BE WHO YOU ARE: KARL BARTH’S ETHICS OF CREATION

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by

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Barth grounds the goodness of creation not in its own independent reality, but in the goodness of Jesus Christ, who, as Barth works out in CD II.2, is the concrete form of the command of God and fulfillment of the covenant between God and humanity. By grounding the goodness of creation in Jesus Christ, Barth makes both the ontological goodness of creation itself and the noetic basis of that goodness dependent on this Christological determination. As a result, scholars have suggested that Barth’s theology really has no proper doctrine of creation at all, i.e. that Barth’s doctrine of creation is simply Christology in disguise.

This dissertation argues that while Barth’s Christological determination of creation is central to Barth’s work, it is not the case that Barth absorbs creation into Christology, i.e. nature into grace, leaving creation without any meaningful ontology of its own. Rather, this dissertation demonstrates that Barth’s ontology of creation is covenantal in structure, but not equivalent to Christology. Furthermore, this dissertation shows that this covenantal structure of creation is specifically ordered so that the creature may realize her goal as God’s covenant partner.
In Chapter One the dissertation shows why Barth rejects any attempt to ground the moral order of creation apart from covenant and why he believes that such an independent grounding yields a created order apart from grace, a separation of law from gospel, which leads to idolatry and an ethics of self-justification. The chapter concludes by showing how Barth’s doctrine of election establishes the inextricable connection between covenant and creation, gospel and law, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Two shows how creation does not exist for its own sake, but is a work of God’s love and freedom, thereby having a specific order and structure, boundaries and limits, which are good, and as such serve as the presupposition and external condition for God’s covenant history to unfold. Chapter Three shows how the covenant is the material basis of creation and how Barth’s doctrine of election provides the basis for his interpretation of the role of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, which serve as the basis for understanding the nature of creaturely freedom and obedience. The chapter also points out how the creature’s existence as *imago dei* means that she is created for covenant relations and as such is not solitary, neutral or self-grounding.

Chapter Four explains how Barth’s Christology is the key to understanding the relationship between creation and covenant. This chapter demonstrates how Barth’s rendering of ontology [*Sein*] as history [*Geschichte*], i.e. “being-in-encounter,” allows him to ground anthropology in Christology without equating the two. In this chapter we see that to be human is to be a creature who can transcend her nature and limits in an encounter with the “other,” yet such an encounter with the transcendent other allows the creature to exist more fully and properly as a covenant partner with God in creation and not outside of it.
This is for anyone who wants to read it.
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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations will be used in citing works of Karl Barth. Complete references may be found in the bibliography.

CD *The Church Dogmatics*, vols. I-IV (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-75)

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Barth was right to insist that there is no such thing as a self-sufficient and solitary human being. While a lengthy piece of academic writing requires many hours of solitude, I have neither been alone in the process nor accomplished this by myself.

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INTRODUCTION

In an article titled “The Doctrine of Creation: Not an Appendix but a First Article”, the late Swedish theologian and professor, Gustaf Wingren, of Lund University in Switzerland wrote, “We all know that the conscious neglect of the first article of the Creed has been a fact for a long time in the church and in theology. Indeed, the doctrine of creation has not only been neglected; it has been the object of pointed opposition ever since the 1920s, especially on the part of Karl Barth and his disciples.”¹ Wingren’s belief that Karl Barth is largely to blame for the widespread neglect and opposition to the doctrine of creation by theologians and scholars of the 20th century is both a commonly held opinion and hardly surprising.

Barth’s infamous debate with Emil Brunner and his vehement Nein! to natural theology has made such a charge almost inevitable. However, Barth’s No! to natural theology was neither an attack on nature nor on attack on concept of the “natural” more broadly conceived. Barth’s attack on natural theology was a “No” to the natural theology manifest in Protestant liberalism and in the neo-Scholastic Roman Catholicism with which Barth was familiar. That is, we do not think that Barth’s attack on natural theology is a wholesale repudiation of the concepts of nature and grace that one finds, for example,

in classical Thomism.² Rather Barth’s attack on natural theology appears to be more of a rejection of a theological method which attempts to produce a knowledge of God or an understanding of the good based on a conception of creation which is derived independently from its relationship with the Creator—a Creator who is none other than the God who is gracious to humanity in Jesus Christ. In short, creation cannot be understood independently from covenant. Any attempt to do so is to create God in humanity’s own image, which ultimately results in humanity worshipping itself. In Barth’s view, the God which 18th and 19th century humanity (e.g. liberal Protestantism) had fashioned after its own image was a God who was solitary, neutral, disinterested, and unrelated to his creation. Correlatively, creation itself, including the human person, was understood to be self-grounding, materially neutral, and unrelated to God. As we will see throughout this project, Barth’s doctrine of creation is one very long sustained effort to refute this view of God and humanity as detached and unrelated to each other.

Another consequence of separating creation from covenant is that attributes such as “good”, “person”, “love”, “freedom”, etc, were ascribed to God based on human experience or on human constructs derived a priori. Barth resists this way of doing theology because he thinks it imprisons God in pre-determined human categories, thus effectively denying freedom to God. This is why Barth believes that theology must free itself from philosophy and let God explain for himself what it means to say that God loves, is free, and is good.³ For Barth, only God can tell us about God. Furthermore,

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Barth insists that since God is the Creator, and God himself became incarnate as a human being, only God can properly tell us about the nature of creation and humanity as well.

Barth’s rejection of natural theology and his refusal to allow creation to be explained in philosophical categories without reference to God’s covenantal determination for creation can lead one to conclude that Barth has no ontology of creation at all. Thus, in the nearly 80 years that have passed since Barth’s debate with Brunner, four generations of scholars have all been taught the same thing: “Karl Barth has no doctrine of creation. Karl Barth is no theologian of creation.” However the fact remains that Barth devoted nearly 2,000 pages of the Church Dogmatics to the doctrine of creation, more pages than he devoted to the doctrine of the Word of God (CD I) and the doctrine of God (CD II) put together. So how can one account for what appears to be such a discrepancy?

The answer lies not only in the reputation that Barth first achieved for himself as an ardent opponent of natural theology, but it also lies in his heavily Christocentric theology which finds its most mature expression in the Church Dogmatics. In the Church Dogmatics, Barth grounds the doctrine of creation, both noetically and ontologically in covenant. It is this theological move, perhaps more than his rejection of natural theology, which has probably damned Barth to the epitaph of being an “opponent of the doctrine of creation.”

Barth expresses this relationship between creation and covenant in a two-fold formulation of the doctrine of creation: “creation is the external basis of the covenant and the covenant is the internal basis of creation.” This dogmatic formulation expresses Barth’s decision to ground the goodness of creation not in its own independent reality,
bur rather in the goodness of Jesus Christ, who, as Barth works out in CD II.2, is the concrete form of the command of God and fulfillment of the covenant between God and humanity. However, by grounding the goodness of creation in Jesus Christ, Barth makes both the ontological goodness of creation itself and the noetic basis of that goodness dependent on this Christological determination. These theological commitments are clearly borne out in the first three part-volumes of the doctrine of creation and have led to suspicions that Barth’s theology has a gnostic character.

For example, in the opening paragraph of Barth’s doctrine of creation CD III.1 Barth begins by saying that the doctrine of creation is an article of faith, which immediately seems to suggest that only believing Christians can know anything meaningful about creation. In §41 entitled “Creation and Covenant,” Barth unapologetically states that the purpose and meaning of creation is to make possible the history of God’s covenant with humanity, of which Jesus Christ is the beginning, center and goal. The following subparagraphs in this same section are Barth’s efforts to further explain his two-fold articulation of the doctrine of creation. However, Barth’s 250-page exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2, which he believes attest, respectively, to the two-fold doctrine of creation, is itself undertaken through a very specific Christological lens. In Barth’s theological anthropology, which is most fully developed in CD III.2, we find Christology, e.g. “Jesus, Man for God”, “Jesus Man for Fellow Man”, “Jesus Whole Man”; and “Jesus Lord of Time,” leading four of the five principal paragraph headings. For Barth, Jesus Christ is the paradigmatic creature, the “real” man upon which any knowledge of all other human beings is based. Even in III.3, where Barth unfolds his understanding of the doctrine of providence and the themes of “sin and nothingness,”
Christ’s Lordship and Christ’s conquering of sin and death are fully at the heart of this volume as well.

This covenantal determination of creation has raised suspicions that Barth’s theology really has no proper doctrine of creation at all, i.e. that Barth’s doctrine of creation is just Christology in disguise. However, we will argue that while it is true that Barth’s covenantal determination of creation is central to Barth’s work, it is not the case that Barth absorbs creation into covenant, i.e. nature into grace, leaving creation without any meaningful ontology at all. Rather, we will argue that Barth’s ontology of creation is specifically covenantal in structure, but is not equivalent to Christology. Furthermore, we will argue that the covenantal structure of creation equips the creature to realize her goal as the covenant partner of God.

Thus, we will see that Barth’s ontology of creation is an ontology of relations, which is thus a specific rejection of any classical way of understanding the ontology of the human being as principally determined by her being an embodied soul, endowed with intellect, emotion and will, language and creativity, possessing reason or conscience, or being able to apprehend the natural law. While it is true that the human being has these capacities, Barth believes that these capabilities do not capture what it means, in the first instance, to be human. For Barth, to be human is to be God’s covenant partner. We are not defined as human beings because we uniquely possess any “capacities” in se, rather what uniquely constitutes us as human beings is that we are “beings-in-relationship” with God as covenant partners and we realize ourselves in this way in our encounter with Christ and with our fellow human beings. Thus, the principal aim of this dissertation is to show that Barth has an ontology of creation which constitutes the normative basis for the
relationship between the human being and God and between human beings themselves. In other words, the Christological ontology of creation serves as the moral order of creation and as such provides the normative basis for Barth’s ethics.

Anyone acquainted with Barth is familiar with his famous phrase “dogmatics is ethics and ethics is dogmatics.” However, in light of this claim, it is somewhat curious that there have been no extended book-length treatments by either a moral or systematic theologian to read Barth’s ethics specifically within the context of Barth’s doctrine of creation. John Webster’s book, Karl Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, considers Barth’s ethics within the context of Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation, but extended treatments of Barth’s ethics within the context of his doctrine of creation have been suspiciously absent. This is especially odd since the only fully completed “special ethics” section of the Church Dogmatics that we have is found in Volume III.4 of the doctrine of creation.4

On the other hand, however, it is perhaps not surprising that such a treatment has not been attempted, given the prevailing prejudice towards Barth’s doctrine of creation. This prejudice is evidenced by the fact that, in a series of lectures over the course of a year on Barth’s theology delivered at King’s College, London,5 the renowned scholar, Colin Gunton, who has written extensively on creation,6 left Barth’s treatment of the doctrine of creation until the very end of the lecture series and then devoted only one

4 Barth had intended, of course, to complete a “special ethics” section at the end of each of his volumes dedicated to the “works” of God, i.e. creation (CD III), reconciliation (CD IV), and redemption (CD V). We have Barth’s unpublished lecture fragments that were to comprise CD IV.4, which Barth had titled “The Christian Life.” However, Barth’s doctrine of redemption and its accompanying special ethics, unfortunately, were never completed.


hour to the topic. It is not fair to say, however, that Barth’s doctrine of creation has been wholly neglected. There are a few book chapters and some articles that deal with Barth’s doctrine of creation more generally. The one book-length attempt to examine Barth’s doctrine of creation as a whole to any extent is Robert Sherman’s *The Shift to Modernity: Christ and the Doctrine of Creation in the Theologies of Schleiermacher and Barth*, but this work is more concerned to show the similarities between Barth and Schleiermacher than to examine Barth’s doctrine of creation for its own sake. Perhaps the closest book-length treatment that we have of a more sustained attempt to think about Barth’s ethics with respect to a certain theme of Barth’s doctrine of creation is Gary W. Deddo’s, *Karl Barth’s Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological, and Human: Toward an Ethics of the Family*. In this book, however, Deddo’s main focus is to explicate the parent-child relationship with respect to Barth’s theological anthropology as it is arises from the doctrine of the Trinity.

