of the present age. Outside, because the Bible is not only talking about Man's experience of the world, but that experience as it relates to God's sovereign will and power.[18]

When Barth chose to speak about eschatology he meant the power of God entering into the world as something distinct and quite unique. Therefore, the Bible correctly understood was not about history, morality or religion. It was concerned with the purposes of God[19] as they impact upon the life of Man.

> It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men.[20]

Therefore, in Barth's thinking, the unity of Man with God lay not in some pre-determined ontological framework, but solely within the will of God. In this sense the concepts of sovereignty, eschatology and unity cannot be separated in his thinking. Life became eschatological when the power of God broke into the normal ontological framework in order that he might exert his authority. Such authority then gave to an otherwise disparate and ontologically

fragmented world a unity not its own. For this reason the Biblical question was simply concerned with how Man will respond to the sovereignty of God.[21]

As with Schleiermacher, Barth was trying to deal with the problem of unity. In a previous essay[22] he identified the need of Man to find a unity with God.

> But now into the midst of this sense of need and apprehension, as resistless and unbroken as the theme of a Bach fugue, comes the assurance of conscience - No, it is not true! There is above this warped and weakened will of yours and mine, above this absurd and senseless will of the world, another which is straight and pure, and which, when once it prevails, must have other, wholly other, issues than these we see today.[23]

There is here an apprehension of something great and purposeful hovering upon the edge of Man's perceptions of the world, like "the tremors of an earthquake or like the ceaseless thundering of the ocean".[24] The unity which Barth was trying to find quite clearly lies above and beyond Man. This is not a unity inherent in the world, but waits upon its edge to break in from outside. It is Man's need of this unity which Barth identified as characteristic of his existence.

In this sense the question of unity and the question of Man's attitude to God's sovereignty went hand in hand. In fact, in Barth's way of thinking, they were one and the same. Unity for Man in his relationship with himself, his world and with God, all depend upon God's sovereignty. The question of unity was an eschatological question. Whether Man will accept the authority of God

as it breaks into the world of his experience as something quite unique and different. This is the Biblical question, and the Bible correctly understood pushes the individual to the point "where one must decide to accept or reject the sovereignty of God".[25]

Having reached this point of understanding Barth still had to deal with the question which Blumhardt looked at only haltingly, that is, the nature of this God whose sovereignty Man is called upon to acknowledge. Barth was well aware of this problem and began to address it in the early theological essays. He put the question in his own inimitable way. If the content of the Bible is God, then what "is the content of the contents?".[26]

Even at this early stage Barth was struggling to find an answer to this question. Clearly he perceived the answer to be in some fundamental way a Christological answer,[27] though at the time his ideas are somewhat vague. To express this truth Barth used the concept of the "Word of God",[28] which meant the standpoint of God, the thoughts of God, the will of God as he addressed Man.[29] But having decided to approach the question of unity from this direction, he was still faced with the burning question as to the nature of the God who addresses Man. With respect to the Bible, Barth still had to discover the "content of the contents". Without an answer to this question there could be no absolute sovereignty, and therefore no unity of direction and purpose.

To a large extent he articulated what he saw to be the 'end', but not the 'means'. In powerfully eschatological language he described the "power of life

and resurrection",[30] that eternity should "dawn in place of time"[31] and that the "events of the Bible are the beginning, the glorious beginning of a new *world*".[32] At times, during these early essays, it was almost as if Barth was quoting from Blumhardt verbatim.[33] Moving away from the ideas of Schleiermacher and individual enlightenment, he began to explore the Biblical view of a "new world"[34] and a new creation.

Harnack's Historical Criticism.

It was not surprising that Barth's line of thinking should eventually bring him into conflict with Adolf von Harnack, because the latter had championed the role of historical criticism as the only true defence of the Christian faith against scientific scepticism. Not unlike Schleiermacher before him, Harnack tried in his own fashion to defend Christianity against a growing antagonism which had developed during the Nineteenth Century.

Schleiermacher's method had been to present Christianity as both the basis and zenith of cultural achievement. Both he and Harnack shared the common aim of unifying spiritual and material aspects of reality. In this way Harnack sought to establish theology as a discipline of autonomous integrity amongst other scientific disciplines.

Schleiermacher's method essentially eradicated much of the historical content of the Gospel. Instead the individual was seen to be a contemporary of

the person of Christ within the realm of his own inner religious experience.[35] This outlook was particularly weak in respect of its Christology.

Harnack's concern about this approach was that it left the field open to the creation of various 'phantoms', imaginary figures growing out of the individual's inner attitude and imagination.[36] While Schleiermacher sought to remove the object of enquiry from the realm of scientific investigation, Harnack tried to establish it firmly within that realm, "at one with the task of science in general".[37] This meant embracing the parameters of enquiry appropriate to his age and acceptable to his peers. This led to his development of an historical-critical method as the foundation of theological enquiry.

In 1895 Harnack delivered a paper entitled "Christianity and History".[38] In this address he sought to answer the criticisms of his contemporaries who thought Christianity to be simply an anachronism. Therefore, he began his counter argument with a statement of what he perceived to be the central issue in the debate. Speaking of the Church he said,

> The whole meaning and purport of religion - life in God, the forgiveness of sins, consolation in suffering - she couples with Christ's person; and in so doing she associates everything that gives life its significance and its permanent value, nay the Eternal itself, with an historical fact; maintaining the indissoluble unity of both.[39]

What this shows is that Barth and Harnack were trying in their different ways to address the same problem, the relationship of time with eternity. Barth had learned from Blumhardt that the two are not compatible, save as the direct

result of the intervention of God as a unique and sovereign act. Harnack, on the other hand, perceived in the 'mechanism' of history, the way in which it 'works', the possibility of time and eternity being drawn together in a more constant and unified fashion.

His argument began with an acknowledgement that "all history seems to be a ceaseless process of growth and decay".[40] But, this did not mean that reason had superseded history as the primary component in religion. Such a proposition would be based upon the false assumption that everything that has happened in history is of trivial importance and accidental occurence.[41] Likewise, Harnack rejected the assumption that Christianity had been made redundant by the overriding growth of a "natural religion".[42] Instead, he presented two conceptions "*development* and *personality*"[43] as the determinate factors in the growth of the Christian faith. Therefore, he could say that,

> religion is no ready-made structure, but a growth; and it is a growth that falls within the history of humanity. Its developments are no mere outward semblance: they are a reality.[44]

When Harnack said this he was not expounding a purely developmental understanding of history. Indeed this was the very argument he was trying to refute. His counter argument followed this line of reasoning; "only in the sphere of political economy"[45] can any sort of simple developmental process be traced; in the area of "intellectual and moral ideas"[46] developments and changes cannot be accounted for except by reference to "the strength and the activity of an individual, of a *personality*".[47] It is not simply the power of ideas which govern

the movement of history. Rather it is the strength of an idea "merged"[48] with a personality that "begets a living conviction".[49] It is the "*person*"[50] who has always provided the momentum of history. It is force of personality which is communicated through the historical medium, and this force "we can only feel".[51] Therefore, speaking of Christ Harnack said

> no aspiration and no progress have ever existed without the miraculous exertion of an individual will, of a *person.* It was not what the person said that was new and strange....but how he said it; how it became in him the strength and power of a new life; how he transmitted it to his disciples.[52]

In this ability to communicate force of personality Christ was not alone. In this sense he stood in a long line of prophets of various sorts in whom the "Spirit of God"[53] had "borne sway".[54] What made him unique was that the first disciples received "from the abundance of this one man, grace from grace".[55] It was this fact which Harnack perceives to be "unique in history".[56]

In the series of arguments in which he was engaged, Harnack chose to define religion as "a relation of the soul to God, and nothing more".[57] He rejected the possibility that dogmatic statements of Christian orthodoxy can in themselves further the relation of the individual soul to God because "it is one thing to be sensible of their truth, it is another to be possessed of their power".[58]

Harnack saw the gospel as something both very simple, and very profound. Christianity in its correct form related not to dogma or ecclesiastical

authority but to the gospel of Jesus Christ.[59] The Gospel was best defined by looking to the 'disposition' which its hearing created in the heart of the individual.[60]

> The religion of the gospel rests upon....faith in Jesus Christ ie. because of him, this particular historical person, the believer is certain that God rules heaven and earth and that God the Judge is also the Father and Redeemer.[61]

The ability to understand the truth of the Christian faith was dependent solely upon the "voice of God",[62] the perception on the part of the individual that God had spoken to him. But this communication rarely occurred "without human help and intervention",[63] so that

> one Christian educates another; heart kindles heart; and the strength to will what we approve comes from the mysterious Power by which one life awakens another.[64]

In this line of communication Christ stood at the beginning, as the 'spring' from which the "river of life"[65] first flowed. This same river also flowed in the hearts of his disciples, assuring them that "*Jesus lives, and with him I live also*".[66] It is the image of his life[67] which gave "surety for the reality of a future world",[68] and this truth was "revealed to our inmost feelings".[69]

Harnack's great defence of Christianity in the light of historical criticism was that the latter had in no sense been able to lessen the "power or validity"[70] of what Christ said, or what he was;

> the great and simple truths which he came to preach, the personal sacrifices which he made, and his victory in death, were what formed the new life of his

> community...This is a simple matter of fact, which no historical criticism can in any way alter.[71]

It was a spiritual, not mechanistic, line of cause and effect which joined us to Christ,[72] and therefore guaranteed the validity of the Christian faith.

If this is indeed the case then certain things must follow. Since Christianity becomes dependent for its efficacy upon the clearly perceived historical figure of Jesus, then the role of theology is to make this figure visible. This is achieved by a process of stripping history of its superfluous and merely metaphysical speculation.[73] This process brings into question statements which have as their foundation anything other than an historical viewpoint. Speculative thought is immediately disciplined by the need for historical accuracy. Metaphysics based upon purely rational concepts ceases to have any meaning. Therefore, thought becomes scientific in so far as it is disciplined in its search for the historical and its rejection of all else.

In his own particular way Harnack was struggling with the same basic theological question which Schleiermacher sought to solve by using his form of ontological under-pinning, again the problem of unity. He differed from his predecessor in that he saw the thread of continuity running between Christ and the present as a traceable 'reality' within the movements and changes of history. Schleiermacher's point of reference had been borrowed from his cultural setting. Harnack on the other hand used the idea of a spiritual continuum to sift and judge the validity of historical material;

> The measure and the directive for all higher motives in the life of men is the conviction that we are not mere fragments of nature, but bear within ourselves an eternal life as the citizens and creators of a spiritual kingdom.[74]

Harnack was opposed to Schleiermacher's conception of Jesus as a paradigm of perfect 'God Consciousness',and insisted that he was an historical figure within a particular historical setting.

Harnack was treading a path between various theological problems. There was the possibility that Christianity was based upon the gospel and person of Jesus Christ as a strictly non-historic phenomenon; it could not be expressed in a set of binding, historically conditioned, rational propositions. But then neither could it escape the 'historical' even when part of its content related to the inner disposition of the hearer. This would lead into the speculative realm of metaphysics. Harnack clearly thought that the Christian faith was 'alive' and independent of any age, but given to us in an historical form. In this sense history was the necessary medium of divine revelation. Rumscheidt makes the point that,

> Harnack did not regard culture and morality as non-divine. Doubtless culture is not religion, nor is morality identical with religion. But a culture and morality deeply indebted to and influenced by religion are - if not divine - then certainly transparent to the divine.[75]

God's presence in history could never be equated directly with the historical. But then the presence of God was always and only perceived in history. In this sense history might be thought of as God's ontological medium.

Harnack could say of the gospel that it circled around a single central point;

> Eternal life in the midst of time through God's power and his presence. It is not an ethical or social arcanum for the purpose of preserving all sorts of things or of improving them. Even the mere question of what it has contributed to the cultural progress of mankind does harm to its spirit.[76]

For this reason he would not allow any simplistic association of the presence of God in history with the development of cultural and moral standards. The Gospel was addressed to man in history, out of and as part of that same history. It caused a change in man's inner disposition which always remained an historical occurrence. Thus, Christianity could never be equated with a simple moral or cultural change of attitude. This meant that the gospel was historically expressed, but never historically bound. Spirituality was a "disposition of mind marked by worship in spirit and in truth",[77] and was both part of history, and free from history.

Harnack argued that this historical grounding of Christianity had been lost early in the life of the church. The reason for its decline he saw as resting with those who had enclosed a living and simple faith within the corpse-like expressions of dogmatic theology.[78] The intrusion of the metaphysical and speculative into the realm of theology had dulled the edge of the Gospel. Together dogma and metaphysics had removed Jesus from the concrete world of human experience. Harnack sought to re-discover what had been lost by a new emphasis upon the need for a process of historical contextualisation.

To this end he insisted that the basic error had originated in the need to translate the Gospel into the thought forms of the Hellenistic culture in which the Gospel was first preached.[79] As time progressed these dogmatic formulations came to be maintained simply by reference to their doctrinal orthodoxy. Therefore, to safeguard their authoritative status they became embodied in various liturgical and ecclesiastical forms;

> The Gospel did not enter the world as a statutory religion and it can therefore have no classical and permanent manifestation.[80]

In practical terms this meant that the gospel could be set free from those early forms of unhealthy authoritative dogmatism, ecclesiastical, liturgical and metaphysical, which in turn gave rise to an

> authoritarianism and an intellectual servitude which are irreconcilable with the Gospel and its spirit.[81]

It was towards this end that Harnack developed his historical-critical method. Behind this lay the conception that truth was revealed gradually, by degree. By studying the changing historical forms in which truth was held, especially the institutional manifestations, the theologian was able to see through these to the basis of that truth. It was the process of distilling the truth of the non-historical gospel from the historical medium of past centuries. Having done this it was then free to be translated into the historical medium of any particular age.

Harnack did not try to produce a definitive expression of the Christian faith. This was impossible, since by his own definition, the efficacy of Christianity was the product of two things: the proclamation of the Gospel expressed in a particular historical medium; and the resultant inner 'disposition' of Man. Therefore, what he was trying to do was develop a historical method which could be the basis of discovering and expressing the gospel for future generations;

> Neither exegesis nor dogmatics will break the power of traditions which are now burdening the conscience of man....dogma must be purified by history.[82]

What this meant was that the role of the theologian in Christian theology was superseded by that of the historian. The latter, by use of his historical method, was able to judge[83] the content of history and intervene in its course so as to pass on to future generations the correct content of a past age. This content was correct only in so far as it remained a living content;

> Only that history which is not yet past but which is and remains a living part of our present deserves to be known by all.[84]

In these terms Harnack's Christology described Jesus as the 'concretion' of the gospel;

> He was the personal concretion and power of the gospel and we still perceive him as such. For none has ever known the Father in the way he knew him, and he gives this knowledge to others...He leads them to God, not only by his word but still more by what he is and does and, finally, by his suffering.[85]

This was the natural outworking of Harnack's approach to theology based upon the reality of history as the sole medium of God's revelation. In the very nature of Christ there was the unique fusion of eternity and history, so that in him, in his transparency, the nature and will of the Father became manifest. This was not the same as the 'God consciousness' of Schleiermacher, because here there was no attempt to transcend or dissipate the historical. The medium of history was taken as the norm, and the Gospel ran through, and in it. For Harnack, if there was no history, then there was no Gospel.

This meant that Harnack saw the love of one man for another as a pure reflection of the love of God for his creation. Here love had its root in an internal attitude. Jesus re-defined ethics in a unique way. This 'Higher Righteousness'[86] had its basis in Man's newly awakened awareness of his spiritual unity with the Father.[87] Therefore, religion was actually the soul of morality. A society could not hope to build a code of moral practice without first rediscovering its basis within the realm of the love of the Father. It was this love of God for Man, and then man for man, which provided the driving force behind the unifying and healing of Man's broken state. All this illustrates the fact that Harnack sought to overcome the problem of the relationship between Christianity and history by suggesting the existence of a spiritual continuum, rooted in the personality of the historical Jesus.

Barth's Response to Harnack.

In his lecture delivered in 1920, Barth sought to address the same problem. It was a problem he could not escape once he had accepted the powerfully eschatological character of Blumhardt's theology. If there existed two radically different forms of ontological reality, the world of God and the world of Man, then in what sense could history be the medium in which they met?

Barth examined the method advocated by Harnack, but could find in it no valid, overriding principle. The reason was quite simple. In his own reading of the Bible he had come to recognise a phenomena for which he could find no purely human, historical or rational explanation.

> To me personally it came first with Paul: this man evidently sees and hears something which is above everything, which is absolutely beyond the range of my observation and the measure of my thought.[88]

Barth was willing to acknowledge the historical impact of whatever it was that dominated the mind and vision of Saint Paul. While being "above everything", this cause or reason left a definite imprint on the lives of those who were touched by it. Quite clearly a "stone of unusual weight must have been dropped into the deep water there somewhere".[89] But then what exactly was the content of that impact? Unlike Harnack, Barth was unwilling to let his inquiry come to rest at the function of personality. He pushed beyond it towards the 'agent' which caused such an indelible impression. Once more Barth was

looking for the "content of the contents". In this respect his criticism of Harnack's work was not because he opposes the critical-historical methods which the latter advocated. Rather, "The historical-critical school must become more critical in order to suit me!"[90] Barth's view was that the methods advocated by Harnack and his contemporaries did not penetrate deeply enough into the substance or content of the theological question. They merely prepared the ground.

In the Bible the eschatological dimension to reality was presented to the reader clothed in the language and imagery of a past age. The role of critical-historical methods were to strip these away, so leaving the "content" of Biblical revelation accessible. Historical criticism might be able to assess 'what' happened, but it proved woefully inadequate in grasping the 'why' of the Bible; the cause behind the most peculiar Biblical history.

The reason for this was simple. Barth expressed it in this way;

> The Bible itself, in any case, answers our eager Why neither like a sphinx, with There was a reason! nor, like a lawyer, with a thousand arguments, deductions, and parallels, but says to us, The decisive cause is *God*. Because *God* lives, speaks and acts, there was a reason...![91]

In other words, the reason which lay behind this strange and wonderful history rested within the purposes, and therefore the nature, of God himself. God was the "content of the contents". For this reason the historical-critical school could have only limited use, because no amount of this sort of assessment could lay

bare the nature of God.[92] This was a direct expression of Blumhardt's understanding of two distinct ontological worlds. It was a consequence of Man being 'outside' the theological question.

> Biblical *history* in the Old and New Testaments is not really history at all, but seen from above is a series of free divine acts and seen from below a series of fruitless attempts to undertake something in itself impossible. From the viewpoint of ordered development in particular and in general it is quite incomprehensible - as every religious teacher who is worth his salt knows only too well.[93]

Barth contended that the basis of Biblical revelation, and therefore Christian revelation, was the freedom of God. As an ontologically distinct being, Man could have no call on God. The former stood in need of the latter, dependent upon his self-giving as the only means of gaining insight and knowledge into nature of reality. Such 'knowledge' once given was never 'knowledge' as such. Because what was revealed was an ontological reality itself, it could not be translated into the human framework of rationality.

This was the problem of eschatology. To Barth's mind Harnack had a completely "uneschatological view of history".[94] In later years he was to explain this in terms of a "horror of all corporeality" expressed in an attack upon the "realistic emphasis" of the New Testament.[95] For Harnack, eschatology was a function of metaphysics. To Barth it was the necessary expression of ontological distinction.

Barth saw theology in the nineteenth century as becoming "essentially a presentation and philosophy of religion in general, and of the Christian religion in particular".[96] This in turn led to a confusion of 'grace' as the free, spontaneously given, gift of God, with the "prolongation of an already existing religious experience".[97]

In his discovery of the "Godness of God", Barth was confronted with the 'subjectivity' of God. Through the witness of Scripture and the teaching of Blumhardt he realised that, although any scientific approach to theology must centre its investigations upon God as the 'object', because this 'object' was also 'subject', no ordinary scientific approach could be used. It was the nature of the 'object' of theology which was at issue.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the 'object' of scientific theology has proven difficult to isolate. If this were not the case the dichotomy which exists between the thinking of Schleiermacher and Harnack would not have arisen. The former insisted that the theological 'object' could not be approached except on the sub-rational plane of the religious experience. In response to this idea he provided a philosophy of the subconscious. The latter complained that this would only lead to solipsistic, metaphysical, speculation. His approach was completely rational and aimed to isolate the 'object' from subjective and historical debris. Which way lies the truth?

Barth rejected Schleiermacher's method because it resulted in Man talking about himself. He rejected Harnack because he could not accept the

subordination of God's sovereign will to a rational process of historical criticism.

Schleiermacher and Harnack introduced into the problem a 'third principle', a governing dynamic, woven into the fabric of spiritual and temporal reality. This then allowed for a bridging of the gap between the inside and outside of the theological dilemma. In Schleiermacher it was a form of ontological underpinning; in Harnack the idea of a spiritual continuum.

Barth rejected both of these approaches for the same reason. The bridges they used were artificial constructions which sat lightly to the witness of Holy Scripture. They were reflections of human ingenuity, rather than an expression of God's freedom and sovereignty. But to reject these alternatives did not deal with the problem. Pelikan, the church historian, expresses it in these terms;

> without sound historical study Christian theology inevitably falls victim to the ... changing fads of the most recent theological masters and dogmatic system builders, or to the murky subjectivities of a religious solipsism.[98]

The point Pelikan is making, he makes from an historian's point of view. But it can legitimately be broadened to cover the whole area of theological enquiry. It concerns the problem of verification, discovering a point of reference whereby statements concerning God can be assessed and judged. The question of verification is doubly important in a science where the object of enquiry is not immediately accessible. The introduction of a 'third principle' is an attempt to deal with this problem.

The critic of Barth's position might quite rightly point out that a mere insistence upon the sovereignty of God is surely not enough to safeguard against vain metaphysical speculation. This is doubly the case in a theology built around eschatology as an expression of ontological distinction. Without some safeguard, or guiding principle, what is to prevent theology descending towards mere "barbarism".[99] If a point of verification does not exist in the religious subconscious, or in a rational model of historical criticism, where might it be found?

The avenue which Barth chose to explore had its roots in the notion of the sovereignty of God. His discovery of God as the 'object' who is 'subject' led him to the possibility that this 'subject' might present itself as a self-verifying 'object'. In other words, true objectivity might only be inherent in the 'object' itself, so providing a new basis for 'scientific theology'. If this was indeed the case then any scientific method which imposed itself upon its object would be inappropriate. In this vein Torrance can say of Harnack's method that,

> while scientific activity is concerned with the pure knowledge of its object, for that very reason the nature of the object must be allowed to prescribe the specific mode of rational activity to be adopted.[100]

The logic of this approach was eschatological. It defied any attempt to read from the face of history the truth of God's revelation. Therefore,

> The so-called 'historical Jesus' constructed out of the records is not identical with revelation, for revelation is the act of God himself which cannot be read directly off the face of human history.[101]

This illustrates the point that, even at this early stage, Barth was motivated in his thinking by the idea that "the content of revelation is God".[102] That is, that there existed a direct relation between ontology and revelation.

The great weakness with this understanding was that it lacked a foothold in rationality. Barth's criticism of Schleiermacher had been based upon this very point. Therefore, what he needed to show was that there existed a direct, three way, relationship between ontology, revelation and rationality, that is, between God in his subjectivity, his giving of that subjective nature as an object and the rationality of Man in his grasp of that given object. Barth needed to discover an ontological-rationality, the means of expressing in rational form ontological existence. This meant discovering the necessary relationship between God and human thought, based upon God's giving of himself as an object, so that the danger of theology becoming purely metaphysical speculation might be overcome.

To deal with this problem Barth chose to explore a third possibility. That is, that the revelation of God in Christ carried with it its own rationality, and it is this inherent rationality in the object of revelation which itself provides the bridge between the two sides of the theological problem. Barth found this possibility in the theology of Blumhardt, but the latter "naively" assumed its existence without ever exploring its repercussions.[103] It is the tension between these two understandings of the rational nature of Christian theology which dominated the exchange of correspondence between Barth and Harnack in 1923.

Much of Barth's theological position at this time is contained in his essay "Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas".[104] It begins with Barth defining his terms of reference as regards the nature of the theological problem. Simply stated, Barth saw that the problem for those who would interpret the Bible was that they were caught "midway between Yes and No, No and Yes".[105]

On the one hand, Barth saw Man as being 'inside' the question concerning the nature of God. This one question provided the basic presupposition to all Man's searches after meaning.[106] All questions of ultimacy began with the basic question as regards the nature of God.