Specific themes of Barth’s doctrine of creation have been treated at greater and lesser length. For example, Barth’s theological anthropology in CD III.2 has gained widespread attention. Barth’s interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 in III.1, Barth’s

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8 (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

9 (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

doctrine of sin and nothingness, Barth’s rendering of the imago dei, and Barth’s doctrine of providence, have also been discussed. But, again, such treatments have not been primarily interested with how such doctrines give shape to Barth’s ethics.

Not only has Barth’s doctrine of creation been seen as highly suspect by a number of scholars because of its ontological grounding in Christology, but Barth’s ethics have also seen its fair share of criticisms, and generally labeled as voluntarist, as a result of this as well. Recall that Barth’s ontological grounding of creation in Christ means that the goodness of creation lies not in its own reality, but rather in the goodness of Jesus Christ who is the concrete form of the command of God and fulfillment of the covenant between God and humanity. That is, since Christ is the one who enacts the covenant, and is thus

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himself the fulfillment of the internal basis and goal of the created order (and humanity in particular), this means that it is not an independent moral order of creation but Christ, the paradigmatic creature, who forms the ‘objective reference point’ for good human action. Therefore, for Barth, human action is not “good” because it conforms to a moral order of creation, rather human action is good when it conforms and witnesses to Christ’s action. Christ is, in himself, the good, because it is Christ who accomplishes the good, i.e. the fulfillment of covenant relations between God and humanity through perfect obedience, even unto death, to the command of God the Father. Because the good confronts us as a divine claim from this Christological site, Barth insists that it is not for us to “decide” what the good is. For Barth, the good has already been decided from all eternity, through God’s divine election of Jesus Christ, and the good has already been accomplished historically in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Barth sums up the consequence of this for human action in the following way:

[The command of God] leaves nothing to human choice or preference. It thus requires no interpretation to come into force. To the last and smallest detail it is self-interpreted, and in this form it confronts humanity as a command already in force. Here the ethical question can never be whether this or that might be the good demanded of the human being, but only whether and to what extent he will correspond in his inner and outer activity to the command which comes to him and confront him in the most concrete and concentrated form, whether he will meet it with obedience or disobedience. (III.4, p. 12)

The last 30 years of scholarship on Barth’s ethics has been focused on interrogating claims like this and others like it. The above quote is indicative of Barth’s

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15 CD II.2, pp. 568, 577.

16 For an extended treatment of Barth’s Christology and its relation to ethics, see Matthew Loverin’s unpublished Notre Dame PhD dissertation, Obedient Unto Death: The Person and Work of Jesus Christ in Karl Barth’s Theological Ethics, 2009.
notorious rejection of casuistry, which we may basically define as the application of rules and principles in one’s moral context in order to ‘decide’ what to do. But, as we have seen above, Barth argues that there is nothing for us ‘to decide.’ God has both already decided what good human action is and has already accomplished it himself in Christ. For Barth it is only left to us to “hear” the command of God as it confronts us in Christ and witness to the good which was accomplished by Christ’s action with our own action. Thus, even with this very cursory description of Barth’s ethics, it does not take long to notice that Barth has a radically different conception of ethics than what has been traditionally understood as “ethics” in the past. Hence, Barth’s recent interpreters have all applied themselves to asking whether or not Barth’s ethics, which seem to leave no room for principles, rules or moral deliberation, is an ethics that is adequate to the complexities of the human moral life.

On the whole, the answer to the above question has been mostly “no.” Indeed, the Anglican moral theologian Oliver O’Donovan, whose work shares much in common with Barth and who is often very charitable towards Barth, once commented publicly, “When it came to ethics Karl Barth went slumming.”\(^{17}\) However, since this project is not simply another investigation into Karl Barth’s theological ethics per se, but rather an investigation into Barth’s characterization of the created order in which God commands and in which human beings act, we will not undertake an extensive examination of the basic lines of criticism that have arisen as a response to Barth’s ethics. Furthermore, since both Loverin and McKenny trace the main scholarly treatments of Barth’s ethics

\(^{17}\) O’Donovan made this comment at the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics conference, Cambridge, England, July 2007. Needless to say, such a comment produced a sharp raising of the eyebrows by Nigel Biggar who was in attendance!
from Willis (1970) to the present, we do not feel compelled to repeat that work here.\textsuperscript{18} However, the basic trajectory of recent scholarship on Barth’s ethics is roughly as follows.

Robert Willis’ \textit{The Ethics of Karl Barth} was the first full-length treatment of Barth’s ethics and remained so for nearly 20 years. Willis, a philosopher, argues that Barth’s Christological starting point and Barth’s refusal to allow philosophical categories and the role of reason to be the ground of ethical reasoning is inadequate to the task of ethics because it does not adequately consider the role of moral deliberation for ethics. Thus, Willis believes that Barth’s ethics are voluntarist and “intuitionist.” Theologians James Gustafson and the early Stanley Hauerwas were also critical of what appeared to be a voluntarist tendency in Barth’s ethics but for different reasons than Willis. Gustafson\textsuperscript{19} and Hauerwas\textsuperscript{20} are critical of Barth’s concept of the ethical “event,” which does not seem to account for a narrative or coherent framework of Christian life in which to consider the moral life as it develops over time. Thus, both Gustafson and the early Hauerwas assert that Barth’s ethics are “radically occasionalistic” and that the Christian life is atomistic. William Werpehowski addresses Gustafson and Hauerwas by developing Barth’s understanding of the relationship of command and history as

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item See Loverin, \textit{Obedient Unto Death}, Ch 1 and McKenny’s \textit{Analogy of Grace}. McKenny does not summarize the secondary literature in any one place, but rather sustains engagement with the recent interpreters of Barth’s ethics throughout the entire book. Indeed, one might argue that McKenny’s book has now supplanted Willis as providing the comprehensive and sustained treatment of Barth’s theological ethics as whole.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
providing the context and framework in which to understand the divine command.\textsuperscript{21} Biggar, like Werpehowski, also defends Barth against the radical occasionalist charge by pointing that Barth does seem to have room for a form of moral deliberation, i.e. an “open casuistry,” but that it is communal and comes by way of the ecclesial community (and also the wider human community). Finally, McKenny argues that Barth’s concept of \textit{Prüfung}, which is preparation through prayerful reflection and instruction in the sphere of human life in which the divine command occurs,\textsuperscript{22} also appears to serve a similar function as moral deliberation in the more traditional sense would.

With respect to the current literature on Barth’s theological ethics, we see this project as trying to elucidate what the moral order of creation is for Barth, its normative dimensions and how this covenental determination of creation informs Barth’s theological ethics more generally. When we began this project we had hoped to show in some detail how Barth’s doctrine of creation in III.1, III.2, and III.3, informed Barth’s special ethics of creation in III.4. However, as any author knows, projects are conceived from the top of a mountain, but worked out in the valley below. Thus, we have only been able to attend to the most salient aspects of III.1 and III.2, i.e. Barth’s exegesis of the two creation sagas and the first half of his theological anthropology in III.2. Furthermore, we have had to be content with simply saying that Barth has an ontology of creation which is normative for his ethics, and must save for a later date a more detailed analysis of Barth’s special ethics of creation in III.4 in light of the moral order of creation that Barth


\textsuperscript{22} See McKenny, \textit{The Analogy of Grace}, Ch 6.
establishes. However, as we will see, Barth’s exposition of the Genesis sagas and his theological anthropology seem to be written with ethics in mind, so the relationship between Barth’s dogmatic commitments and how these influence his broader ethical program, to include his understanding of freedom, responsibility, obedience and what constitutes good human action will be evident throughout our investigation. We will also indicate at certain points where Barth’s covenantal ontology of creation is particularly important for understanding Barth’s special ethics of creation in III.4.

In Chapter One we will examine the historical circumstances that gave rise to Barth’s rejection of natural theology. We will show that Barth understood the political problem of German National Socialism, which was theologically legitimized by an appeal to the traditional theological concept of “orders of creation,” to be the result of a deeper theological problem, i.e. the separation of law and gospel. Barth believed that this separation was a reflection of an understanding of creation divorced from revelation, i.e. a created order without grace, which results in an ethics of self-justification and idolatry. In this chapter we show why Barth’s attempt to place creation and revelation into a dialectical and mutually informing relationship through his gospel-law thesis, results in charges that his theology is gnostic in character and that he has no ontology of creation.

In Chapters Two and Three we will examine the nature of the relationship between creation and covenant that Barth establishes by way of his dogmatic reading of the two Genesis sagas. Chapter Two explores what it means to say “creation is the external basis of the covenant.” We will demonstrate how creation is itself a gift for life and that it is ordered and structured in a specific way, with boundaries and limits, so that covenant relations with God may be fulfilled. In this chapter we will also show how
creaturely life and action is that which corresponds to God’s divine life and action, paying careful attention to how Barth’s understanding of the *imago dei* is grounded in God’s own Trinitarian life, which he describes as “being-in-encounter.” We will conclude that chapter with an analysis of Barth’s exegesis of God’s decision to rest on the seventh day in order to show how Barth establishes his understanding of freedom and love.

Chapter Three attends to how the covenant serves as the internal basis of creation. Specifically we will see how Barth’s doctrine of election provides the basis for Barth’s interpretation of the role of the two trees in the Garden of Eden and its basis for understanding creaturely freedom and obedience. This chapter will also point out how the covenant informs Barth’s more extended treatment of humanity as created *imago dei* and how the being of humanity is not a neutral or solitary being, but rather created for covenant relations. Throughout our examination of the relationship between creation and covenant in these two chapters we will highlight how Barth maintains the relationship between these two spheres without collapsing them into one another.

Chapter Four explains how Barth’s Christology is the key to understanding the relationship between creation and covenant. This chapter demonstrates how Barth’s rendering of ontology [*Sein*] as history [*Geschichte*] in the phrase “being-in-encounter” allows him to ground anthropology in Christology without equating the two. In her encounter with the transcendent other, the creature is able to transcend her own nature [*Natur*], but at the same time exist more fully and properly in her creaturely existence. That is, as a result of this encounter with the transcendent other, which is Christ, the creature realizes herself as a human covenant partner with God, as *imago Christi*, in her
own history [Geschichte]. Thus, Christology does not overwhelm human “nature” but rather establish the boundaries of what constitutes human existence as a history in creation.