On the other hand, Barth also saw Man as 'outside' the question, by virtue of the fact that he had to ask the question regarding the nature of God at all; "The question will no longer down but breaks out in flame..."[107]

Barth asked the question, how is it that Man can neither grasp with full assurance the existence of a God who cares, nor deny his existence in the face of so much evidence to the contrary in the world of his experience? How is it that Man is always caught within the midst of the question regarding the nature of God, midway between the 'yes' and the 'no'?

On the one hand, Barth came to see the 'no' of Man's experience as a function of the whole problem of ontological unity. The 'no' sounding in the nature of Man was the product of His distinct ontological state. It was the affirmation of God's unique existence, the denial of an inherent law of

correlation between two distinct worlds. It was the affirmation, in Man, of God's freedom, and the sounding of Man's need.

On the other hand, the 'yes' which sounded in Man was the aspect of his existence which characterised his ontological state. "Whoever understands him at this point, understands him completely".[108] This was true of Man, not because of something within himself, but because of something quite beyond his experience.

> Now how does it happen that there is no resolving of this contradiction? The No from the earliest days has had on its side much greater power to contradict than the Yes has had: what is the reason it cannot once for all submerge the Yes? Why is it that we never break through to the clear and final conclusion that our sense of being inside is mistaken? The answer is hinted at in the very inevitability of our continued asking for a knowledge of God: we belong to the Yes and not to the No.[109]

This assertion by Barth could not be justified, with any degree of surety, on the basis of Man's mixed bag of worldly experience. Its justification could only be found outside His ontological state. Its basis lay solely within the realm of God's sovereign will. As such, Barth saw it as a Biblical statement born out of the revelation of Scripture. It was an assertion whose meaning could be validated solely on the grounds of God's sovereignty, and Man's obedience. In this respect Barth saw the obedience of Christ as the key to understanding his life and mission.

> We have received from Jesus many different truths. But the simplest of them all we have the least comprehended - that he was the Son of God and that we, if we will, may go with him the way wherein one simply believes that the Father's will is truth and must be done....We may take

> the new way. Or we may not. Sooner or later we shall. There is no other.[110]

Put simply, Barth saw the will of God as bridging the gap between the two ontologically distinct worlds. Man might have a part in this, but He could never be in control of it. Two worlds would always remain two worlds. They could come together only as the direct result of God's action. Therefore, the rationality which governed and explained this occurrence was the will of God, the rationality of God. As such it was accessible to Man only as a direct result of God's mercy. Therefore, theology became a discipline with its own distinct character and purpose. It was this understanding on Barth's part of the nature of theology which formed the background to the exchange of correspondence in 1923.

In the initial exchange of letters Harnack levelled certain specific criticisms at the 'despisers of scientific theology',[111] among whom he numbered Barth. The content of these criticisms reflected the emphasis already seen in Harnack's theology upon the need for a sound historical basis to all thought regarding the nature of Biblical interpretation.

His basic problem, which he articulated in different ways in the first eight of his "questions",[112] related to Barth's insistence upon the ontologically distinct natures of God and the world. There was in his writings a sense of exasperation. How was it that anyone could claim that the Bible was a "unity"[113] such that its content could be determined without reference to "historical knowledge and critical reflection"?[114] At the same time, if the Bible

simply reflected the truth that "God and the world... are complete opposites"[115] how was the truth of morality, and the "development of culture"[116] and "one's own existence be protected against atheism"?[117]

In contrast, Harnack argued that if the "awakening of faith"[118] was the same as an experience of God[119] then how could such an experience be separated from the medium of history? This being the case, critical reflection must always be necessary to distinguish genuine faith from "uncontrollable fanaticism".[120]

Likewise, how is it, asked Harnack, that God's world and man's world are different? If this was indeed the case the result would be the withdrawal of the individual from the world[121] and a failure to correctly equate the love of one's neighbour with the love for God,[122] the core of the Gospel. This would mean in turn that there could not be the necessary "education in godliness",[123] since no worldly perspective could provide a doorway into God's morality. Critical reflection was needed to draw out from history the divine content and justification for morality.[124]

If God had simply cut Man loose to drift free upon a sea of history, how was He to prevent Himself from being beaten down by the waves and storms of immorality and atheism?[125] Wasn't it far better to see the cultural and ethical deposits of society as landfalls of Christian hope and belief? And since this was the case, should not the tools of critical reflection be used as tools of navigation?[126]

Also, the Christian life should not be one of doubt and questioning. The Christian should not be caught "between door and hinge".[127] He should feel secure in his knowledge of God, since such knowledge lay waiting to be discovered in the "true and beautiful".[128] Critical reflection was the doorway into this aspect of truth.

If sin was lack of "reverence and love",[129] then how was it to be overcome save by the preaching of God's "holy majesty and love"?[130] The key to salvation was a clear vision of human value in the unity of the soul with God. Such witness was only possible because of the tools of critical reflection.[131]

Finally, in a world in which so many sub-conscious experiences were wrongly thought to be equivalent to experiences of God, what else could safeguard the "real"[132] content of the Gospel other than the rational and critical? Did these two not rightly stand guard over what was so valuable and precious? And if they should be lost would not "gnostic occultism"[133] simply come to the fore? Since Christianity must be Christocentric, then the "real" Jesus,[134] the human figure of history, the doorway into the heart of God, had to be made accessible through the use of the critical-historical method.[135]

Barth's reply to his former teacher circled around the central theme of the nature of history. It has already been seen how Barth was influenced by the "If Christianity, then not history" of Overbeck, and the simple and yet profound proclamation of Blumhardt "He is risen!". The divergence in the thought of Barth from that of his theological teacher can quite rightly be traced back to

these two corresponding points of reference, because they both highlight the impossibility, and yet for Blumhardt also the actuality, of the power of God as a 'historical' happening.

Barth's counter argument to Harnack was the same he voiced against the critics of his commentary on 'Romans'. He, Barth, was not a "despiser" of scientific theology. It was simply the case that Harnack's critical method was not "critical enough". If it had been, it would have expressed that

> the communication of the 'content of the gospel' can be accomplished... only through an act of this 'content' itself... The 'scientific character' of theology would then be its adherence to the recollection that its object *was once subject* and must become that again and again...[136]

Since, the true 'content' of the Bible was actually the nature of God as he revealed himself to the world, then the only possible avenue of approach to understanding the Bible was that of "*faith*".[137] As such, historical criticism might prepare the ground for the proclamation of the Gospel, but it could never create the desire for that proclamation because the latter was only accessible through "the Word of Christ"[138] within the realm of faith.

In Barth's insistence upon the efficacy of faith it is possible to see once again the influences of Overbeck and Blumhardt. This perception arose out of an understanding of the ontological difference between God and his world. Faith was a necessary product of Man's ontological state.

> A theology, should it lose the understanding of the basic distance which faith posits between itself and this *world*, would in the same measure have to lose sight of the

> knowledge of God the *Creator*. For the 'utter contrast' of God and the world, the *cross*, is the only way in which we as *human beings* can consider the original and final *unity* of Creator and creature.[139]

This statement provides as precise an articulation of Barth's early theological position as can be found anywhere. In it he expressed the idea that God's purpose, his rationality, became evident in the cross of Jesus Christ. As such, this rationality served to highlight rather than blur the distinction between creature and Creator. Therefore, theology as a discipline concerned with the rationality of God was a discipline of faith. In this respect all the answers which Barth gave to the criticisms of Harnack reflect this basic understanding.[140]

The two men never came to a point of mutual acceptance other than on a personal level. Barth's thought always remained for Harnack, "under the cover of a heavy fog".[141] Historically the debate marked the separation of theology as a discipline along divided paths. The road which Barth chose to explore some have subsequently embraced and others rejected.

As regards the theme of this thesis, the correspondence of 1923 is important because it articulates Barth's determination to find the rationality of revelation in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Such rationality he understood, even then, to find its content within the Content of God's giving of himself. Therefore, any understanding of objective reality, be that the nature of Man, or the nature of evil, was related to the rationality of God as it entered the world as something unique and independent. Any understanding of true objectivity could not be found from 'within'. Objectivity was concerned always and only with the

sovereign will and purpose of God. Therefore, it was God's attitude towards different aspects of the created order which would define their standing as examples, or otherwise, of objective truth.

Perhaps this clear articulation of Barth's theological position, while outlining his thinking during this period, gives a slightly false impression. At this stage his theology had not found such an ordered expression. This lay some years ahead. Its achievement followed on from what has been called Barth's 'dialectic' theology.

DIALECTIC THEOLOGY

It has been shown that to understand the early theology of Karl Barth the reader must have in mind the same basic question with which Barth himself struggled in the early years of the twentieth century. That is the question of theological and ontological unity. This had become for Barth a question which would "no longer down".

It has also been shown how he came to reject the methods of his teachers and contemporaries because of their use of a 'third principle', a form of human rationality through which to interpret the revelation of God. Barth saw this as creating a false unity between God and the world which denied God's unique status and existence.

This inner character of all theology had become clear to Barth in his work as Pastor of Safenwil in the years surrounding the 1914-18 war, both by the nature of the work itself, and by his growing awareness of the sovereignty of God declared to mankind in the resurrection of Jesus.

Barth knew himself to be 'inside' and not 'outside' the theological question. He had learned from Blumhardt that any understanding of Man's unity with God could only be found in the nature and will of God. Theology as a discipline had to reflect that fact.

As a result, Barth understood that questions of ultimacy, of unity and of eschatology were all expressions of the problem of ontology. The clear difference which exists between the world of God and the world of Man came to light in the resurrection of Jesus. At this point all theological questions found their most articulate expression.

Barth was to say in later years that it was the "new recognition of the *divinity* of God which so deeply stirred us and then also others".[1] God's freedom as a Being over and against humanity. His unique and original ontological state. In short, his 'subjectivity'.

> By this I mean that property of God which in relation to humanity and to the world is absolutely his own.[2]

It would be a mistake to think that Barth's realisation of the subjectivity of God was simply axiomatic, that he was trying to redress the imbalance of nineteenth century theology by stressing the autonomy of God over and against the thinking of the theologian, that he was using a principle or an idea.

The truth of this is shown by the way in which his awareness of God's subjectivity developed. He was a Pastor within the Reformed Church of Switzerland. Therefore, it was to a large part the nature of his work that made him re-assess his own theology. It was in the face of practical pastoral need and the discipline of weakly sermon preparation that his theology developed.

If he had simply chosen to state the idea of God's subjectivity as a theological axiom then he would have condemned himself to the same path as Schleiermacher and Harnack. It would have meant losing sight of the fact that ontology and rationality cannot be separated.

This is, perhaps, too clear an expression of Barth's thinking at the time. But certainly it is true that he had learnt from Blumhardt that the rationality of a God who raises the dead cannot simply be equated with the rationality of Man. In Blumhardt this was expressed in terms of God's sovereignty. Barth took the point and began to explore what it might mean in terms of rationality.

It is clear from the biographical material that Barth's greatest challenge as a Pastor was provided by the weakly need to preach.[3] In an early essay[4] he articulated the emphasis which this particular discipline came to exercise upon his theology. As such, it provided not the basis of a new "school"[5] but a marginal note to all theology. As Barth chose to call it, "a pinch of spice in the food".[6] As a Pastor and Preacher, he felt that he had something to say concerning the relationship between God and the world that was unique to his situation. In no sense was he trying to create a new rational model to replace those of Schleiermacher and Harnack. His "pinch of spice" was meant as an alternative to such an approach.

He sensed that in the minister's specific "problem",[7] the sermon, the questionable nature of all theology became apparent, and then with a peculiar

force and gravity. He chose to use this word for a reason. His own specific situation as a Pastor was this,

> As a minister I wanted to speak to the *people* in the infinite contradiction of their life, but to speak the no less infinite message of the *Bible*, which was as much of a riddle as life...But this critical situation became to me an explanation of the character of all theology.[8]

Here is a clear articulation of the 'problem', as Barth saw it, of being both 'inside' and 'outside' the theological question. In contrast to his teachers he did not search for another unifying principle, "*Exactly not that*".[9] Instead he embraced the problem because he saw in it the most suitable expression of Man's condition. In this sense theology became the expression of the Pastor's "embarrassment".[10]

In not trying to evade the experience he found the beginning of a new theological method. Previously the theologian had been the questioner, the master of his craft, the 'virtuoso'. Barth discovered that the roles had been reversed. The questioner had become the questioned.

The Minister, as one who must speak the word of God to his parishioners, was indeed surrounded by questions. Previously both Schleiermacher and Harnack had sought answers within the world of human experience. Barth saw the cultural and social confidence of the nineteenth century to be shallow and inadequate. It had been blown apart, for him, by the immorality and hypocrisy of the war.

In a scathing attack upon the cultural theology of the post war years he drew upon a Biblical image to make his point.[11] He likened it to the building of a 'Tower of Babel', the reaching out of Man towards something better.

A fruitless idolatry, Man simply create an earth-bound righteousness. The foundation of the tower was still the earth. It reached up, but never beyond to a "new world".[12] Barth saw morality, allegiance to state and religious fervour as simply building materials.[13]

> Are we not rather hoping by our very activity to conceal in the most subtle way the fact that the critical event which ought to happen has not yet done so and probably never will?[14]

But what was the 'critical event' that Barth was looking for? It was this critical event, or the need of it, which came to haunt the Pastor when he stood in his pulpit on a Sunday morning. The Bible open before him and the up turned faces of his congregation below him, there was a simple "What now?".[15] The whole situation was heavy with expectancy.

This was a "grotesque"[16] drama in which the theological problem became critically apparent. A drama in which the 'inside' and 'outside' of Man's existence sat side by side. This was an dominated by the knowledge that ""God is present!""[17], but in what sense?

In the act of Sunday worship Barth discovered the truth of Blumhardt's assertion that there is 'Action in Waiting'.[18] In the preface to the first edition of

Romans he makes the point that Paul's letter will "wait".[19] Under the influences of pulpit, Blumhardt and Paul, Barth discovered the eschatological nature of theological truth.

This eschatological dimension to life made itself felt to the congregation in the simple question, "*Is it true?*".[20] It was the search for unity which brought people to Church on Sunday; the same basic search that stirred the minds of Harnack and Schleiermacher to develop, in their different ways, such intricate theological systems. It was 'the' question which characterised the life of Man; is it true?

In this sense the whole event of Sunday morning worship, in whatever church it might take place, was an eschatological event. It was a happening loaded with the particular sort of expectancy that reaches out towards the ultimate meaning of life.[21] The Church failed when it did not recognise the eschatological dimension inherent in Sunday worship.

What people were searching for was "*the*" word[22] to assure them that God was present in their life. To borrow a quote from Blumhardt,

> This business of eternity - honestly speaking. I have certain misgivings when people always comfort me with eternity. If I don't see any help in the world, who can guarantee me help in eternity?[23]

It was this clear need which Barth identified in his congregation in Safenwil, and which in turn drove his thinking towards dialectic theology.

Where Barth differed from Blumhardt is in the fact that he identified the question of eternity with that of ontology. The need to answer this question made itself felt in Man as a necessity. About *this* question, Man had no choice.[24] His whole ontological state was a question with which he had to live and struggle. It was this question which he brought to Church each Sunday seeking an answer.

> Blood and tears, deepest despair and highest hope, a passionate longing to lay hold of that which, or rather of *him* who, overcomes the world because he is its Creator and Redeemer.[25]

Barth's understanding of eschatology was not simply the rejection of historicism. Nor was it only the injection into theology of various metaphysical categories. It was the rejection of all that is provisional and limited. It was an attempt to lay hold of the fundamental questions of human existence. This precluded an escape into phantasy in favour of a deeper immersion into the present.[26]

In an early essay entitled "The Word of God and the Task of Ministry",[27] Barth expressed Man's ontological compulsion in the fact that "...we ought to speak of God".[28] It was this need in other men[29] that gave rise to the life and existence of the Pastor. In this sense the Pastor fulfilled his task, not when he attempted to help the people with the every-day aspects of their life, but when he addressed the

> What? Why? Whence? Wither? which stands like a minus sign before the whole parenthesis and changes to a new question all the questions inside - even those which may already have been answered.[30]

The life which Man lives was in one sense insignificant. The Pastor's role was not to help the people live, "rather...to help them *die*",[31] that is, to help the people discover the answer to the basic question of life, of which their own existence was simply one concrete expression.

> When they come to us for help they do not really want to learn more about *living*: they want to learn more about what is on the father edge of living - *God*. We cut a ridiculous figure as village sages - or city sages. As such we are socially superfluous.[32]

The opening of the Scriptures and the gathering of a congregation brought into collision two distinct worlds. The Preacher's role was eschatological in that in him was focused the ultimate human questions on the one hand, and the need to speak God's ultimate answers on the other. He was as a prism, and in that lay the promise and the problem of his preaching.[33]

The Preacher did not interpret the Scriptures, but was himself interpreted by them. This was true daring because what might be disclosed was not what lay behind the Bible, but what lay behind its reader.[34] The Bible, correctly understood, dealt with only one kind of truth, and that alone: ultimate truth. As such it became intelligible only when the student was willing to listen to the question which the Bible itself posed "Are we asking after *God*?[35]

This did not mean that the questions which men and women brought to Church should be despised. These questions were a halting articulation of the deeper need for which they sought an answer. In fact the human expectancy inherent in a church service could not be taken seriously enough because,

> it is an adumbration of the great expectancy with which God arrives first upon the scene.[36]

Fundamental to Barth's early theology was the sense in which the question of God and the question of Man were opposite sides of the same coin. It was yet another expression of the problem of ontology. Man was finite, and it was this "finitude"[37] which drove him to search after God.

At the same time, his finitude was apparent, as such, only because over and above him stood a nature "which is straight and pure".[38] Man was most definitely inside and not outside the theological problem. But the problem existed not because of Man but always and only because of God.

This was a very different approach to theology than those of Schleiermacher and Harnack. This was the presupposition behind all of Barth's thinking. It was not that he began with an axiomatic view of God, building upon it with more or less sophisticated intellectual structures. No. The whole point is that he began with God, the fact of God, the Godness of God, the subjectivity of God.

Man's condition became apparent to Barth only because of God. Man's sense of his own finitude weighed heavily upon him only because of the existence of a different and quite unique Nature. Man as a question was overshadowed and presupposed by the greater question which was, for Man, the nature of God. This was not for Barth merely an intellectual question. It was once more a question of ontology.

Barth understood that the subjectivity of God prevented the theologian from perceiving God as an object which he could master. God could not be thought of as an 'object' among other 'objects'. Therefore, while the truth of the subjectivity of God was apparent through the impact which it made upon the world, it was not a truth which could be isolated from the world. Neither could it be understood simply as part of the world.

Barth saw the subjectivity of God as being the Theologian's greatest problem, that God is God, and Man is Man. This in turn undermined the theology which he had been taught. Schleiermacher and Harnack blurred the whole issue of God's subjectivity. This in turn led to a misplaced understanding of the nature of the Incarnation, such that all of their thinking came to circle around Man, "without having any exit into the open air".[39] Speaking of Schleiermacher, Barth coined the now famous phrase, "one can *not* speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice".[40]

In a sense, Barth made Schleiermacher "stand on his head".[41] His understanding of the incarnation differed from his predecessor because it did not focus on the subjectivity of Man. Instead it expressed the subjective nature of a God who is able to give himself as man.

This emphasis he had learnt from Kierkegaard.[42] It was an expression of the ontological gap that existed between God and Man. It was also a denial of Schleiermacher's basic premise that Man experienced God within an already existing ontological framework. The 'objectivity' of God, since it was an

expression of his 'subjectivity', could not be inherent in Man's own subjective nature. This type of immediacy would be an ontological contradiction; "for to be known directly is the characteristic mark of an idol".[43]

Barth saw the incarnation as a miraculous expression of God's, and not Man's, subjectivity. As such it contradicted any merely axiomatic approach to theology. It highlighted both the glory and difficulty of theological thinking.

> That the promises of the faithfulness of God have been fulfilled in Jesus the Christ is not, and never will be, a self-evident truth, since in Him it appears in its final hiddenness and its most profound secrecy.[44]

Then how might the theologian speak of God? The question of unity would not simply go away because it was ignored. Barth could see this.[45] As a Pastor he could not simply walk away. But then how might the theologian begin to build a "bridge"[46] between these two distinct worlds?

Barth saw the whole problem clearly expressed in Sunday morning worship.

> Man as man cries for God. He cries not for *a* truth, but for *truth*; not for *something* good but for *the* good; not for answers but for the answer - the one that is identical with its own question... He does not cry for solutions but for salvation; not for something human, but for God, for God as his saviour from *humanity*.[47]

Man's problem was himself. He was a problem because God 'is'. It was his own sense of being ontological limited that forced him back to the search for

God. Because God 'is', Man was a question which needs to be answered. Since Man 'is', God was the answer to the question;

> when people ask for God, they do ask for an answer which is identical with their *question*, for an infinite which is also *finite*, for One who is beyond and also *here*, for a God who is also *man*.[48]

Here lay the essence of Barth's problem, and his challenge to all theologians; his "pinch of spice". God was both the Question and the Answer. Since the resurrection disclosed a quite unique realm of authority, Man was forced to acknowledge the limited nature of his world,[49] either that or create a third unifying principle which would help him with his problem. Since the latter would only serve to rob the resurrection of its meaning, Man was forced to seek the real answer to his question. Since his question was at its root ontological, then he must ask after God.[50]

But here was Barth's greatest problem. As someone who was called upon to preach he knew that to speak of God was at best "daring",[51] and at worst presumption. The subjectivity of God denied Man the opportunity to speak of him. Certainly Man could speak of his own need, that "adumbration" of the great question around which his life circled, but he could not simply speak of God without succumbing to clever axiomatic and intellectual games.

> The solution of the riddle, the answer to the question, the satisfaction of our need is the absolutely *new* event whereby the impossible becomes *itself* possible... There is *no* way which leads to this event; there is *no* faculty in man for apprehending it; for the way and the faculty are themselves new, being the revelation and the faith, the knowing and being enjoyed by the new man.[52]

Since God was both question and answer, and since his own subjectivity precluded him simply being grasped as another object of Man's desire, then the question of unity was reiterated with growing urgency. The possibility of veering towards a Gnostic viewpoint was a real problem.[53] Barth was aware of both these issues.

In his essay 'The Christian's Place in Society',[54] Barth wrestled with the whole question of the historicity of God's revelation. How to express a unity between the 'beyond' and the present. The eternal was not inherent in the world (as Schleiermacher claimed), nor was it to be banished from the world as an unacceptable aspect of metaphysics (as Harnack claimed). The world was 'shot-through' by the eternal, but in such a way that its disclosure lay only within the realm of God's self-revelation.

The world was eschatological because it stood in relation to the ultimate meaning of reality as a question is related to an answer. Barth knew that there was an answer because he himself was a question. Therefore, ultimate meaning ran through the course of human history as a subjective presence which could not be grasped, but which nonetheless made itself felt. God was both question and answer.

Therefore, Barth was able insist upon the need to embrace the world as question, as adumbration, but not be perceived as an end in itself.

> And this is not a matter of losing oneself in the object of one's regard but of penetrating through the object to its creative origin.[55]

The object of enquiry was always the 'creative origin'. Since that origin revealed itself in the world as parable, then the theologian had to concern himself with the world. The value of events was not in themselves but in their 'heavenly analogue'.[56] In this way the world provided not only parables of the action of God in Man's salvation, but also parables of the death of Man withoutGod.[57] Therefore, the falling apart of so much of culture and society was the death of things "in themselves";[58]

> what is being called into question today at more than one point and very seriously is the deadly isolation of the human from the divine...We must understand the mighty God-given restlessness of man and by it the mighty shaking of the foundations of the world.[59]

The nature of the world was always eschatological because it was related in the present to the eternal meaning of history. In one sense this was a natural theology of negation, of insufficiency.[60] As a 'hidden' content, the meaning of history could only be seen, either from each end,[61] or by shattering it into pieces;

> The most radical ending of history , the negation under which all flesh stands, the absolute judgement, which is the meaning of God for the world of men and time and things, is also the crimson thread which runs through the whole course of the world in its inevitability.[62]

In Barth's understanding of eschatology, history was a causeway leading back to the creation of the world and forward to its end. 'Meaning' was dependent not upon method, but upon viewpoint. In other words, the Theologian might develop any number of clever 'methods' in his attempts to speak about God without ever speaking from that point at which time and

eternity meet and overlap. The Preacher, on the other hand, was left with no choice in the matter because the very need to preach forced him to stand at that point of overlap. The point on which he stood is intelligible only in relation to the beginning and end of the whole.