In short this dissertation will demonstrate that to be a creature is to be summoned by God and to hear the command “Be who you are,” one destined for covenant relations with God in the creation that God has made for this purpose. There is nothing more or less that the creature can be; there is nothing more or less that the creature can do. And, she should only be grateful for this determination.
1.1 Introduction

Barth’s theological ethics and his doctrine of creation did not spring from his mind *ex nihilo*. Just as Augustine’s *City of God* was written in the midst of the collapse of the once mighty Roman Empire and Aquinas’ great *Summa* was written in the context of the emergence of once lost fragments of knowledge which came to light at the dawn of the Middle Ages, so, too, was Barth’ *Church Dogmatics* a response to the context of his day. However, if one sits down to read the *Church Dogmatics* one might never know this. While Barth sometimes makes ostensible references to the political and social events of his day, they do not dominate the page. Why is this the case? Barth believed that the political problems of his day were largely the result of certain theological errors that had developed since the end of the 18th century, and his writing was directed accordingly. One of the primary theological errors of his day to which Barth directed much of his attention was the theology of ‘orders of creation’ and ‘natural theology’

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23 For example, the name of Adolf Hitler occurs only 17 times in the entirety of the *Church Dogmatics*, and only six times in Volume III. Furthermore, his name appears mostly in passing or as a minor example in the midst of other examples of problematic political or social practices.
which Barth believed was partly responsible for the German Church crisis and the rise of the National Socialism in the 1930s.

We begin this project by attending to the theology of ‘orders of creation’ because Barth’s criticism of the concept and his rejection of natural theology as a whole has led both the casual reader and scholars of Barth alike to believe that Barth’s theology devalues creation or that he at least disavows the existence of any moral order in creation which could be relevant to the moral life. It will be the principal burden of this project to demonstrate otherwise. In order to do so, we must first explain why Barth took issue with the concept of ‘orders of creation’ in the first place and what he felt was theologically, ethically, and politically at stake in the use of the term. Only after we have done this can we begin to understand why Barth dedicated over 2,000 pages of the *Church Dogmatics* to the doctrine of creation and why Barth formulated that doctrine in the way that he did.

In the first part of this chapter we will give a brief overview of some of the significant developments leading up to the crisis of the 1930s that led Barth to take up arms against ‘orders of creation.’ We will point out that Barth’s principal complaint against this theology is that it identifies the ‘orders of creation,’ especially those of the family and the state, with the will of God apart from God’s self-revelation. In Barth’s view, identifying ‘orders of creation’ apart from God’s self-revelation is to establish them apart from grace, which thereby establishes a *moral order* that requires obedience to a God who is not known to be gracious. At the root of this problem, Barth argues, is the failure to understand the proper relationship between law and gospel. Thus, for Barth, the problem of ‘orders of creation’ is not a problem with the doctrine of creation as such, but rather it reflects a misunderstanding as to the proper nature of both the doctrine of the
Word of God (revelation) and a doctrine of God. Specifically, the problem issues from a failure to understand creation in conjunction with God’s self-revelation in Christ. In other words, the theology of ‘orders of creation’ misunderstands the doctrine of the Word of God (revelation) because it treats the ‘orders of creation’ as a kind of ‘general’ revelation apart from God’s self-revelation in Christ. This theology misconstrues the doctrine of God because it implies a dualism in the nature of God, i.e. that there is a God of harsh law and a God of grace.

Furthermore, this false division between law and gospel upon which the theology of ‘orders of creation’ rests results in an ethics of self-justification. For Barth, self-justification is the idolatry of reducing God to the guarantor of our own quest for righteousness, which occurs when we invest our self-made laws (which are designed to produce a righteousness apart from God’s grace) with divine authority. In short, the separation of law and gospel reflects the mistaken belief that creation can be understood independently from God’s self-revelation in Christ, which consequently produces an understanding of ethics apart from grace. For Barth an ethics that is not framed with respect to the normativity of grace produces a moral subject who fails to understand what it means to be a moral subject, i.e. a creature of God ordered to fellowship with God and her fellows. Thus, Barth concludes, an ethics based in creation, without reference to revelation, and specifically without reference to God’s self-revelation in the Word and work of Jesus Christ, produces an indeterminate moral subject, whose goals and aims prove to be nothing more than an effort to justify her own existence apart from the work of Christ.
In the second part of this chapter we will explore Barth’s solution to the problem of ‘orders of creation.’ That is, we will show how Barth attempts to restore creation and revelation to their proper relationship by reversing the traditional ‘law and gospel’ formula into a more positive ‘gospel-law’ thesis. Barth’s ‘gospel-law’ thesis is concerned with a doctrine of the Word of God (revelation) which issues from a doctrine of God that includes a doctrine of election of humanity. In his doctrine of God, Barth insists that God as disclosed in Jesus Christ reveals to us that God is the God whose very being is determined by God’s decision to bind himself irrevocably to humanity. Likewise, Jesus Christ reveals that the human being is determined to be the covenant partner of this God, i.e. the God who has bound himself to humanity through the election of Jesus Christ. Thus, for Barth it is the very existence of the person of Jesus Christ who secures the truth that the life of God and the life of humanity are inextricably bound together. It is in this way that Barth establishes the relationship between creation and God’s self-revelation in Christ, which is grace.

Furthermore, in Barth’s doctrine of God, Barth shows that it is the God who is gracious to us in Jesus Christ, and only that God, whose command we are obligated to obey. In this way that Barth tries to secure what he believed to be the necessary Christological referent to the law that he thought had been lost in modern Protestant theology. By securing this Christological referent to the law, Barth insists that ethics can only properly be understood with respect to grace. More specifically, ethics can be understood only with respect to Christ as the one who “fulfills” the law and accomplishes ‘the good’ in our place. One of the important features of Barth’s “gospel-law” formula is that it reveals to us what it means to be a creature. For Barth, to be a creature means not
trying to be good, or to do the good, in and by oneself. To do so would be to refuse the status of creature. Rather, to be a creature is to be who we are and to do what is required of us as creatures, namely, to witness to the good that Christ has already done on our behalf and which has set us free to live in and by God’s grace. It is in this way that we are to be covenant partners with God, which includes covenant relations with our fellows. Hence, Barth believes that by articulating an ethics in which grace is normative for the creature and whose justification is secured by the Word and work of Jesus Christ he solves the problem of the theology of orders of creation and the ethics of self-justification which it had produced.

Barth’s ‘gospel-law’ formula and its accompanying doctrinal claims have prompted many to view Barth’s theology as ‘gnostic’. It is gnostic, they argue, because Barth’s doctrine of election seems to locate the entire drama of human salvation within the Trinitarian Godhead, which in turn seems to evacuate history of any meaning. Furthermore, because Barth denies that there can be any eternal law or law of the ‘created order’ which is different from the law manifested in Christ one might assume that there is no created moral order at all in Barth’s ethics.

On the contrary, we will endeavor to show that, for Barth, God’s grace does not confront us as a command from an ethereal “above,” in which we wait breathlessly moment by moment to hear God speaking to us before we can act. Rather, Barth argues, God’s grace meets us as a demand that arises from the conditions of our very existence. Our natural, social, and cultural existence is lived out and expressed within the context of four ‘domains’ of creaturely life which include our life 1) as covenant partners with God; 2) as covenant partners with our fellows; 3) as creatures with a soul and body; and 4) as
constituted in these three ways in time. Indeed, we will endeavor to show that Barth’s understanding of the structure of covenantal relations between God and humanity and between the human being and her fellows, who exist as body and soul constituted in time provides the framework and limits, i.e. the normative elements proper to creaturely existence, that inform and guide human action. Thus, for Barth these four ‘domains’ or ‘spheres’ of existence reflect the normativity of the moral order of creation, which is itself an expression of the command of God as grace.

We hope that by presenting some of the historical background and the dogmatic presuppositions of Barth’s theological program, the reader will be prepared for the detailed exposition and reconstruction of Barth’s doctrine of creation that we will undertake in subsequent chapters. In those chapters we will argue that Barth’s articulation of the doctrine of creation in its two-fold form as “creation as the external basis of the covenant” and the “covenant as the internal basis of creation” reflects Barth’s decision to ground creation in God’s self-revelation in Christ and that it is only in this way that the normative significance of creation may be properly understood. Thus, it is only after carefully investigating Barth’s exposition of Gen 1-3 and his theological anthropology that one will be properly equipped to understand Barth’s ethics of creation in III.4. It is the overall goal of this project to argue that a careful examination of Barth’s doctrine of creation may relieve Barth of some of ‘gnostic’ charges leveled at his work. Indeed, we will argue that, on the contrary, Barth in no way devalues or denigrates creation, but rather may have one of the most radical affirmations of the created order that Christianity may have ever produced. We hope to show that his theology presents the creaturely life not as something to be transcended and overcome, but as something to
be embraced and accepted freely, since it was God’s desire that the inner glory of God, God’s being as being-in-encounter, i.e. the relationship between God the Father and God the Son in the Holy Spirit, be manifested *ad extra* in the created realm by God’s own creatures. To witness to this truth about God is the ultimate meaning, purpose and goal of creaturely life and God has prepared nature for this purpose.

1.2 Orders of Creation, Idolatry, and Self-Justification

When Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists were elected to power on January 30th, 1933, Barth, who was in bed that day with the flu, believed that the German people had succumbed to idolatry. Barth believed that, at its core, National Socialism was a pure, consistent nihilism that was completely destructive and hostile to the spirit.24 Thus, Barth was convinced from the beginning that the National Socialist policy on religion and the church was aimed at the eradication of Christian belief and its expression. However, Barth was also convinced that National Socialism could only move toward this goal “step by step, indirectly and in a variety of guises.”25 One of these guises, Barth believed, was the theological concept of the ‘orders of creation.’

The concept of ‘orders of creation’ is associated with Luther’s doctrine of the ‘three estates’ (e.g. family (*oeconomia*), state (*politeia*), and church (*ecclesia*)) and his doctrine of the “two kingdoms” (or “reigns of God”). Unfortunately, in the hands of the German Christians, the concept of ‘orders of creation’ had been tragically distorted and


25 Busch, p. 223
used as the theological legitimization for the National Socialist movement. This tragic distortion of the orders of creation was also due in part to the influence of the nationalist and racist Volk movements that had been developing since the 19th century.

Barth’s reaction to National Socialism was not unfounded. Throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s the “Evangelical National Socialists” began to promote what had become known as Volk-theology, i.e. an attempted synthesis of Christian theology and German nationalism. This Volk-theology served as the theological platform of the later “German Christian” movement—a movement which provided the public Christian support of the political and social vision of Nazi Germany. One of the more prominent German theologians whose work advocated Volk-theology was Lutheran theologian Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972) who was perhaps the first theologian to fuse orders of creation and Volk-theology together.

26 The term “Volk” is difficult to translate directly into English but is usually rendered as “people.” However, this concept of “people” must be understood as comprising a mystical whole that has a national soul and understands itself to be identified with particular cultural, social, and linguistic practices. The concept of Volk is also strongly attached to the idea of the land which the people inhabit.

27 This was the name of the group before it became officially known as the “German Christians.” The group originally wanted to call themselves “Protestant National Socialists,” but Hitler vetoed that label and suggested “German Christians” instead.

28 The crisis in the German church can be roughly described as the struggle between the German Christians and the other members within the Evangelical (Protestant) Churches in Germany for control of the Church. On April 3-5, 1933, the German Christians held their first national synod and won over 2/3 of the seats in the Evangelical Church. They also instituted a Reich Bishop (who was to be one of Hitler’s deputies) who declared that one of the German Christians’ stated goals was to form a National Reichskirche for the Third Reich. It was this struggle for power that eventually moved Barth and others from the emerging “Confessing Church” movement to draft the Barmen declaration (1935) and publicly denounce the guiding principles of the German Christian movement and the Hitler regime. Two book-length treatments of this struggle in English are Doris L. Bergen, The Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Arthur C. Cochrane The Church’s Confession Under Hitler (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1962).