Jesus could speak of the world in purely realistic terms[63] because the events of the present moment were fully justified and complete in themselves.[64] However, the awareness of the eschatological nature of the moment had always create a tension with the world. The looking forward of the Christian meant that he could never accept the mortal character of his existence as an end in itself. Therefore, the act of God's affirmation had also to be an act of questioning. The questions which Barth found in Safenwil were the adumbration of God's affirmation of the world.[65]

God is saving the world; he has already saved the world; and the world will be saved. The whole basis for this three-fold definition was the primary act of God in creation whereby he gave himself in his eternal stability as the 'promise' of history. Since God's act was an act of promise its guarantee was buried within the nature and being of God himself. Therefore, any moment of affirmation had always to be a moment of ontological contradiction because by it God revealed both his own infinity and also Man's finitude.

The purpose of history could only become apparent when God chose to reveal part of his own nature as a holy, powerful, creative, redemptive God. His answer would always provide a question because his own presence would

condemn history to be perceived as ontologically limited. His judgement would be experienced primarily as judgement.[66]

God's 'No', the questioning of the temporal by the arrival of the eternal, would only be perceived as a 'Yes' by those who were content to dwell within the realm of contradiction. Therefore, the Christian, and especially the Theologian, was expected to participate in the action of God within the world.

The sovereignty of God demanded a response. The judgement of God questioned Man.[67] At the point of God's revelation history was simply dissolved. The acts of God in history could not be observed or defined. Therefore, Barth removed theology and the object of theological investigation from all normal realms of human experience. He differed in his method from Schleiermacher and Harnack in that the act of removal emanated from the side of the object, rather than from the side of the observer. Both his predecessors had tried to safeguard theology by using a series of presuppositions which they had built in to their method. Barth saw this as superfluous and destructive because God could safeguard his own existence simply by being himself. God was subject before he ever gave himself as object. Therefore, no form of historical method would be able to penetrate through to the inner nature of God's revelation.[68]

> The Divine is something whole, complete in itself, a kind of new and different something in contrast to the world. It does not permit of being applied, stuck on, and fitted in. It does not passively permit itself to being used; it overthrows and builds up as it wills. It is complete or it is nothing.[69]

If Barth was right about the subjectivity of God and the provisional nature of all thought then all theological 'method' was brought into question. To borrow one of von Harnack's questions,

> If God is simply unlike anything said about him on the basis of the development of culture, on the basis of the knowledge gathered by culture, and on the basis of ethics, how can this culture and in the long run one's own existence be protected against atheism?[70]

Dialectic theology was Barth's attempt to articulate the relationship between theology as a rational product of Man's existence with his inner search for unity with God. In what way could theology as a product of Man's rational mind capture that relationship?'.

Barth's dialectic was born of the eschatological nature of existence. The ultimacy of life is what was straining to find expression. Theology was not a vain exploration of academic questions. It was the articulation of Man's deepest need. Whether it was also the expression of the answer to that need depended upon its relation to the nature of God. In this sense Barth's dialectic expressed the problem, but, within the context of his theology as a whole, it did not answer it.

Barth rejected Schleiermacher on the grounds that the latter lost the ultimate need of a rational content in theology within a sea of subjective anthropocentricism. Barth saw Harnack as going to the other extreme by encasing the revelation of God in a framework of rational interpretation, which

in itself is ironic because Harnack actually sought to free the 'truth' from centuries of dogmatism.

What Barth was trying to do was express the rationality of the 'content of the contents'.

> The only answer that possesses genuine transcendence, and so can solve the riddle of immanence, is God's word - note, *God's* word. The true answer can hardly consist in neglecting the question, or merely underscoring and emphasising it, or dauntlessly asserting that the question itself is the answer.[71]

Dialectic theology was Barth's first halting step upon the road to answering the question of his congregation, 'Is it true?'

Barth saw the answer he was looking for in terms of God's 'word', that is, the rational articulation of God's purpose. He rejected Man's subjectivity in favour of God's subjectivity. He rejected Man's rationality in favour of God's 'word'. He did not try to eliminate either the subjective or the rational from theology.

Barth sought to express the rationality of God's subjective nature. He was trying to express the rational side of God's ontology. Eduard Thurneysen provides a definition of the premise which lay behind what was to develop;

> The existence, the life of man, on the one side, and on the other the Word of God that meets this life, lays hold of it, and transforms it - these are the two poles between which the spark must again begin to pass in order that there might be an arc of light that will illuminate all things.[72]

This was an understanding of rationality as a function of movement. It was about the fluid nature of human thought as a condition of understanding divine changelessness. Conditioned by two static points, the need of man and God's answer to that need, this was not a form of universal relativism. It was a recognition of the need to allow for changing forms of thought in the expression of God's ontological rationality.

This is a function of ontology. Therefore, the theologian was not so much a virtuoso as a mimic. The meaning of language and argument lay not in its 'outer' form, but in its 'inner' correlation with the revelation of God's own rationality. This rationality was

> complete and self-sufficient rationality, the rationality of God, who is so fully rational that he does not need to be interpreted in terms of anything outside himself.[73]

This basic premise dominated the first arguments surrounding Barth's approach to Biblical interpretation.

In Julicher's criticisms of Barth's commentary on Romans[74] there were echoes of Harnack. Jülicher saw Barth as trying to escape the historical nature of the Biblical record.[75] Therefore, the argument was concerned with the historicity of God's revelation. For Jülicher this was a matter of Biblical interpretation. For Barth it was a question of ontology.

Barth was critical of any approach to theology which struggled only with the given text and did not attempt to push beyond the text to the force which

caused it to be written. If theology did not concern itself with the 'content of the contents' it was simply concerning itself with the problems of a particular form of human rationality. This was Barth's criticism of his contemporaries,[76] and a criticism which Brunner supported in his appraisal of Barth's early work;

> The empirical world takes part in the divine occurrences; but the latter are to be understood not in terms of it, but in terms of the "beginning" in God and of the "end" in God, in terms of the past and future which lie in the eternity which is beyond.[77]

In this view all aspects of human life were only understood correctly in their relation to God. Since God was a living God, the theologian was faced with the challenge of trying to express a living nature in dead forms of human rationality. Therefore, dialectic thought was a process which attempted and always failed, to capture the movement of God through and in history. To express this Barth chose to use the visual image of a flying dove. The Theologian attempts to draw the dove in flight,

> our position is really an instant in a *movement*, and any view of it is comparable to the momentary view of a bird in flight. Aside from movement it is absolutely meaningless....[78]

It was this attempt which Barth found in the pages of Scripture. In this sense dialectic theology was an attempt to reflect a way of thinking which Barth saw as having its roots within the Bible.

> What the Bible is interested in never loses its importance but is never captured in a word. It desires not to be accepted but understood... It is through and through dialectic. Biblical dogmatics are fundamentally the suspension of all dogmatics. The Bible has only *one*

> theological interest and that is not speculative: interest in God himself.[79]

This particular quote has brought Barth's argument full circle. He began in his pulpit in Safenwil and in a very important way never left it. The shadow of judgement, the adumbration of expectancy, was at its deepest and darkest where the holiness of God drew near. This was the point at which the Preacher had to stand if he was to follow after the movement of God, seek the eternal within the temporal or catch the dove in flight. Above all else he had to be a courageous man.[80]

Barth argued that the Question of God would also become the answer to those who would persevere. The cross of Christ was the answer for the world only when it became the place of deepest questioning. It was in the dereliction of Christ, the scandal of desertion, that the greatest light was shed upon the world. In Christ's cry of dereliction God's 'No' was heard. The resurrection was the sounding of his Yes.

> This No is really Yes. *This* judgement is grace. *This* condemnation is forgiveness. *This* death is life.... The crucified is the one raised from the dead.[81]

Therefore, dialectic theology was, on the one hand, the affirmation of God's freedom in his ontological subjectivity. On the other, the denial of any possibility that Man's rationality could grasp or articulate what is an ontological answer to his ontological need. This was why Barth insisted that the Preacher is the real Theologian. It was in the pulpit that ontological answer and rational inadequacy were brought together with shattering force.

Dialectic theology raised the basic question as to how suggested forms of knowledge could be verified. How could Man's rationality relate to the dove in flight? What was to prevent the theologian from mistaking mere metaphysical speculation for the genuine article? How could the rationality of Man become bound to the eternal in a sufficiently disciplined way?

For Schleiermacher and Harnack, objective truth was an already present 'given', woven into the fabric of the world. For the former this meant that Man was 'religious', and it was the realisation and acceptance of this which ultimately led to his greatest social and cultural development. In this case the 'given' was an inner spiritual nature which provided a stable and unchanging basis for theological truth and reality. For the latter, objective reality was suspended in the medium of history like chalk suspended in water. Harnack developed his own historical method to strip away that which was historically conditioned. Therefore, for both these theologians truth was an inherent 'given'.

Barth differed because he saw truth as a 'given' only when God gave himself. Objective truth emanated from the font of all truth. But since God was a living Subject, then the perception of objective reality occurred only as a spontaneous, momentary, gift. Therefore, because the Object of theology was also Subject, then the 'givenness' of objective reality could never be inherent in either of the senses put forward by Schleiermacher or Harnack. The discovery of any form of objective truth always remained beyond the realm of method or process.

Also, because the true nature of reality was dependent upon a clear perception of God's rationality in history, and since such a rationality was apparent only when the temporal and eternal are brought together, then this meant that all forms of objective truth were eschatological. Objectivity could not be separated from eschatology, and because eschatology always remained in the sphere of the divine grace, then the objective perception of any form of reality had also to be the product of grace.

If Barth was right in his assertion that the questions of life are simply an adumbration of a deeper truth, and that the key to understanding this truth could only be sought in the area of ontology. And if he was also right that at the point of ontological questioning Man was confronted not with questions about himself, but about God, who is the Truth under which he lived, then this had to reflect upon any perception of evil as an objective reality.

What it meant was that the truth of a given 'object' could not present itself to Man simply 'in itself'. From a theological point of view truth was always relational. Questions of existence could only be understood in terms of their relation to God whose existence was itself the ontological foundation of all other forms of truth. Since God was both question and answer, then theological 'objectivity' was dependent upon the perception of an ontological relationship.

However, the subjectivity of God precluded any simple connection between the temporal and the ontological. This meant that the theologian was dependent upon God's giving of himself. It also meant that if he was not to fall

into the same error as Schleiermacher and Harnack whereby he introduced a third principle to interpret God's self-giving, he had to discover a point at which God's revelation contained its own inherent rationality. This was a necessity forced upon him by the resurrection of Jesus which denied any possibility of Man's rationality, based as it was upon a limited ontology, from expressing the self-giving of God.

Therefore, before any theological understanding of the objective existence of evil could be reached, the theologian must discover a point at which God's own rationality is expressed in a form which human thought can at least begin to articulate. This was for Barth the precursor to any theological understanding of objectivity reality. Whether Barth was able to discover such a point is a question which must now be looked at.

EARLY WEAKNESSES

Between 1911 and 1931 Barth concentrated with singular intensity upon the questions surrounding the nature of God. This one concern dominated all his thinking during the early years. It cast a theocentric shadow under which thoughts about Man, Jesus and salvation all came to be examined from a particular point of view. Barth's concentration upon this theme was "as resistless and unbroken as the theme of a Bach fugue...[1]

He was fuelled in his relentless searching by an intense awareness of the subjectivity of God. This emphasis upon God's unique ontological freedom he had learnt from Blumhardt and the Bible. It has already been pointed out that this aspect of Barth's thinking gave rise to his particular form of dialectic theology.

It has also been pointed out that Barth was not unaware of the weaknesses of his theology. It is interesting to notice that in his early thinking Barth did not confuse Man's basic need for God with speaking about God himself. He was the first to admit that strictly speaking his 'theology' lacked content. Throughout those years the answer to Barth's basic question concerning the nature of God eluded him. God still remained hidden in his own subjectivity, he still remained a righteous god whose righteousness was independent of Man.[2]

Barth remained only too aware that God could not be grasped as other objects might. The barrier of ontology was both a promise and a problem.[3] He was unable to define in clear terms the point at which God revealed himself to Man such that human rationality might express that revelation.

It was this deep sense of inadequacy that provided the foundation for a theological position which Barth was to develop only years later. In spite of everything he felt absolutely compelled to speak of God.[4] As a Pastor and Preacher he was drawn to speak of that which was beyond his grasp.

This meant that in his early theology Barth was unable to approach or speak of God directly. Instead he concentrated upon the dichotomy which he saw existing in the relationship of God and Man. This in turn led to a theology based upon the language and imagery of "impact".[5] Barth's approach to God was from the direction of Man's ontological inadequacy.

It is clear that the solution to the problem of ontological dichotomy both dominated and alluded Barth during this period. He was unable to discover in a satisfactory way the point at which God's own living rationality was revealed to Man.

This meant that his early thought was dominated by the theme of 'contradiction'. This he understood to be the characteristic and direct result of God entering into the world of Man. If the student approaches Barth's early theology from this point of view it is easier to appreciate the content of his fiery

polemic. It is also easier to appreciate the inherent weaknesses of the theology which he developed.

The earlier discussion of the debate with Harnack illustrated one supremely important theme in Barth's early work. He was perplexed by the nature and mechanism of history. This was as a direct result of his understanding of the resurrection and carried the mark of both Blumhardt and Overbeck. It provides a focus for discussion because it opened directly onto the problem of ontology.

The argument concerned the nature of God's revelation in and through history. Overbeck and Blumhardt provided a critique of Harnack's position. Barth used their understanding of God as being ontologically distinct from history to counter-balance the confidence which Harnack had expressed in his search for the 'historical Jesus'. The positive side of Barth's critique was that it provided a genuine attempt to explore the notion of God as divine Subject.

In the early chapters of The Epistle to the Romans Barth explored this idea in terms of Man's experiencing the subjectivity of God as an encounter with the divine "incognito".[6] In this way Barth based his thinking on an understanding of God's absolute freedom.

> No divinity remaining on this side the line of resurrection; no divinity which dwells in temples made by with hands or which is served by the hand of man; no divinity which NEEDS ANYTHING, any human propaganda... can be God.[7]

To express the notion of the sovereignty of God Barth used the language of distance.[8] However, Harnack's accusation of a descent into gnosticism[9] was completely misguided. Harnack failed to understand the relationship in Barth's thinking between the 'nature' of God and the 'will' of God.

What this meant was that Barth understood God to be distant in an ontological sense, that is, unique, free, Subject. However, he did not mean distant in the sense of disinterested or uncaring. What Barth was trying to express was "the divinity of God".[10] God was distant because he was divine. Barth simply meant that there could not be, in the ontological sense, an inherent relationship between God and Man. This point of unity could exist only within the free will of God and as a result of divine condescension. At this point Barth's theology was pure Blumhardt.

This rationale provides the reasoning behind Barth's enormously strong emphasis on 'contradiction' as a sure sign of the presence of God. It served to highlight the points at which Man had allowed the 'Answer' to 'question' his life. This was grace to Barth's way of thinking, God's contradiction of that which was limited so as to free it from its limitation;

> Grace is radically contrasted with the whole realm of human possibility... Though grace, on account of this contrast, lies beyond all human possibility, yet nevertheless, for the same reason, it judges human life and launches a disturbing attack upon it. In so far as in this contrast God is encountered, human life is re-fashioned and provided with a new hope and a new promise.[11]

This was one of Barth's greatest themes during this period, Man had to be questioned before he could be affirmed. The ontological gulf which existed between God and Man could not be bridged from Man's side.[12] The whole fabric of the world was under a constant threat. Man was "unrighteous and humiliated" so that through the grace of God he could be "justified and exalted".[13] Therefore, Barth traced the presence of God through what was not given[14] more than through what was. This way of thinking bore fruit in a theology of 'krisis'.[15]

The krisis of Man's life was caused by the "void"[16] in which God revealed himself. This was the determinative factor in the relation of one with the other because of the ontological, and therefore rational, 'distance' which separated time from eternity. Man's knowledge of God had to remain obscure,[17] and all things be considered relative in relation to the subjectivity of God.[18] In this way all perceptions of God were deemed eschatological.

So it was that Man found His life to be characterised by a series of questions to which there was no obvious answer:

> May God never relieve us of this questioning! May He enclose us with questions on every side! May he defend us from any answer which is not itself a question.... In that central void the answer to our questioning is hidden; but since the void is defined by questions, they must never for one moment cease.[19]

Barth's us of the word 'void' was never meant to signify an emptiness. Paradoxically this 'void' was filled with the fullness of God's living presence.

However, it was perceived as paradox because Man's rationality could not grasp the subjective nature of God.[20]

This understanding highlights the problem which Barth faced. He had rejected the method of his teachers because he could not sanction the use of a 'third principle', but he himself could not speak in positive terms about the revelation of God. 'Void' and 'paradox' could not, in Barth's mind, form the content of Christian theology.

While Barth criticised the Biblical exegesis of his contemporaries for its failure to express the Bible's real content, his own theology suffered from the same inadequacy.

To try and overcome it Barth created a powerful rational content against which to judge aspects of the world. In this way he moved unwittingly away from the foundation of ontology and developed a rational framework of his own invention. In an attempt to safeguard the autonomy of God against the onset of anthropocentricism his theology became axiomatic.

This weakness arose out of an overriding desire to undermine the theology of the nineteenth century. The explosive impact which Barth's thinking had upon the theology of his day[21] was born out of the same need. Barth himself said

> ... things could not go on as they were doing. It was inevitable that bounds should be set to the then prevailing

> theological conception by new and at the same time older and original Christian knowledge and language.[22]

Barth's aim was to give back to God that awe and grandeur which should be his own by right.[23] Above all else God was to remain autonomous and independent. Barth tried unsuccessfully to build upon the fact of God's subjectivity.

In this way he was able to acknowledge the relative nature of all theological statements, not in the sense of subjective or historical relativism, but because the written word was quite clearly not identical with the ontological truth of God. The movement of the Divine in history itself relativised all things.[24] Therefore, no valid theology could remain static. Such 'movement' had its origin 'from above':

> I mean a movement from above, a movement from a third dimension, so to speak, which transcends and yet penetrates all these movements and gives them their inner meaning and motive...[25]

The third dimension was God's own being. The history of salvation was one of intervention, the history of the world was one of condescension whereby God had bound himself to the world and given himself as its guarantor.

It is in the contradiction of these two differing needs that the frailty of Barth's early thought becomes apparent. The need to "dethrone"[26] the theology of his day overshadowed the basic premise upon which he built. This created a seriously flawed dialectic.

Any true revelation of God had to be an inherently free act. In this sense the message of Paul's letter to the Romans could "Wait".[27] The individual's response to revelation had no impact upon it, which meant that the theologian need not defend God.

Barth's mistake was to defend that which needed no defence. This meant that God's freedom became merely an axiom and Barth was drawn into a merely intellectual argument having lost the ontological high ground. He failed to practice what he preached:[28]

> ... we were fascinated then above all by the image and the conception of a "totally other" which we had no right without more consideration to identify with the divinity of him who is called Yahweh-Kyrios in the Bible. In the isolation, abstraction and absolutism in which we viewed it and opposed it to humanity, poor wretches - not to say boxed their ears with it - it still had or required greater similarity to the divinity of the God of the philosophers than to that of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.[29]

In this sense Barth practised his own particular form of anthropocentricism. Not unlike Schleiermacher and Harnack, he introduced his own third principle. In this case it was the idea of the "*totaliter aliter*",[30] the "infinite qualitative distinction"[31] between God and Man.

However, if God's purpose was not to be found through spiritual introspection or suspended in history neither was it to be found in a purely rational model. Instead God's revelation of himself was observable only through "faith",[32] and that in Jesus Christ.

> Who and what God is in truth, and who and what humanity, we have not to explore and construct by roving freely far and near, but to read it where the truth about both dwells, in the fullness of their union, their covenant, that fullness which manifests itself in Jesus Christ.[33]

The true and necessary dialectic which existed between Man and God became apparent and real in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it was to a deeper apprehension of the Christocentric nature of theology that Barth turned next:

> This is not a rational, obvious, self-evident procedure, but it is the nature of revelation... Without eyes there cannot be sight, and without God there cannot be eyes.[34]

For this reason Barth judged the whole of the pre-war era to be a flight from a proper understanding of God's revelation in Christ to differing forms of idolatry:

> The images and likenesses, whose meaning we have failed to perceive, become themselves purpose and content and end. And now men really have become slaves and puppets of things, of 'Nature' and 'Civilization', whose dissolution and establishing by God they have overlooked.[35]

The Christian, on the other hand, in his acceptance of the non-historical nature of the resurrection could embrace is existence as creature, thereby paying due homage to God whom he experienced through the seemingly meaningless contradictions of his life. Therefore, in Christ, God

> affirms Himself by denying us as we are and the world as it is. In Christ God offers Himself to be known as God beyond our trespass, beyond time and things and men.... He acknowledges Himself to be our God by creating and maintaining the distance by which we are separated from Him...[36]

While this growing emphasis upon the person and work of Christ certainly played a part in Barth's early theology, he was unable to develop it with the depth and clarity which was necessary. To a large degree Jesus remained only a point of contradiction. Barth paid the person of Jesus scant attention except to insist that in him the contradiction which sinful Man refused to acknowledge was revealed in its totality.

> In Christ the consistency of God with Himself - so grievously questioned throughout the whole world, among both Jews and Greeks - is brought to light and honoured.[37]

Jesus was the bringer of the Gospel because through him was revealed a world distinct from our own,[38] he was the 'krisis' of the world,[39] the point at which the "crimson thread" of divine history was revealed.[40] The efficacy of Jesus' witness lay in the fact that through him God's Righteousness was revealed and all men were seen to stand upon a single, finite, temporal plain.

Therefore, Jesus was the person in history through whom God chose to justify himself.[41] His resurrection was the point at which God transformed time into eternity, uniting two conflicting and contradictory ontologies. The impossible marriage of the righteousness of Man and the Righteousness of God took place.

> The new Day which has dawned for men in the resurrection, the day of Jesus Christ, this... is the day that ushers in the transformation of time into eternity.[42]

For the same reason the only thing that Barth could say of the Christian was that in him a "void" became apparent. Therefore, his value lay not in what he was, but in what he was - not.

> His importance may consist in his poverty, in his hopes and fears, in his waiting and hurrying, in the direction of his whole being towards what lies beyond his horizon and beyond his power. The importance of an apostle is negative rather than positive. In him a void becomes visible.[43]

Ultimately Barth was able to say very little about the content of objective truth. He was able to articulate in powerful terms the fact of its existence and point to its basis within the ontological nature of God. However, he was never able to find a substantial foundation for his theology. He defined his arguments by reference to terms which he chose, but which need not in themselves appear compelling to others. It is obvious that the basis for defining what is objectively true cannot be in terms of whether or not a person agrees with Karl Barth.

Barth's entire theology was unhinged by his inability to express the rational form of God's revelation. Instead, he imposed his own thought in an attempt to bury the theology of the nineteenth century. Ironically, he created his own form of anthropocentricism.

It was impossible to verify what Barth was saying because he provided no external point of reference. The weight of his theology hung upon the intellectual structures which he himself erected and this proved to be its greatest weakness.

It is obvious that Barth saw the solution to this problem in a greater emphasis upon the Christological nature of revelation. Why this should be the case is best illustrated with an examination of Barth's understanding of the theology of Anselm.

FIDES QUAERENS INTELLECTUM

The previous chapter has served to highlight the fundamental weaknesses in Barth's early theology. What he had failed to do was discover a method whereby theology could find a satisfactory relation to rationality. Having rejected sub-rational subjectivism on the one hand and historical relativism on the other, he needed to develop a new method of rational interpretation.

Above all else, this new understanding needed to respect the 'object' of theology. This meant a form of rationality that could express ontological truth. If it proved impossible, theology would be doomed to a fruitless future.

Barth's interest in Anselm originated in 1930 with a seminar on the latter's *Cur Deus Homo.*[1] Barth expressed his desire, as a result of this study, to "deal with Anselm quite differently from hitherto".[2] The result was crucial to Barth's movement towards 'dogmatic' theology.