Influenced by Fichte’s German nationalism, Hirsch invoked the concept of “Volk” as an “ordinance of creation” in his book *Die Liebe zum Vaterlande* (1924). In that book, Hirsch argues that not only was the will of God revealed in the German people and in its culture, but also that the laws of the state were *divine laws of creation* which expressed the will of the Creator for his creatures. Furthermore, Hirsch believed that the German state was the consummation and expression of the meaning and purpose of humanity. For Barth these claims beg the following theological questions: First, how can one know that these so-called “divine laws of creation” manifested through the laws of the state express the will of the Creator for his creatures? Who is this Creator and what does it mean to be a creature? For Barth, one cannot know who this God is who creates nor can one know what it means to be a creature either by 1) investigating into the nature of creation independently from revelation, or 2) believing that the creation accounts of Gen 1-3 *on their own* provide a comprehensive knowledge of what it means to say God is the Creator and what it means to be a creature.

A second question Barth wants to ask is this: How can we know that the appeal to “orders of creation” is not simply an attempt to legitimize particular contingent social and political arrangements, i.e. human laws, with divine authority? On Hirsch’s terms, the state is a divinely authorized institution within which human beings realizes themselves as morally responsible agents. But Barth wants to ask: How can we know that we are being obedient to God in this way and not merely to the will of other human beings?

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30 See, for example, Fichte’s famous addresses to the German nation.

beings in the form of laws masquerading as the divine will? This is precisely what Barth believed had occurred in the German situation.

Hirsch’s *Volk*-theology is clearly evident in the 1932 publication of the “Guiding Principles of the Faith Movement of the ‘German Christians.’” Three of these principles are worth quoting in full as they clearly indicate how the German Christians used the term ‘orders’ (*Ordnungen*) as a way to divinize the laws of the state and theologically legitimate the National Socialist program.

7. We see in race, folk [people] (*Volk*), and nation, orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God’s law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders. Consequently miscegenation is to be opposed. For a long time, German Foreign Missions, on the basis of its experience, has been calling to the German people: “Keep your race pure,” and tells us that faith in Christ does not destroy one’s race but deepens and sanctifies it.

9. In the mission to the Jews we perceive a grave danger to our nationality. It is an entrance gate for alien blood into our body politic. It has no justification for existence beside foreign missions. As long as the Jews possess the right to citizenship and there is thereby the danger of racial camouflage and bastardization, we repudiate a mission to the Jews in Germany. Holy Scripture is also able to speak about a holy wrath and a refusal of love. In particular, marriage between Germans and Jews is to be forbidden.

10. We want an evangelical Church that is rooted in our nationhood. We repudiate the spirit of a Christian world-citizenship. We want the degenerating manifestations of this spirit, such as pacifism, internationalism, Free Masonry, etc., overcome by a faith in our national mission that God has committed to us. Membership in a Masonic Lodge by an evangelical minister is not permissible.32

The problematic use of ‘orders’ and the influence of *Volk*-theology is evident in principle (7) “we see in race, folk [*Volk*], and nation, orders [*Ordnungen*] of existence granted and entrusted to us by God,” and principle (10) “We want an evangelical Church

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which is rooted in our nationhood.” It was this use of ‘orders,’ Barth believed, that was a threat to the very essence of Christianity.

As these principles indicate, the German Christians employed the concept of Volk as an “order” of creation and the foundation upon which to build the German church. That is, they did not secure the foundation of the Christian church on the Word and work of Christ, but rather on the particularities of the German people. Barth regarded this appeal to Volk as an order of creation as an attempt to redefine the very nature of the church itself. A Reichskirche, a church “rooted” in German nationhood that excluded any foreign blood, especially any Jewish blood (baptized or not), was not a church constituted by the community of the baptized in Christ. It was a church where blood was thicker than water and where the blood of nationalism, not the body and blood of Christ, bound the church together. This is why Barth believed that the German Christian movement was at its root an anti-Christian movement and therefore terribly dangerous.

Furthermore, not only was Barth deeply troubled by the ideology of German Christians, but he was also even more distressed by the fact that the German Evangelical Church as a whole did not even appear capable of recognizing the German Christians and the National Socialist State as a problem. Barth believed that the German church had become so assimilated to the social and cultural movements of his day that it had reached a point where it was no longer an effective witness of the Gospel to the world because it had become too much a part of the world. Indeed, after watching some of his theological allies, especially his former colleagues from the ‘dialectal’ school, e.g. Brunner, Gogarten, and Bultmann, defend the theological concept of “orders of creation” to varying degrees (although they did not otherwise associate themselves with the German
Christians), Barth was convinced that the German church itself was on the brink of disaster. Thus, in 1933, Barth decided that the time had come to “issue the necessary warnings to the church about the danger it was in.”

Barth’s first warning came in the form of a lecture titled, “The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology,” which he delivered in Copenhagen on May 10th, 1933, a mere two weeks after the February 27th burning of the Reichstag. In this lecture Barth makes it clear that the theological concept of ‘orders of creation,’ which Barth also comprehends under the more generic term ‘natural theology,’ is not properly theological at all, but idolatrous. Specifically, he argues, an appeal to the ‘orders of creation’ to justify obedience to the state is idolatrous because the concept rests upon a knowledge of God and the world that has been secured independently from God’s own self-revelation in the Word and work of Jesus Christ. The problem with this is not so much that the laws of the state claim to be legitimized by the authority of God, but rather the God who allegedly serves as the guarantor of the laws is not understood as the God and Father of Jesus Christ, i.e. the God who is gracious to humanity. Thus, the resulting problem is that people are required to be obedient to a false God, which is idolatry.

Barth believed that “recent Protestant theology,” i.e. the theology of the late 18th and the whole of the 19th century, was largely to blame for this development. Barth characterized Protestant theology of that period as “and-theology,” which he describes as theology that appeals to additional sources of revelation in addition to God’s own self-

33 Busch, p. 223.

revelation in order to secure the whole truth about God, creation, and humanity. Barth argues that these and-theologies emerged as a result of modern theology’s belief that the revelation of God’s Word was too narrow and too small a source of knowledge in the face of philosophy, the historical and natural sciences, and the many other accomplishments of the natural world. Barth writes:

More than all other earlier theologies [modern theology] believed that it had discovered all around itself possibilities and necessities, truths and realities, “concern” and needs. All that it so discovered was so noteworthy, so important, so serious that it was sure that it could not extricate itself from these realities. It was sure it had to give its heart to them and that it had to acknowledge them, for all practical purposes, as a second, third, fourth revelation in a addition to the first one.\(^{35}\)

Barth goes on to offers his own succinct summary of modern Protestant theology:

Thus said the eighteenth century: “Revelation and reason.” Thus said Schleiermacher: “Revelation and religious consciousness.” Thus said Ritschl and his disciples: “Revelation and ethos of culture.” Thus said Troeltsch and his disciples: “Revelation and history of religion.” Thus it said in these days from every side: “Revelation and creation.” “Revelation and primordial revelation.” “New Testament and human existence.” “The commandments and the orders of creation.”\(^{36}\)

Barth believed that the fundamental problem with and-theologies is that they fail to conform to the axiom of the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.” They fail because they allow the second criterion of the paired concepts to dominate the primary criterion of revelation as the ultimate source of one’s knowledge of God. Barth argues that and-theologies attest to two separate words of God, and consequently two separate wills of God, each word leading to a different knowledge of

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 72.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., pp. 72-73.
God. As we will see in a moment, Barth believes that this implies a dualism in the nature of God and thus reflects a problematic doctrine of revelation and doctrine of God. One of the consequent problems for ethics, Barth believes, is that this division of God’s word leads to the bifurcated understanding of the relationship between the internal and external aspects of human existence. That is, the law of God is only concerned with social and political structures, and the gospel is concerned with one’s feeling of forgiveness.

For example, Barth argues that while the word of God as revelation does indeed lead to a knowledge of a God of grace and forgiveness, he believes that when revelation is paired with another criterion, e.g. reason, nature, history, etc., then the sphere of human life over which revelation is concerned becomes restricted to one’s inner life of feeling, guilt and forgiveness. Consequently, the additional criteria then appear to be concerned only with the external aspects of one’s life, e.g. family and political life. Furthermore, and even more problematic in Barth’s view, these “additional” sources of revelation pretend to secure a knowledge of God which can be abstracted from reason, nature, and history. Barth writes:

Did not the discussion of the eighteenth century […] happily allow revelation to be absorbed in reason and declare reason itself to be genuine revelation? For Schleiermacher, is revelation more than a determination of pious self-consciousness? For the theologians of Hegel’s school, is revelation more than a part of the absolute spirit’s self-progression? Does it not disappear in culture with Ritschl, in the general history of religion and spirit with Troeltsch and his followers, in the conscience with Holl and Hirsch, and in a particular understanding of human existence with Bultmann? Vis-à-vis Brunner and Gogarten I have to ask whether “God” is really more than another word for “neighbor”? Is “commandment” more than another word for the orders of creation? Is “justification” more than another word for life in those orders? And
vis-à-vis Bultmann: Are theology and anthropology really interchangeable concepts?  

Hence, Barth believes that when revelation is paired with any other term, e.g. reason, nature, and history, these latter terms essentially emerge as the principal sources of revelation and are either permitted to judge the veracity of God’s own self-revelation or become equated with it. Barth argues that these other “sources” of revelation cannot lead one to the true knowledge of God, the God who reveals himself in the word and work of Jesus Christ, i.e. the God who is gracious to humanity. This false knowledge of God not only results in idolatry, but also, even more problematically, leads us away from God, and thus away from grace. In other words, Barth is concerned that if any other source of revelation becomes primary and supplants God’s own self-revelation as the one Word of God, which declares the truth about God and human existence, then we are left to ourselves to try to secure our own righteousness through obedience to laws authorized by a God who is not known as the God who is gracious to humanity. As we shall see in a moment, obedience to any god which is not the God and Father of Jesus Christ produces and an ethics of “works righteousness” or an ethics of self-justification. But, in short, anyone who advocated for ‘orders of creation” or ‘natural theology’ in any form was essentially affirming an ethics of self-justification and thus giving aid and comfort to the enemy. At the end his of his lecture Barth explains that the very existence of theology was at stake in this matter. He writes:

The fight against natural theology, which is unavoidable in view of the first commandment as an axiom of theology, is a fight for right obedience in

\[37\text{ibid.}, \text{pp. 75-76.}\]
theology…Theology is right and good when it corresponds to the first commandment and does not oppose it…[Theology today] should take its leave of each and every natural theology and dare, in that narrow isolation, to cling solely to the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Why? Because that and only that has been commanded of it. *Because everything else is arbitrariness which does not lead to, but leads away from God.* That is the simple meaning of the thesis defended here.\(^{38}\)

That “everything else is arbitrariness which does not lead to, but leads away from God” is the heart of the problem. Barth believed that theology must both point us to and lead us to the God who is gracious to humanity, i.e. the God who accomplishes humanity’s justification through the word and work of Jesus Christ, which is grace.

Barth’s lecture in Denmark, of course, did not prompt any immediate theological retractions from his former colleagues who advocated for natural theology. Indeed, in June of 1933, Gogarten publicly declared: “the Law of God for German Christians is identical with the law of the German people.”\(^{39}\) Around the same time, Brunner informed Barth of his forthcoming pamphlet “Nature and Grace” in which Brunner continued to advocate for a legitimate understanding of ‘orders of creation’ and ‘natural theology’ albeit, however, in a much more chastened form than that of Gogarten. With these two developments, Barth believed that something even more decisive than a public lecture was going to be necessary in order to warn the Church that its very existence was under threat, not only from the outside, but from within its own walls as well.