In the Preface to the Second Edition of Fides Quaerens Intellectum he made the point that, of his critics, only Hans Urs von Balthasar had understood "how much it has influenced me or been absorbed into my own line of thinking".[3] Commenting upon this particular piece of writing he said, "in this book on Anselm I am working with a vital key... as the only one proper to theology".[4] To discover why this should be the case, it is important to trace the line of Barth's interpretation of Anselm.

The weakness of Barth's theology lay in his 'need' to express a particular understanding of God, in contrast and opposition to the theology of his day. This necessity led to a distortion of his thinking. A rational straight-jacket was imposed upon the 'object' of theology.

Barth began his study by pointing out the "absence of necessity"[5] in Anselm's thinking. This he attributed to a particular understanding of the purpose of theology. Since Anselm was interested in the "aesthetics of theological knowledge", what did "'to prove' mean, if it is the result of the same action which may also lead straight to *delectatio*?".[6] Clearly, a search for *delectatio* was not the driving force behind Barth's early polemic.

This understanding Barth attributed to Anselm's view of 'to believe'; "a striving of the human will into God".[7] This was more than an assent to a series of rational statements. It contained an ontological reference. It was the quest of one ontological being for another. Therefore, 'belief' was ontological before it is rational in the sense that it was relational rather than simply axiomatic.

This meant that the rational 'necessity' which dominated Barth's early work was completely lacking in Anselm. Rationality was subordinated to ontology, not in the Schleiermacher sense of becoming ultimately irrelevant, but because it remained inherent in ontology. If this was the case then,

> It is the presupposition of all theological enquiry that faith as such remains undisturbed by the vagaries of theological 'yes' or 'no'.[8]

If faith was a striving of the human will 'into' God, then 'belief', of itself, was not a rational thing. In Barth's explanation of Anselm he outlines a precise order of priority in the relationship which exists between belief, understanding and proof.

> Anselm wants 'proof' and 'joy' because he wants *intelligere* and he wants *intelligere* because he believes. Any reversal of this order of compulsion is excluded by Anselm's conception of faith.[9]

Understanding arose as a direct result of Man's striving 'into' God. This was because His participation in the nature of God uncovered a deeper, pre-existent rationality.

This was exactly the point which Barth failed to make in his dialectic period. In an attempt to be 'scientific', he undermined his own insistence upon the primacy of faith by building upon a form of rational under-pinning, namely, his dogged pursuit of the idea of the 'totally other'.

Having defended that which, or better He whom, needed no defence, Barth learned from Anselm that

> It is not the existence of faith, but rather - and here we approach Anselm's position - the nature of faith, that desires knowledge... It is my very faith itself that summons me to knowledge.[10]

Therefore, Barth's polemic, rather than being worthwhile, merely illustrated a rational subversion of an ontological foundation. This was a mistake which Anselm did not make because he maintained the primacy of faith, over and

above that of reason. Barth drew out four converging strands in Anselm's thought which highlighted the "compulsion"[11] of faith to search for understanding.

Anselm understood God to be both *summa veritas* and *causa veritatis.*[12] He was the one in whom "*intelligentia* and *veritas* are identical".[13] In God there was no disparity between rationality and ontology. Therefore, his "Word to us is nothing other than the *whole truth of the substance of the Father".*[14]

This meant that to search for proof, to be drawn into the 'being' of God, was inescapably also to be drawn into rationality.

At the same time, because faith was a "movement of the will",[15] and Man was a rational creature, such a movement had to involve Him in an act of choice. Because this involved a decision between what is "*just and unjust, true and untrue, good and bad*",[16] then faith was, in part at least, informed by Man's reason.

As a "striving of the will into God", faith could not occur without something new encountering Man from outside.[17] It could never simply be a product of Man's nature. The "seed" which was received was the "Word of God" which was "preached and heard".[18] Once accepted, it encountered within Man a "*potestas*",[19] a potential for recognizing, knowing and loving "*the best and greatest of all*".[20] Therefore, faith had to precede knowledge because "the

completeness of Man's likeness to God as restored in the Christian, demands it".[21]

Finally, Barth drew from Anselm an eschatological viewpoint based upon the relationship between faith, knowledge and vision. Anselm was quoted as having called "*the intellect which we take in this life* the *medium between faith and sight*".[22]

By this, Barth understood Anselm to mean that knowledge was the medium which connects the "striving" of Man's will into God, which is the content of faith, with the consummation of that desire, which he calls "vision".[23] Therefore, while knowledge most certainly had its limitations,[24] it was also capable of providing a "*similitudo* of vision".[25] To refuse such a possibility had to be, to Anselm's mind, "*negligentia*".[26]

Because he saw understanding to be inherent within faith, Anselm was able to accept the "possibility of theology".[27] This was such a long way from Barth's thinking in the years of his dialectic theology. There he struggled to express in rational terms the subjectivity of God. In those early years the eschatological emphasis in his thinking precluded the possibility of making positive statements regarding the content of theology.

> We cannot speak of God. For to speak of God seriously would mean to speak in the realm of revelation and faith. To speak of God would be to speak God's word, the word which can come only from him, the word that *God becomes man*. We may say these three words, but this is not to speak the word of God, the *truth* for which these words are an expression.[28]

Barth clearly found in Anselm an understanding of the relation between human rationality and divine revelation, such that he could envisage the "possibility of theology".

Barth began his explanation of how this might be possible with the perception that, for Anselm and the Early Church, *fides* could never be "illogical, irrational and, in respect of knowledge, wholly deficient *tendere in Deum*".[29] Faith was directed towards, and into God, whereby it was a "proper action of the will" and therefore contained a rational aspect.[30]

Faith was the result of hearing, which itself was caused by preaching.[31] Because faith was the result of Man's awakening under the influence of God's "seed",[32] and this was the "Word of Christ",[33] then it followed that the "Word of Christ" could be "legitimately represented by particular human words".[34]

While Barth was unable to name precisely those words which Anselm would have happily called "legitimate", he was able to identify the fact that for the latter there existed, alongside the "*credo*"[35] of the individual, a "*Credo*"[36] of the Church which formed an "unimpeachable point of reference".[37] Because faith arose out of the "'Word of those who preach Christ'",[38] then faith was

> assuredly nothing less than the awareness of a *sound signifying a thing*, of a coherent continuity that is expressed logically and grammatically, which, having been heard, is understood and now exists in *intellectu*.[39]

In other words, because the "seed" awakened in Man was itself the "Word of Christ", and because this was brought about by those who "preach the Word of Christ", then there had to exist a form of continuity between the two.

The fact that this understanding existed "*in intellectu*" meant that it need not be exclusively Christian. The difference between Christian and non-Christian was that, for the former, the rational thought which existed in the intellect was seen to correspond with an "object".[40] This was not the case for the latter.

> to the *esse in intellectu* is added the *intelligere esse in re* - faith is assent to what is preached as the Truth, assent for the sake of Christ who is its real and ultimate Author and who, himself the Truth, can proclaim only the Truth.[41]

In other words, the Christian was one who assented to the truth of rational statements 'regarding' Christ because he accepted that they correspond to an ontological truth 'in' Christ. He knew that there must exist this relationship between statements of belief and the 'being' of Christ because "*voluntas Dei numquam est irrationabilis*".[42]

The "awareness" of a "coherent continuity" within statements of faith, juxtaposed with the Christian's "assent" to the Truth expressed in Christ, meant that theology became a real possibility:

> And just because the beginning and the end are already given in faith, and because all that has to be settled regarding the *intelligere* that we are seeking is the gap between these two extremes, this *intelligere* is a soluble problem and theology a feasible task.[43]

In a sense, this quotation brought full circle the process which began in Barth's thinking during his time in Safenwil.[44] What began with a speculative return to the Scriptures and a growing awareness of "a God who goes forth in his Word", culminated in this clear articulation of the possibility of a developed theological position.

It began, as did all of Barth's thinking, with an awareness of the "Godness of God". To express this using Anselm's phraseology, "*quo maius cogitari nequit*"[45] - that than which nothing greater can be conceived". Both Barth and Anselm began with "One who is exalted absolutely above and beyond us".[46] This was for them not merely a logical building block[47] but a statement which reflected the disparity between creature and Creator.

Therefore, because God was 'beyond' Man's conception, any form of knowledge relating to the deity had to be the result of an act of divine grace. Torrance expresses it well when he says that

> it is not possible to think beyond God, or to think from a point where one can look down on God and oneself...[48]

This might, at first glance, seem to be a re-phrasing of Barth's conception of the "totally Other", which proved so destructive in his early thinking. In fact the two are poles apart.

It has already been shown that Barth's insistence upon the uniqueness of God expressed itself in an axiomatic form. The weakness in this approach was

that as a purely rational statement, the idea of the "totally Other" could claim no objective point of verification. It needed only to remain true in the mind of Barth.

In contrast, Anselm did not begin from an axiom, but with the fact of revelation. God was someone who addressed Man in his Word, who gave himself, and thereby created the possibility of theology. Certainly God was the 'object' of theology, but he was not a "static"[49] object. His living nature precluded such a possibility. This meant that theology began with God because it was primarily an act of "obedience".[50]

This was the point which Anselm made in his "proof". If it was possible to conceive of an object greater than God, then Man has not as yet encountered the true God. Man's rationality, being dependent upon God to reveal himself before theology could properly begin, had always to remain subservient to the God who gave himself. Any form of rationality which could supersede this process simply proved itself to be inadequate. This was the whole basis of Anselm's "*fides quaerens intellectum*".[51] Faith was a Christian's assent to the fact of God's pre-existence, prior to his giving of himself in his Word.

Therefore, faith was never a believing of what was preached. It was belief in the reality which lay behind the spoken word, which was mediated to Man through the sermon.[52] Echoes of Barth's early essays bear witness to his search for that objective reality which gave rise to the actions of the saints and leaders of the Church.[53]

The limitations which are imposed on theology could never be those of culture or historical method. They always had to arise from the side of the 'object'. As a dependent discipline, the pursuit of the theological task could only begin as a response to a decision on God's part to share himself.[54] For the same reason, theological statements could only be validated if they were shown to correspond to the God whose decision allowed them to be construed. God "validates them by supplying himself as their object and thereby conferring on them their truth".[55] God was, and must always be allowed to remain, a self-validating object.

In many ways this particular idea reflected a trend which Barth discovered in Blumhardt. As a man who could think "organically", Blumhardt impressed Barth because of his capacity to recognise a unity in the relationship of God with the world. Blumhardt's understanding was in marked contrast to Schleiermacher and Harnack because it was based upon the will and attitude of God, rather than the capacity of Man.

Set in the context of "Christ is Victor", Blumhardt's perception was based primarily around the salvation which God would instigate in the history of Man. As such it had little to say regarding the method of academic theology. It was a message of hope and vision which Blumhardt never tried to accommodate to the theological debate which was going on around him.[56]

Barth took Blumhardt's idea of a unity existing in the will and purposes of God and developed it beyond the scope of Blumhardt's original context.

Blumhardt was concerned primarily with the response demanded of the Christian in recognition of the sovereignty of Christ declared in his resurrection from the dead. The fact that this response might involve a disciplining of His rationality was evidently something which did not concern, or suggest itself, to Blumhardt.

In contrast, it was just this point that Barth was able to develop using Anselm's "*fides quaerens intellectum*", the idea, that is, that the point of unity which Man so desperately required not only existed in God's sovereign will, but within his very nature, since what God 'is' and what he 'does' were one and the same thing. In other words, God did not have an 'attitude', but rather a self-determination to act. Now, because knowledge of God was revealed through an in his Word, then the unity he provided from within his will was not only authoritative, but also rational. In this way Barth was able to deepen and broaden Blumhardt's original conception.

In turn, this meant he had to develop a model of rationality which was able to express the complex relationship which existed between God and Man. This was necessary because the unity which he sought existed 'in' God. Therefore, theology, whatever it might involve, could never be the comparison of like with like.

> True knowledge of the object in its objectivity involves a penetrating into its inner rationality.[57]

This fact precluded any simplistic identification of a purely noetic expression with the ontological Truth which was God himself, and undermined once and for all the possibility of developing a theology upon purely axiomatic foundations.

Barth suggested that Anselm was to be understood as using *ratio* in three different ways. These were linked together in a descending line of importance.

> *Ratio* is used then in a dimension of depth; of the ultimate Truth, the *ratio* of God himself; of the words and acts of God in Revelation, the *ratio* proper to the object of faith; and Man's knowledge of the object, the knowing *ratio* which corresponds to the *ratio* of the object.[58]

This meant that while a relationship existed between God and Man along the causeway of rationality, this relationship was always dependent upon the decision of God to reveal himself. Therefore, "the Truth itself is master of all *rationes*".[59]

While the discipline of theology involved the ordering of rational thought so as to correspond with the object which was given,[60] no amount of effort on the part of the theologian would be able to lift noetic rationality onto the plane which was above it. Therefore, the adequate expression of the object in noetic form was always the result of divine grace, because the necessary correspondence whereby noetic reason became 'truth' had to be the result of God's giving of himself in vindication of what s written.[61]

This is a very different approach to either that of Schleiermacher or Harnack. In different ways they both adopted a model of theological inherency, that is, that there existed a point of correspondence between God and Man woven into the fabric of reality such that no new or spontaneous act of God's grace was necessary to reveal it. In Schleiermacher this meant an inner realm of the sub-conscious, in Harnack an absolute belief in the capacity of human reason. Both were happy to identify the means of unification as being within Man's reach. This had the effect of limiting God's freedom of revelation. The unity, which for Barth could only exist within the nature of the living God, was already apparent and could be attained by those skilled in either Christian piety or the historical-critical method.

Barth's insistence upon a three-fold hierarchy of reason meant that theology was necessarily a discipline based around the exegesis of Holy Scripture. Because Man's reason needed to be conformed in likeness to the rationality present in God's giving of himself, it followed that

> Man's theological activity derives from and is determined by the activity of God himself in his Word, for it is that Word communicated through the Holy Scriptures which is the real object of his knowledge.[62]

This was a natural development of Barth's earlier notion of God as both 'question' and 'answer'. The 'question' under which Man lived and which characterised his life was fundamentally ontological. However, as an attempted rational expression of this ontological truth, the Scriptures undoubtedly

contained more than a series of noetic statements whose acceptance or rejection formed the content of faith.

It was this central awareness of the ontological reference inherent in the witness of the Bible to Jesus which has formed the background to most of the modern theological debate. Barth's profoundly Christocentric emphasis has arisen not simply out of personal preference, but because of his understanding of the relationship between rationality and revelation which to a large part he was able to articulate clearly because of Anselm. The truth which Barth focused upon so clearly in the 1930's still holds true, that the Scriptures are not concerned with religion, but with revelation. This means not simply a "quantum of supernatural information about God",[63] but God himself through his Word.

It was this particular understanding which provided the impetus behind the new theological movement which began in the early years of this century and drew to itself theologians such as Barth, Bultmann, Brunner and Tillich. Initially it was fuelled by a common rejection of the anthropocentric trends in nineteenth century theology and an awareness of God's unique existence over and above his creation. Barth found a notable ally in Rudolf Bultmann whose genial review of Barth's first commentary on Romans came as something of a surprise.[64] Both men agreed that the revelation of God must come afresh to each generation from beyond the historical plane. Where they differed was on their understanding of how and where that revelation could be found.[65]

Where Barth differed from his contemporaries was in his determination to maintain the unique and absolute revelation of God in and through Christ, his living Word. In different ways, all those theologians who began life together with the rejection of nineteenth century subjectivism, have since diverged to follow different theological paths. Bultmann has engaged the philosophy of Heidegger to "distinguish between valid and in-valid self-understandings" within the Biblical text.[66] Brunner has used the notion of 'analogy', by which a limited knowledge of God could be gained from the world, so providing a necessary condition for correct human thought. Tillich, while accepting Barth's dialectic of grace and judgement, has insisted that this contradiction is found not only in God's Word, but also through nature, culture and the human spirit.[67]

What separated Barth from these other theologians was his dogged determination to allow the 'object' of revelation to provide from within itself the rationality which would validate its content. This was a theme which appeared in his essays of the 1930's.

> The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of all our human limitations. We need only to dare to follow this drive, this spirit, this river, to grow out beyond ourselves toward the highest answer.[68]

What Barth discovered in Anselm was an understanding of rationality that allowed him to develop a scientific approach to theology, while still paying due respect to 'object' of that science.

The attitude of the theologian to the 'object' before him should be one of "reverence, worship and humility".[69] This was because the 'object' under investigation already possessed its own ontological rationality born of its relationship with the *causa veritatas*, God himself. Therefore, the scientific nature of theology, correctly understood, was "a process of ascent from one *ratio* to an ever higher *ratio*".[70] This meant that in the exegesis of Scripture the theologian was progressing from one level of rationality to another, dependent at every stage upon the Living God giving himself as the validation of what was written[71]

> No exegesis that is content only with noetic rationality can be regarded as properly scientific, for scientific activity must penetrate through noetic rationality into the ontic rationality of its basis and so lay bare its inner necessity.[72]

If this scientific approach is broadened beyond simply the exegesis of Scripture and applied to Barth's early theology, it becomes clear that, as he said himself, those who threw themselves into revolt "were wrong at the very point where we were right".[73] He was right to reject the anthropocentricism of Schleiermacher, and also right to reject the ill-fated intellectual confidence of Harnack. Where he himself was shown to be inadequate was in

> not knowing how to carry into effect carefully enough and completely enough the new recognition of the *divinity* of God which so deeply stirred us then and others.[74]

Where Barth's early theology really fell apart was in its inability to move away from the idea of the divinity of God, to the rational expression of that

ontological truth. In its place he developed the idea of the "totally other" which he admitted later

> we had no right without more consideration to identify with the divinity of him who is called Yahweh-Kyrios in the Bible.[75]

This failure mean that he was unable to bring about that relationship which was essential if any real objective truth about Man and his world was to be found.

His early identification of ontology as providing the key to understanding Man and his condition may well have been correct. His mistake was in not identifying the ontological reality of God's revelation with the person of Jesus Christ. This meant that his assertion that 'objectivity' was a truth only accessible through the presence of the Living God could not be developed as was necessary because of the pre-conditions which dominated his thought. The polemical character of his early work carried within it a profound weakness which ran far deeper than simply the level of content. Barth's early theology suffered from what might be called its own form of Barthian-rational-subjectivism.

CONCLUSION

The principles which govern Barth's theology are surprisingly simple. Their development was detailed and penetrating but this should not be seen as over-elaboration. Throughout the years discussed in this thesis Barth's basic position did not change. There was development, there was a continual re-assessment and re-stating of basic principles, but by and large the fundamentals did not change.

In the early years as a Pastor in Safenwil, Barth was gripped by the "Godness of God". It was his growing awareness of the absolutely unique nature of the Creator in relation to his creatures which forced him to re-assess and then move away from the theology of his teachers. In this sense it was the eschatological nature of theology that came to the forefront of his thinking. This was never for Barth an escape into vain metaphysics or subjective reflection. It remained a constant theme throughout all his early work and without an awareness of it those who read his early writings might lose the direction and content of his thinking amid the harshness of his early polemic. Therefore, the first thing that needs to be said about Barth's understanding of 'objective' truth was that it always remained eschatological. In other words, questions about objective reality were first and foremost questions to do with the 'ultimate' nature of things, and this in turn meant that they were questions to do with God.

Here was the fundamental point which cannot be stated too often: God is God. In Barth's mind the object of theology was always God. Theology as a

discipline, as a science, was dependent, and would always remain dependent, upon an object which was unique both in its nature and in its relationship with the theologian. In this sense Barth saw theology as a discipline which had to stand apart from all other human disciplines by virtue of the nature of its object. He was quite clear, even before he wrote on the thought of Anselm, that the theologian could not think from 'above' God. Therefore, the second thing which can be said of Barth was that he never understood theology to be a 'free' science because it was always dependent upon an object which was itself free, namely God.

This truth, both simple and profound, was the driving force behind all of Barth's early work. His criticisms of Schleiermacher and Harnack were in themselves simply a clearing of the ground so that a fresh statement of this truth could be made. The growing awareness of God's uniqueness was expressed in the subject-object motif of the early period.

The great weakness of his work at the time lay in its failure to grasp with sufficient depth the relationship between ontology and rationality. At least, even while Barth understood this, he was unable to develop his theological method around it. Instead his powerful polemic carried all before it so that the freedom of God to be first subject before he gave himself as object was buried beneath a whole series of arguments and ideas of Barth's own making. Even during the early years Barth was well aware that to simply make a statement about God, even if that statement carries force and commitment, does not make it 'true'. He

understood only too well that rationality in itself cannot be identified with content.

The dialectic phase of his thinking marked an attempt to deal with this basic difficulty. At its root lay an awareness that the object of theology could not be grasped by the theologian. It was an acknowledgment on Barth's part of the unique subjectivity of God. The weakness of the method lay in its inability to make positive or authoritative statements regarding the content of God's revelation in Christ. Too often the "No" in Barth's dialectic smothered the "Yes" which he was trying to articulate.

Even when Barth could see that the freedom of God had to be the overriding factor within theology his attempt to grasp that truth led to a flawed scheme of rational speculation. Even when he could see that the incarnation was not about the subjectivity of Man but the freedom of God, even then, his determination to free his thinking from the legacy of the past led to a distorted expression of the truth of God's revelation. Stated in its simplest terms, Barth tried to put words into God's mouth.

Behind this failure lay the glorious simplicity of Barth's perception. He saw that theology existed as a discipline only because of God. God himself was the question which drove Man to speculate and think. Therefore, theology had to begin with ontology, and then not as an idea, but as an existence and a reality. In his own mind the basis of theology had to be God himself and his self-revelation as a result of his own free choice. Theology could only exist

because of God's self-determination to act and then only as a direct consequence of his divine nature.

Barth insisted that God's giving of himself as an object was as a result of his unique subjectivity. Therefore, even when given as an object, Man could not grasp God like he might some other object because all other objects within Man's experience did not manifest this unique subjectivity. Therefore, Barth could see theology existing only if the object in which God chose to manifest his subjectivity carried within itself its own means of making itself intelligible to Man. This in turn meant that God's self-revelation had to manifest itself in a unique unity of ontology and rationality.

What would be the point of God's revelation if it proved unintelligible to Man? Barth never wanted to replace what he saw as being the intellectual presumption of his teachers with a new form of Christian gnosis. His early writings were a determined effort to discover the way in which the inherent intelligibility of God's revelation might be expressed in the limited terms of human rationality.

This was the crux of Barth's later theological development and the reason for his concentration upon Christology as the foundation of all his thinking. As was said at the beginning of this thesis, Barth saw revelation, ontology and rationality as being inseparably linked in all theological enquiry. It was his search for the inherent rationality of God's unique ontological nature revealed in objective form that fuelled all of Barth's work.

For this reason it is not possible to draw out of Barth's early theology a simple explanation of the objective existence of evil. This is the reason for his "side long glance", as Jüngel described it, which was alluded to in the introduction to this thesis.

In Barth's mind questions of objective truth always remained adumbrations of that deeper question concerning God. He believed he could never say "this is the case" about Man before he said "this is the case" about God. Therefore, the truth regarding evil had to remain a secondary question which in the period under discussion he never really attempted to answer.

Barth's theology began with God and therefore remained deeply eschatological. His awareness that objective truth could not be approached directly dominated his thinking. Perhaps scientists or anthropologists might make what they deemed to call 'objective' statements about Man, but the theologian could never allow himself this possibility. Theology remained in Barth's mind a discipline dependent for its meaning upon God. Theology began with God because its only legitimate source material, its only legitimate object, remained the inherently rational revelation of God, uniquely combining subjective and objective reality within itself. In other words, the person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is not possible to find in Barth's early theology a coherent understanding of objective evil. However, it can be said without fear of contradiction that the premise which lay behind his early theology precludes a

merely phenomenological approach to the understanding of evil, even if the source material for such a study could be found. Barth would no doubt insist that questions about the objective existence of evil are concerned with God and therefore dependent for their solution upon God's free act of self-expression. In other words, they are Christological questions.

In Barth's mind what mattered most was not that Man might say of God "this is the case", but rather that in his divine grace and mercy God had deemed to speak on his own terms and in his own unique way, and in that one living Word had said of himself and of Man all that ever needed to be said. To understand this is to begin where Barth himself began.

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