On May 16\(^{th}\), 1934, in order to prepare for the First Confessing Synod of the German Evangelical Church (an effort to organize a more consolidated and unified

\(^{38}\) *ibid.*, p. 77. (emphasis mine)

ecclesiastical resistance to the German Christians), Barth drafted a “theological declaration” to present to the Synod. This theological declaration not only repudiated the false doctrines of the German Christians which had been built upon the distorted theology of ‘orders of creation,’ but also positively proclaimed what Barth believed to be essential theological truths which he believed could not be compromised. On May 31st the Synod unanimously accepted this theological declaration, which is now famously known as the “Barmen Declaration.” For Barth, the Confessing Church’s acceptance of this theological declaration was significant because it was not only the first sign that the Evangelical Church was ready, on the basis of the confessions, to take the problem of natural theology seriously, but it also indicated that it was ready to attest publicly to the truth that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God whom one must trust and obey in life and death. Thus, the Barmen Declaration was a more full-throated response by the German Evangelical Church as a whole to the German Christians who, in Barth’s view, were “the last, fullest and worst monstrosity of neo-Protestantism.”

The rejections listed in the Barmen Declaration are worth listing in full here as they clearly reflect what Barth believed was theologically at stake in the emerging political crisis of his day.

1. We reject the false doctrine that the church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures, and truth as God’s revelation.

2. We reject the false doctrine that their could be areas of our life in which we would belong not to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

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40 Busch, p. 247.
41 ibid., p. 230.
3. We reject the false doctrine that the church could have permission to hand over the form of its message and of its order to whatever it itself might wish or to the vicissitudes of the prevailing ideological and political convictions of the day.

4. We reject the false doctrine that, apart from this ministry, the church could, and could have permission to, give itself or allow itself to be given special leaders (Führer) vested with ruling authority.

5. (1) We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the state should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfill the vocation of the church as well. (2) We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the church should and could take on the nature, tasks, and dignity which belongs to the state and thus become itself an organ of the state.

6. We reject the false doctrine that with human vainglory the church could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of self-chosen desires, purposes and plans.  

These rejections listed above clearly reveal Barth’s concern that the German Christian movement and its supporting theology were idolatrous. The first two rejections deal with the Confessing Church’s refusal to accept as true anything other than the one Word of God as a source of revelation, e.g. people, movements, nations, history, etc. The last four rejections are concerned with the fusion of church with the state, which ultimately results in the failure of each to recognize and to fulfill its proper function.

Unfortunately, again for Barth, the Barmen Declaration did little to change the minds of those who advocated for a legitimate understanding of natural theology. A very public debate with Brunner on natural theology ensued at the end of 1934, which ultimately left both men at odds with each other and the theological issues still

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unresolved.\textsuperscript{43} Hence, after reaching this impasse with Brunner, Barth decided to try a different strategy.

In October 1935, Barth prepared to deliver another public lecture. But this time Barth set out to address what he believed lay at the very heart of the problem of natural theology and orders of creation, namely, the original prototype of all natural theologies and \textit{and}-theologies: the \textit{and}-theology of “law” \textit{and} “gospel.” For Barth, this attempt to review the basic relationship of “law and gospel” was not merely an academic exercise. Rather, Barth was convinced that because the two concepts had come to operate independently from one another as two separate words of God that this had resulted in the return to an ethics of “works righteousness,” i.e. an ethics of self-justification, instead of an understanding of ethics informed by grace. Thus, the title of the 1935 lecture, in which Barth endeavored to explore the consequences of the separation between “law and gospel” is called “Gospel and Law.”\textsuperscript{44}

\subsection{1.3 Barth’s Gospel-Law thesis}

In his lecture on “Gospel and Law” Barth develops further the point he made in his 1933 lecture “The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology,” namely that there are not two words of God, i.e. a word of God as harsh law and another word of God as


\textsuperscript{44} Barth was unable to deliver this lecture in Barmen as he had planned because the Gestapo was escorting him out of Germany that very day as a result of his refusal to take the oath of allegiance to Hitler. However, Pastor Immer read Barth’s lecture to an overflowing Church in Barmen on Barth’s behalf. Busch, p. 266. The translation of the lecture can be found in \textit{Community, State, and Church: Three essays by Karl Barth.} (NY: Anchor Books, 1960), pp. 71-100.
grace and forgiveness, but rather that there is only one Word of God, the Word of God as revealed in the Word and work of Christ. In his “Gospel and Law” lecture, Barth explains why it is only through this one Word of God that one can understand the proper nature and goal of human moral action. Barth articulates this thesis, which he began developing as early as 1927\(^45\) and which finds its most mature expression in CD II.2, by way of explaining that the law and the gospel must be considered together as two aspects of the same one Word of God. In short, Barth argues that the law is the ‘form’ of the gospel whose content is grace.

Barth begins by arguing that the traditional ‘law and gospel’ formulation, while not altogether wrong, can be misleading and “enveloped in ambiguities of every sort.”\(^46\) He suggests that one would do better to reverse the relationship of the two terms into ‘gospel and law.’ He states that “anyone who really and earnestly would first say Law and only then, presupposing this, say Gospel would not, no matter how good his intention, be speaking of the Law of God and therefore then certainly not of his Gospel.”\(^47\) With this reformulation of the two terms into ‘gospel and law,’ Barth goes on to develop three points: 1) the gospel is prior to the law; 2) the law and the gospel must be understood as inextricably related; 3) the law is the form of the gospel, whose content is grace. Barth appeals to the witness of scripture to justify his argument.


\(^46\) *op. cit.*, p. 71.

\(^47\) *ibid.*, Barth’s emphasis.
Barth appeals to the narrative of salvation history in the Bible to make the claim that the gospel first appears in its nascent form as God’s promise to Abraham. For Barth, this promise and thus the gospel precedes God’s giving of the law to Moses. After Moses received the law, Barth points out, the law was placed and enclosed in the Ark of the Covenant. Barth interprets this action as indicating that the law is hidden and enclosed in the gospel. However, he goes on to say that while the law follows the promise, the fulfillment of the promise is not the law, but the gospel. Thus, Barth reasons, the law follows from the promise and points the way to its fulfillment, i.e. the gospel, which is nothing less than word and work of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Barth points out that Jesus himself attests to being the fulfillment of the law. Matthew 5:17 records Jesus as saying, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill.” (NRSV) Barth interprets this passage to mean that the law is made manifest in Christ, i.e. the law is no longer hidden but revealed in the Word and work of Christ. Hence, as we will see in a moment, Barth argues that the law is only properly understood and thus only then demands our obedience as it confronts us from this Christological site.

But what do we learn about the law when it becomes manifest to us in the person of Christ? Barth answers that we learn that the law says to us: “You shall believe.” That is, the life and work of Christ shows us that believing in God means to act as one who “loves and fears” God, which in the end is nothing less than being obedient to the law. Furthermore, Barth insists, not only does Christ believe perfectly, but more significantly,

\[\text{ibid.}, \text{p. 82.}\]
Christ believes in our place. By believing in our place Christ is also obedient in our place. The result of Christ’s belief and obedience is that Christ accomplishes the good in our place. As we will see in a moment, this is a highly controversial claim and has prompted some critics to accuse Barth of suggesting that human moral action in history is therefore meaningless.

The main point is Barth’s insistence that the content of the law is revealed as grace, and one may thus say that the law both points to and is made manifest in Christ. The law points to Christ because it will be the person of Christ who makes manifest the truth that the content of the law is grace and belief in God is obedience to the law. Thus, Barth concludes, Jesus Christ reveals to us that true belief, true faith, i.e. to love and fear God, is obedience to the law. It is in this way that the law is the form of the Gospel, whose content is grace.

This manifestation of the law as the form of the gospel attests to the fact that God’s grace has its goal in our action. The goal of the law is that we believe in God, which is to love and fear God. By believing in God, Barth argues, we accept the fact that God is for us and we are not for ourselves. True faith should eliminate all claims to autocracy or self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Barth argues that from what God has done for us, i.e. believing in our place, we can infer what God wants from us, i.e. to believe in him, to love and fear him, to have no other gods before him. In other words, Barth argues that by believing in our place and being obedient in our place, and therefore accomplishing the good in our place, Christ shows us what it means to believe and act as a human being. As we will explore more fully in a moment, to believe and act as a human being is to believe and act as a covenant partner with God.
However, Barth further explains that, because we are sinners, we cannot believe in God *in the same way* that Christ believes. Jesus, who is without sin, intercedes with his humanity for our humanity and accomplishes for us what we cannot do ourselves, i.e. believe perfectly in God and is thus be perfectly obedient to the law. Thus, because Jesus is human, the good he accomplishes is truly a human good, i.e. it is the good that is appropriate to creaturely life. Thus, it is in this way that Jesus stands in our place and whose faith and obedience is *representative* for us. Thus, Barth concludes, since we cannot believe in God *in the same way* that Christ believes in God, we are called to *believe in Christ*. It is faith *in Christ* that is the appropriate faith for sinful creatures.\(^{49}\)

So what is it that Christ *does* when he believes in our place? Barth answers that Jesus says *yes* to God, and *yes* to life. This *yes* is an affirmation that “I am not my own but God’s.” Hence, by saying yes to God, Christ says *no* to godlessness, sin and misery. Barth understands Christ’s *no* as a no to an understanding of humanity without God—an understanding of humanity that is left to itself, *to autocracy*. In short, Jesus’ *yes* to God tells us what it means to *be a creature*. That is, to be a creature is to be *with* and *for* God and not for ourselves.

As we mentioned above, Christ’s faith, i.e. his saying *yes* to God, fulfills the law. Specifically, Christ’s action of believing and obeying in our place fulfills the first commandment, “you shall have no other gods before me.” For Barth, all other commandments *are included in this first commandment*. This means that perfect faith equals perfect obedience to the first commandment, which in turn equals perfect

\(^{49}\) *ibid.*, p. 78.
obedience to every other law. It is in this way, Barth insists, that Christ both establishes the law and is the sole basis of the law’s authority. Christ establishes the law because it is in his life and work that the meaning and content of the law as grace are revealed, promulgated and fully published. He is the sole basis of the law’s authority because grace occurs as a result of Christ’s faith in God and obedience to the law. This is why, Barth concludes, that law in the Old and New Testament must be interpreted Christologically. Grace occurs and the law is fulfilled in the faith of Jesus Christ. This is how Barth secures the Christological referent to the law which he believed had been lost in modern Protestant theology and which was missing in the case of the German Christians and National Socialism. Barth writes that, from the very beginning, God has sought to raise us to life with himself though grace, and that:

[t]his alone can also be the meaning and content of the authority with which the Church confronts its members and the world. We are always concerned with faith in Jesus Christ, who is crucified and risen. There can never be claims and demands which would have legal validity from another source or in themselves: there can only be witnesses. And these witnesses will always be concerned with the grace of God, which has accomplished everything for us and whose end must be this accomplishment. By saying this, these witnesses, admonish, warn, command, order, and prohibit. They will have legal authority, because and to the extent they proclaim the “law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) and the “Law of faith” (Romans 3:21) and the “law of the Spirit of life” (Romans 8:2)50

Barth further elaborates:

And we will keep and fulfill the Law and all its commandments if we have faith in Jesus Christ; that means the faith which clings to him and remains true to him, simply because he is the eternal incarnate Word, which has accomplished all things. This faith includes all obedience. Our works, great and small, internal

50 ibid.
and external, are accepted if they take place as *works of this faith* – and they are rejected if they do not.\(^{51}\)

Thus, for Barth, *we* will fulfill the law and all its commandments only by having *faith in Christ*. In other words, our faith in Christ is our obedience to the law; faith *includes obedience within it*. This faith, however, the faith we are called to have in Jesus Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit and is not a capacity we have within our nature, but is something that we must *pray for*.\(^{52}\)

Finally, as we mentioned above, Jesus’ faith is a *unique* act that cannot be repeated. Jesus’ faith is a *representative* faith, which we can never achieve ourselves. Thus, Barth argues, we must acknowledge this representative faith and *allow it to count as our life*, i.e. to count for our faith and our obedience. We must allow it to count for our life, Barth insists, because Christ’s faith and obedience reveal that only the eternal Word made flesh could accomplish this perfect obedience. When we do this, we accept the fact that we do not have our life here in our hands at our disposal, but have it *with and in* Christ who is above with God (Col 3:1f).\(^{53}\) This is an important point for Barth because with it he affirms St. Paul’s comment that “the law is spiritual” (Rom 7:14) and that we are to “set our minds on things that are above” (Col 3:2) because our life is being “raised with Christ” (Col 3:1). However, as we will see in a moment, it is precisely this emphasis that Barth places on Jesus’ representative faith for us, i.e. his insistence that the

\(^{51}\) *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

\(^{52}\) *ibid.*, p. 84.

\(^{53}\) *ibid.*, p. 83.
law is spiritual and that we have our life above with Christ, which has led many to criticize Barth’s theology as having a gnostic cast.

At this point we have seen how Barth defends the thesis that 1) the gospel precedes the law; 2) the gospel and the law must be considered together; and 3) the law is the form of the Gospel, whose content is grace. However, Barth points out that there is another fact about the gospel and the law that must be taken into consideration: God puts the gospel and the law in the hands of sinners. The result of this is two-fold: 1) the nature and depth of our sinfulness is revealed to us; and 2) our sin distorts both the content and meaning of the law and the gospel. It is this latter result which Barth believes had taken hold of modern Protestant theology.

Barth argues that when God’s grace, and therefore God’s law, becomes manifest in Jesus Christ, the fact and meaning of our sinfulness becomes clear. Grace reveals the depth and seriousness of our sin because grace testifies to the fact that it was God who had to take our place in order to point us to faith. We could not appear for ourselves. For Barth, sin consists in our very inability to appear for ourselves, but that we still wish to do so. This desire to appear for ourselves is autocracy and godlessness, a rejection of God’s grace given to us in Christ and our self-assertion against God, i.e. our separation from God. What then happens to the law and the gospel in the hands of human beings who still wish to appear for themselves before God? Barth answers that sin distorts the meaning and purpose of both the law and the gospel.

Barth argues that sin perpetuates a great deception by means of the law. What is this deception? Sin deceives us into thinking that the law proclaims justification by our
own works, and not justification by the Word and work of God.\textsuperscript{54} How does Barth arrive at this conclusion?

Barth argues that sin causes covetousness to shoot up in us in the face of the law’s command: “thou shalt not covet,” i.e. to want for oneself. Furthermore, Barth argues, this deception occurs with respect to the \textit{spiritual} character of the law. The spiritual character of the law promotes a zeal for God. However, Barth argues, that in the hands of sinners, this zeal for God is \textit{misdirected}. Barth quotes Romans 10:2 to make his point, “They have a zeal for God, but it is unenlightened. For, being ignorant of the justification that comes from God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to justification by God. For Christ is the end of the law, for justification.”\textsuperscript{55}

Barth argues that this point is depicted by the encounter of the rich young ruler in Luke 18 who asks Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus is reported to have told him to “obey the law.” Then, when Jesus tells the ruler to sell his possessions and then “come follow me,” it is reported that the rich ruler went away sad because he was a man of much wealth. Barth believes this passage is paradigmatic of the problem of sin because he interprets the actions of the ruler as wanting to “justify himself.” Even though the rich young ruler had zealously kept all of the laws and showed an ardent desire for eternal life, Barth argues that the rich young ruler exemplifies the deception of sin with respect to the law. That is, the rich young ruler had an understanding of the law as something one could “keep for oneself” in order to inherit eternal life \textit{without} relation to the Gospel, i.e. Christ. Thus, Barth argues, the rich young

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{ibid.}, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{ibid.}, p. 86.
ruler failed to recognize that the goal of the law is Christ, and obedience to the law is for the sake of Christ, for life in Christ, who accomplishes our justification. Thus, for Barth, obedience to the law requires the recognition that one must subordinate one’s self to the justification accomplished in Christ, and to live a life in this subordination.  

Barth argues that as sinners, we are from the very start engaged with asserting ourselves and our own cause. It is in this way that our sin conceals the decisive element of the law from us, i.e. that the law is grace. Hence, we try to strengthen, confirm and exalt ourselves as worthy co-workers of God, with the help of God’s laws. Barth articulates this as turning the divine “You shall be” (in Christ) into the “You ought,” which is sin’s way of weakening of the law. Thus, for Barth, any claim to have a zeal for God, understood in terms of obedience to God without reference to grace is a lie. What is even worse, however, (and what Barth especially laments), is that in this understanding of obedience to the law, it is God who serves as a pretext for sin. Barth explains:

Just let no one think that, because it is based on ignorance and because it always is a zeal for God, it is a relatively harmless and forgivable zeal, perhaps to be regretted on account of its imperfection but nevertheless to be praised on account of its good intention. No, its ignorance is disobedience, and it is a lie to call it zeal for God! Sin triumphs in this zeal, more, infinitely more, than in what we think we know as idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, and robbery; infinitely more because here, in his gift of the Law, in the misinterpreted Decalogue, in the misinterpreted prophetic utterances, in the misinterpreted Solomonic wisdom, in the misinterpreted Sermon on the Mount and apostolic admonition, God himself has been made the cause and pretext of sin.  

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56 ibid., p. 86. Barth also discusses this Biblical passage much more extensively in II.2, pp. 613-630.

57 ibid., p. 88 (Barth’s emphases).
In our zeal for God we ardently endeavor to obey different “letters” and “shreds” of the law in order to bring about a special justification of our own existence. Barth gives examples such as trying to lead an “exemplary life as citizen and family man” or one who tries to live a life of demonstrative “simplicity and frugality.” For Barth these are all “works of the law,” in which one endeavors to justify her existence apart from the grace of Christ.\(^{58}\) Barth concludes, “Thus, our lust, our zeal—is it for God? No, with the help and to the honor of God, it is for our own godlessness—which crucified Christ and crucifies him again and again in the midst of Christendom (Hebrews 6:6).”\(^{59}\)

However, it is not just the law that becomes distorted in the hands of sinners, but the gospel becomes distorted as well. Indeed, Barth insists that when the form of the law falls, so, too, does its content. That is, in the hands of sinners, the meaning and content of grace become distorted as well. The result of this distortion is that Jesus, who gives everything to us by appearing before God in our place, becomes a demigod to those who seek their own justification. Barth writes that Jesus becomes one who:

imparts pretended powers to them, a sort of magic talent, which they are free to control and direct as their possession, which redounds to their honor before themselves and before others, in which they believe they have a good support for their efforts to assert, to advocate, to justify themselves, with which they intend to comfort themselves (secretly, this is the most important of all), in case as a result of the incompleteness for their efforts there should be disappointments and standstills, here and there, even simply failure.\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\) ibid.

\(^{59}\) ibid., p. 89.

\(^{60}\) ibid., p. 90.
In other words, Barth argues that Jesus becomes the “indispensable companion” and the “stop gap” for all our efforts toward justification.

Jesus Christ becomes the wonderful ideas which we always invent for the sake of this justification, according to whatever the spirit and taste of our time may be! Jesus becomes the great creditor who again and again is just good enough to cover the cost of our own ventures in righteousness! This is what becomes of grace, of the Gospel. […] This Jesus Christ has not yet even helped or comforted, much less saved a single man in the temptation which must necessarily follow sin’s deception.\(^61\)

It is in this way, Barth believes, that natural law, abstract reason, history, and in his own day the “Volksnomoi” or (people’s laws) have been invented in order that human beings may invest their own meaning and content into the law in order to serve their own purposes.\(^62\) Furthermore, the gospel becomes an “aid” and “comfort” to those who are ardently pursuing their own purposes, endeavoring to secure their own “justification” through the law, instead of recognizing that Christ has already accomplished this justification by believing in our place. This failure at self-justification coupled with a distorted view of the gospel thus results in one having no justification at all, leaving Christ to have died in vain.\(^63\)

In sum: Barth took issue with orders of creation and natural theology because these concepts separate creation and revelation, law from gospel, which leads to a false understanding of God. This false understanding of God leads to a distortion of both the law and the gospel. The law becomes principally concerned with the external aspect of

\(^{61}\) ibid., p. 91.

\(^{62}\) ibid.

\(^{63}\) ibid., p. 93.
human life, and the gospel either gets reduced to being concerned only with the internal aspect of human life with respect to grace and forgiveness, or it becomes sort of “stop gap” measure with which to help the human being fulfill her own will. In whatever way this works out, Barth insists, the result is the same, i.e. the human being attempts to secure her own justification.

At this point we will briefly examine Barth’s doctrine of election, in which Barth argues that ethics is most properly a task of the doctrine of God. In Barth’s doctrine of God, Barth will endeavor to unite a doctrine of creation with the doctrine of revelation, by way of the doctrine of election. Indeed, Barth’s doctrine of election in II.2 is the more mature expression of the themes he articulated in his lecture “Gospel and Law.”

1.4 Ethics as a Task of the Doctrine of God

Barth insists the doctrine of God is not only concerned with God, i.e. the knowability, being, and perfections of God, but also with humanity. This commitment can be seen in the structure of CD II. CD II.1 is concerned about the knowability, being, and perfections of God, and CD II.2 discusses the election of humanity in the form of the covenant. Thus, Barth argues, it is only through the concept of the covenant that the concept of God can come to completion. That is, God is not known and is not knowable except in Jesus Christ. God is not known completely, and therefore not at all, if God is not known as the maker and Lord of this covenant between God and humanity. Hence Barth concludes that the Christian doctrine of God cannot have only God for its content. If the God under discussion is the God of the covenant, then the doctrine of God must include humanity. For Barth, a God without Jesus Christ, i.e. a God understood apart
from the knowledge of God’s compassion and faithfulness to humanity as disclosed by
the covenant, would not be God at all. The God of Christian knowledge, the only true
and real God, is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (II.2, pp. 509-510)

With this understanding of the doctrine of God as necessarily including the
covenant between God and Christ, Barth explains that there are two elements to the
doctrine of the covenant as well. The first aspect is the doctrine of the election of grace,
i.e. predestination. The second aspect is the doctrine of the divine command.

In the doctrine of the election of grace, God elects himself, to be gracious towards
humanity, i.e. to be God for humanity. By doing this God also at the same time elects
humanity to be humanity for God. Humanity fulfils this election by witnessing to God’s
glory. This divine election and decision decreed from all eternity in Christ and executed
in Jesus Christ in time is the mystery of the will of God. This is the basic mystery of God
which God reveals in his Word and which may be known and grasped in faith in God’s
Word. For Barth, to say divine election is to say predestination, which is to say in one
word, the whole content of the Gospel. This is why, for Barth, the doctrine of election
belongs to the doctrine of God. (II.2, p. 510)

The second element in the concept of the covenant is the doctrine of the command
of God. This second element is concerned with the question: What does God ask from
the human being whom God elects? (II.2, p. 510) For Barth, to say that God has elected
humanity is to say that God has determined humanity for a certain relationship.
Specifically, Barth argues that God determines the human being to be a person. To be a
person is to be a partner in the covenant which God has made and established between
God and humanity. If the election of God determines the human being to be a covenant
partner of God, then the human being’s *self-determination* in *response* to this divine
determination must be considered. In other words, there must be a human decision that
*corresponds* to the divine decision. (II.2, p. 511) For example, if God wills to be our
Lord, then this means that God wants humanity’s obedience. The question for the human
being is, will she obey? If God determines us for God’s service, this means that God
claims us for God and we are therefore asked whether or not we will satisfy this claim.
When God becomes our partner as the Lord of the covenant who determines its meaning,
content and fulfillment, then God necessarily becomes humanity’s judge and the law of
human existence. Thus, humanity is judged as measured against God. To be *elect* means
to be accountable to the question as to what is *required* of the elect. In other words, God
cannot draw humanity towards God without necessarily involving humanity in
responsibility to God. (II.2, p. 511)

The point to be made clear is that for Barth it is within the doctrine of God that
the question of human responsibility arises. Thus, Barth sets out to establish that the
being and essence and activity of God as the Lord of the Covenant between God and
humanity *includes* a relationship to the being and activity of humanity. As God makes
himself responsible for humanity, so, too, does God makes humanity responsible to God.
(II.2, p. 511) The perfect form of human responsibility to God takes place in the life and
work of Jesus Christ, who as we saw above believed in our place and was thus obedient
in our place.

While this divine decision to elect humanity in Christ occurs in eternity, God
*actualizes* this good in the human being of Christ *in time*. Thus, it is in the Word and
work of God in Jesus Christ in which obedience and “right action” *has already been*
performed by a human being. Barth states: “the good is done here.” (II.2 p. 517) This good accomplished by Christ is obedience to God, which is the human affirmation of God’s divine “yes” to creation and “no” to sin. Jesus’ obedience unto death accomplishes the reconciliation of God and humanity and vanquishes death and sin once and for all. This is why Jesus’ act of believing and standing in our place accomplishes the good of which we are not capable. Thus, it only remains for us to witness and confirm the action of Christ with our own action. (II.2, p. 543) It is in this way that Christ’s realization of the good in our place, i.e. grace, becomes the standard and measure of human conduct and thus also concerned with sanctification. In other words, Christ’s action frees us to be creatures, to be free from the threat of sin, so that we may be free to be who we are, i.e. covenant partners of God who are both justified and sanctified as a result of Christ’s believing and acting in our place. In his book Analogy of Grace Gerald McKenny explains concisely: “The grace of God addresses us as what we are not (yet) in ourselves (ontically), but are (already) in Christ, such that what we are in Christ (ontologically) becomes determinative for what we are in ourselves, in our existence as acting subjects.”\(^ {64}\) The good, then, confronts us not as something still to be accomplished by us, but as a demand to be what we are, and are now free to be, because of God’s gracious action in Christ. It is in this way that the command of God is the claim of grace. In Jesus Christ God is for humanity in all God’s deity (gospel), and he summons humanity to exist as the one whom God is for (law).\(^ {65}\) As we will see in future chapters, God determines us to be free in a specific direction, that is, to be free to exist as creatures


\(^{65}\) ibid., pp. 166-168.
who exist in time as body and soul in covenant relations with God and fellow humanity. Furthermore, this freedom will be a freedom exercised and secured within the limits of time, body and soul, and covenant relations. Indeed, for Barth, one cannot realize one’s self as a creature without being governed and constituted by these limits.

However, as we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this move by Barth has prompted criticism. By arguing that the good is established in the intra-Trinitarian relations, i.e. in which God determines both himself to be for humanity and thus also determines humanity to be for God, the question then becomes: If the good has already been accomplished in Christ, through which Christ accomplishes both our justification and sanctification, then what is the meaning and purpose of human activity in creation? Some have criticized the results of Barth’s gospel-law thesis as producing a gnostic antinomianism. In this next section we will examine the nature of those criticisms and explain why such a reading of Barth misunderstands him.

1.5 Gnosticism: A Criticism of Barth’s Theological Ethics

Barth’s insistence that 1) there no such thing as “good” human action in and of itself, but that it is only “good” insofar as it corresponds to the divine action made explicit in the person and work of Christ, and 2) the command of God confronts us as a claim of grace, has much prompted criticism. The criticisms come in the various charges of Barth being a ‘gnostic’ in that he effectively disavows any moral order in creation that provides a normative framework which informs and guides human action. As we will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, Barth does acknowledge a moral order in creation; however, what he will insist upon is that the moral order in creation is both noetically and
ontologically grounded in Christ. It is in this way that Barth secures the Christological referent to the law which confronts us as the moral order of creation. And, as we will also argue later, Barth’s ontological claim that Christology, i.e. God’s covenant with humanity, as the internal basis of creation, in no way devalues or denigrates creation but rather establishes its proper meaning and orientation. However, before we take up the more positive task of reconstructing Barth’s doctrine of creation, let us first take a closer look at the gnostic charges leveled at Barth’s theology.

One of the difficulties in trying to assess whether or not Barth’s theology can be pejoratively labeled as ‘gnostic’ is the fact that the terms ‘gnostic’ and ‘Gnosticism’ have hardly been used univocally in the history of Christian thought. The term Gnosticism derives from the Greek word (gnosis) meaning “knowledge” and is typically applied to a series of widespread and diverse religio-philosophical movements that occurred in late antiquity. Even though a precise definition of Gnosticism is still a matter of scholarly debate, the most pervasive meaning associated with the term is that it implies an anti-cosmic or world-rejecting stance. As we will see, while it is true that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ provides both the noetic and ontological basis for creation, this in no way will imply that creation is something from which human beings are to be liberated. For Barth, Christology serves the opposite function, namely, Christology points the creature to the very goodness of its created being and creaturely life.

Barth was first accused of being a gnostic by Adolph Jülicher in 1920 after the first edition of *Der Römerbrief (Romans)* was published. While we are not concerned

66 Adolph Jülicher was one of the foremost scholars of the New Testament and of the historical-critical method at Marburg.
with evaluating the validity of this charge with regard to Barth’s theology in Romans, we mention it here because some of the basic theological commitments in Romans that worried Jülicher will continue to inform the rest of Barth’s theological enterprise. Hence, it will be helpful to point out here why Jülicher felt compelled to compare Barth to the mid-2nd-Century gnostic heretic Marcion. While these comments by Jülicher were made before Barth’s gospel-law thesis and his more fully developed Christology, these early concerns of Jülicher have influenced the subsequent reading and interpretations of Barth’s theology. Indeed, Jülicher’s charges are frequently cited in the secondary literature on Barth and seem to have been influential in producing what seems to be the consensus that Barth has no proper doctrine of creation.

Jülicher characterized Barth’s theology as gnostic because he believed that Barth’s theology in Romans was very similar to the anti-historical spiritualism advocated by the Marcionite Gnostics. There are three features of Barth’s work in Romans that led Jülicher to make this charge. The first is Barth’s insistence on the “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and humanity. The second is Barth’s assertion that the true meaning of scripture is spiritual and not historical. The third is Barth’s disavowal of an understanding of the ‘progress of history,’ a notion which had been used to suggest that

67 Marcion (ca. 85-160) was a dualist. He believed that there was another God beside the creator god YHWH of the Old Testament. The god of the Old Testament was the lesser god (a demiurge) and creator of the material universe. The other God was the Heavenly Father of the New Testament. Jesus was the living incarnation of this God, who was a new God. Whereas the god of the Old Testament gave human beings the law and the mosaic covenant, who demanded justice and punishes every transgression of the law, Marcion argued that this god was not the same God of the New Testament of forgiveness and love. Such dualism devalues creation and denies the original goodness of creation. Furthermore, Marcion’s dualism denies that the God of Christ is also the creator of the world.

God’s spirit (logos) was unfolding in historical events such that nature/history was revelatory of the will of God. These three features of Romans led Jülicher to accuse Barth of passing through history into the history-transcending world of the Bible. Barth’s theology was a problem, Jülicher argued, because such claims evacuate history of any meaningful content and imply that Barth does not respect creation and history as being a source of general revelation. Furthermore, Barth’s commitments imply that only those with a “spiritual” understanding of the Bible have a “true” understanding of the world. Thus, Jülicher believed Barth’s theology proceeded in the same way as Marcion’s, i.e. with the “same sovereign arbitrariness and assurance of victory, with the same one-sided dualistic approach of enmity to all that comes from the world, culture, or tradition, and [who] never tired of tossing a few pet ideas in front of us.” Thus, Jülicher labeled Barth a “new Marcion” because of Barth’s “radical dualism of all or nothing and his wrath against those who take only half.”

Emil Brunner’s “championing” of Romans in his review, “The Epistle to the Romans by Karl Barth: An Up-to-date, Unmodern paraphrase” may have also contributed to the pervasive belief that Barth’s theology is gnostic. In this work Brunner endeavors to explain why Barth essentially preferred the older doctrine of biblical inspiration over the historical-critical method which dominated theology at the time. Brunner comments that it was Barth’s goal to let Paul’s thoughts in his Letter to the Romans “explain

69 In Dorrian, p. 56. Jülicher, however, conceded that neither Barth nor Marcion were full-fledged gnostics, but rather only “half-gnostic.”

70 ibid.

themselves, not to our intelligence—for that is ‘of this world’—but to our original understanding of God.” (p. 65) Brunner suggests that:

[Barth] expects them to find admission to that part of our souls which is not imprisoned in the temporal and finite, but has remained an undisturbed reservoir for the voice of God, undistorted by the “culture” and adaptation to the world of merely human knowledge. Already here in the “pre-suppositions” there is a dualism at work which governs the whole book and with which Barth, on Paul’s side, stands over against our present-day developmental monism—the dualism of the Fall, the break in principle with the optimistic concept of evolution which rules almost undisputed over our religious, moral and scientific thought. (p. 65)

These remarks by Brunner sound strikingly similar to some of the general characteristics of Gnosticism. The idea of one’s soul being “imprisoned in the temporal and finite” has a very negative cast to it and seems to suggest that Barth has a very condemnatory view of nature, creation, and history.

It is well known in Barth scholarship that Romans\textsuperscript{1} was certainly not Barth’s definitive view on such matters. Indeed, almost as soon as Barth penned the last word of the first edition he began a revision. However, even in his second edition of Romans (Romans\textsubscript{2}), Barth still strongly insists on the “infinite qualitative distinction” between God and humanity and still disavows any meaningful role for history as a source of revelation apart from Christ. This latter commitment, as we have seen above, is also evidenced in Barth’s rejection of natural theology, which has also obviously contributed to the belief that Barth’s theology has a gnostic cast and that there is no ‘moral order’ in creation.

However, as we will try to argue in subsequent chapters, even though Barth rejects orders of creation and natural theology, this does not mean that there is no normativity in creation for Barth. On the contrary, there is normativity in nature and
history for Barth, but there is no normativity independent of Christology. Not only does Barth insist that the life and work of Christ provide us with the epistemological key to the nature, purpose and meaning of creation, but he also makes the even more controversial ontological claim that the structure and form of creation itself is Christological.\(^72\) (III.4, p. 39)

Barth arrives at this conclusion in the following way: The one God who commands is the God who is gracious to humanity in Jesus Christ. This God is also the Creator. Christ is the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:3), and creation is the place where God’s desire to have fellowship with humanity in and through the life-work of Jesus Christ takes place. Therefore the grace of God in Jesus Christ also includes within itself creation, and therefore the command of the Creator. (III.4, p. 39) Here Barth firmly establishes the noetic basis of creation, i.e. that it is only when we know the grace of God revealed in Christ as the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the dead as the kingdom of God, do we know what creation itself is, who its creator is, and what the creation is for. (p. 39) However, Barth continues on to say that the grace of God in Christ is also the ontological basis of the knowledge of creation. Barth makes this claim based

\(^72\) It is on this last point that Barth and O’Donovan diverge. In *Resurrection and Moral Order* O’Donovan criticizes Barth for suggesting that the moral order of creation is ontologically Christological. (p. 86) While O’Donovan agrees with Barth that Christology is the key to the meaning of the moral order, O’Donovan wants to insist that there is a moral order in creation that exists independently from Christology. O’Donovan criticizes Barth’s decision to make Christology the ontological ground of the created order because he thinks that by doing this Barth effectively denies that there are generic and teleological ordered relations within creation. Barth’s discussion of Grenzfall or the ‘boundary case,’ which seems to indicate that an action can fall outside the normal boundaries of what would be considered morally acceptable and still be judged to be good, seems to make Barth’s ethics radically voluntaristic. On the contrary, Barth’s ‘domains’ of creaturely life are reflections of the teleologically ordered covenantal relations which govern the moral life. A ‘boundary case’ still falls on the outer edge of the domain and is not properly considered an exception in Barth’s theological ethics, but only an unusual expression of the generic relations proper to that domain or sphere.
on the doctrine of God and the doctrine of election that we explored above, i.e. when Barth establishes the relationship between creation and revelation in the word and work of Jesus Christ.

The eternal decree of God that precedes creation and makes it possible and necessary is the gracious election of humanity in Christ. Thus, Barth argues, it is not the case that God first determined himself as Creator, and then created humanity, and then later decided to elect humanity and institute a covenant with humanity. Rather, Barth argues, it is for the sake of this election in relation to God’s instituting this election that God created heaven and earth and humanity. Barth says that God, “[C]reated the universe in Jesus Christ.” (III.4, p. 40) Jesus is the meaning and purpose of God’s creation of the universe.

To say that Jesus is the meaning and purpose of God’s creation of the universe is to say that creation exists for Christ and for the sake of God’s fellowship with humanity in Christ. This also means that God fashioned creation in such a way as to facilitate this relationship. Barth says that creation is marked off by a “yes” from God. We will see in the next chapter the significant of this “yes” that God says to creation. Suffice it to say, because creation is the theatre for God’s saving acts in history, God has fashioned or “fitted” creation for this purpose. As we will see in the next chapter, creation is the presupposition of grace, or the “external basis of the covenant” and the place where God’s covenant of grace is enacted and carried out. Therefore, Barth insists, there is nothing evil or imperfect or lacking in creation. Creation is suitable for God’s purposes. Creation itself witnesses to the divine “yes” and is pure benefit and grace for the creature.
Does this then mean for Barth that nature is grace itself? The answer, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, is no. Creation is fitted for grace and is the presupposition of grace, but is not grace itself. Barth does not collapse nature into grace. Creation is good. Creation is for God. And, perhaps even more astonishingly, in contrast to much of the Christian tradition, Barth’s doctrine of creation is so positive that he suggests that creation is not something from which to be “liberated” nor is it something that needs to be perfected or healed. Rather, the very structure of creation, which is itself Christologically determined but not equivalent to Christology, makes covenant relations with God possible. In other words, creation is the place in which the claim of God as grace confronts us. For Barth creation is the presupposition of grace whose moral order is fitted and “ordered for” covenantal relations.

Barth develops his understanding of the moral order of creation in his articulation of the four basic ‘spheres’ or ‘domains’ (Bereiche)\(^73\) of creaturely life in which we live. These are 1) as covenant partners with God; 2) as covenant partners with our fellows; 3) as creatures with a soul and body; and 4) as constituted in these three ways in time. Barth writes, “These domains are the domains in which God commands and in which human beings obey or disobey, but they are not laws according to which God commands and human beings do good or evil.”\(^74\) (III.4, p. 29 rev. Emphasis mine) Barth’s insistence that

\(^73\) The translators of the Church Dogmatics render the term Bereich as ‘sphere.’ However, here we will follow McKenny in his Analogy of Grace who translates the term as ‘domain,’ since domain seems to capture more accurately the notion of a place where the encounter with God’s command occurs. McKenny helpfully notices that it is difficult to visualize an event of personal encounter with the divine command as occurring in a ‘sphere.’ Furthermore, the concept of ‘domain’ helps to situate Barth’s idea of ‘boundary’ (Grenze). (p. 250n69)

\(^74\) Revised translation is from McKenny, p. 252.
these domains are the places in which God commands and in which human beings obey is significant because in this way Barth connects the domains to the Word of God. That is, Barth’s articulation of the domains as the place in which God’s command occurs and in which human beings obey is the way Barth reunites creation with God’s revelation in Christ. The domains are located in the history of the covenant of grace and not associated with any concept of history or nature which is independent of this history, or knowable through any independent knowledge of this history. It is in this way that Barth’s ‘domains’ are different from Brunner’s ‘orders.’ Also, Barth tries to do justice to the moral significance of created reality without identifying it with either the existing social and political arrangements or with the divine command itself. Thus, Barth appears to overcome the problems of created ‘orders’ while at the same time still insisting on the importance of history for human action, i.e. as the place where the encounter between human and the divine take place.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have endeavored to explain how the social and political problems of Barth’s day influenced the nature and direction of Barth’s theological writing. Specifically, we tried to show why Barth believed that National Socialism, which was theologically legitimized in part by an appeal to ‘orders of creation’ and ‘natural theology,’ was but a symptom of a more deeply problematic theological mistake, i.e. the false separation of the law and the gospel. For Barth, this separation of the law and the gospel, which also reflects a separation of creation and revelation, proceeds from the erroneous view that there are two words of God, i.e. a word of God of harsh law and a
word of God of grace. This mistaken viewpoint results in a distortion of the true nature of the gospel and the true nature of the law, which in turn results in an understanding of ethics as human self-justification which is manifested as idolatry.

Barth labors to correct this view by insisting that there are not two separate words of God but only one Word of God, which is definitively revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. By proceeding on the basis of this claim, Barth reformulates the traditional presentation of “law” and “gospel” into a “gospel-law” thesis. With this thesis, Barth insists on the inseparability of the gospel and the law, which thus denies that there is any dualism in God’s nature and self-communication. He also insists on the priority of the gospel to the law, which reflects the priority and primacy of God’s grace over righteousness. Third, Barth insists that the law is the “form” of the gospel, whose content is grace. With this last point, Barth argues that that the law is only made manifest in the person and work of Christ and thus the law confronts us as a claim of grace which orients us to Christ, and therefore frees us to live in the specific direction and obedience to be free to be covenant partners of God. This last point also contains the more controversial view that sanctification is also implied in election, which has turn has generated criticisms of Barth’s theology as being gnostic.

Barth develops this controversial view that sanctification is also implied in election in his doctrine of God, where he insists that a proper doctrine of God must also contain a doctrine of humanity. Barth claims that from eternity, God elects humanity in Christ so that humanity may enjoy fellowship with God as God’s covenant partner. God actualizes this good, i.e. God’s covenant relationship with humanity, in the person and work of Jesus Christ in time. Thus, Barth argues, in the person and work of Christ, Jesus
has accomplished the good in our place, which thus also establishes the authority of the law, and it only remains for human beings to witness to the good which was accomplished by Christ. The grace of God, which occurs in the life and work of Christ, thus summons us and sets us free be who we are, i.e. creatures who are created, reconciled, and redeemed in Christ.

The claim that Christ has accomplished the good in our place and that the command of God only confronts us from this Christological site has prompted criticisms that Barth’s theology is gnostic and that he evacuates history of any meaning, since the drama of human salvation takes place in the intra-Trinitarian relationship between God the Father and the Son in the Spirit. However, as we have seen, Barth has a positive role for history. Not only is God’s eternal decision to be gracious to humanity accomplished and actualized in time through the life-work of Jesus Christ, but God’s covenant history of grace contains the spheres or domains in which the encounter between humanity and God takes place. Creation itself is fitted for this purpose, i.e. to facilitate covenant relations with God and his creatures, and is the place where we are called to be ourselves, to be free to be creatures of God.

We will now turn to Barth’s doctrine of creation itself where we will examine the nature of the relationship between creation and revelation which informs Barth’s moral vision of creaturely life.
CHAPTER 2:

GOD EQUIPS CREATION FOR GRACE

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we examined the historical and theological situation of the 1930s which motivated Barth to disavow the theological legitimacy of the ‘orders of creation’ and ‘natural theology,’ concepts that Barth believed had arisen from the problematic separation of creation and revelation, law and gospel. We showed how Barth’s ‘gospel-law’ thesis was his attempt to reestablish the inextricable relationship between creation and revelation and how such a connection is grounded in Barth’s doctrine of election.

We turn now to the first “work” of God, i.e. creation. Barth expresses the relationship between creation and revelation dogmatically in the two-fold formulation: “creation is the external basis of the covenant” and “the covenant as the internal basis of creation.” This two-fold formulation provides the basis from which Barth’s doctrine of creation proceeds, and which Barth believes is supported by the witness of Genesis 1 and 2, respectively. The first creation saga reveals that creation is the external basis of God’s covenant of grace. The second creation saga reveals that God’s covenant of grace is the internal basis of creation. In order to show how Barth understands the relationship between nature and grace, creation and revelation, we will undertake a close examination of Barth’s exegesis of the first creation saga found in Genesis 1-2: 4a in this chapter and

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we will take a close look at the second creation saga found in Genesis 2: 4a- 25 in Chapter 3. Furthermore, because Barth insists that Christology is both the noetic and ontological ground of the doctrine of creation Barth will interpret the Genesis sagas “dogmatically.” This dogmatic reading of the Genesis text will produce an understanding of creation as that which corresponds to God’s eternal “yes” and “no” in God’s election of humanity to himself in Jesus Christ. Thus, with respect to Barth’s claim that “creation is the external basis of the covenant,” we will show that the divine “yes” and “no” which God speaks in creation will establish the order, structure, boundaries and limits for the creation that will serve as the gift of life for God’s covenant history.

Methodologically we will take Barth’s exegesis of Gen 1 – 2:4a in the order in which he presents it, since Barth views the architectonic structure of this creation saga from the Priestly source as being theologically significant. Throughout our interpretation of Barth’s exegesis of the Genesis texts we will also point out how Barth’s dogmatic interpretation of the text gives shape to certain aspects of his ethics as well.

In the first part of this chapter we will explain how creaturely life is to be understood as a gift from God for God’s covenant. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to exploring Barth’s exegesis of the Genesis text itself. In the course of our examination, we hope to establish the following points. First, that Barth understands creation to have a specific order and purpose and this order and purpose itself

prophetically witnesses to Christ. Second, Barth’s understanding of the “being of nothingness,” i.e. the chaos reality which God passes over in Gen 1:2 which corresponds to the divine “no”, implies that there is no dualism in Barth’s doctrine of creation. We will also focus on why God’s act of separating the cosmos into its distinctive elements is an act of grace and sign of God’s protection of the creature from chaos. In other words, we will show why God’s creation is an environment which is for the benefit of the creature and thus an environment in which the creature is to feel safe, secure, and at home—it is the place most suited for the creature to live.

The rest of the chapter will focus on Barth’s exegesis of the sixth and seventh day of creation in detail since here we can see how Barth describes creaturely life and action as that which corresponds to God’s divine life and action. With respect to the creation of the animals, we argue that Barth conceives of a specific relationship and order between human and non-human creation. We will show that while it is true that the goal of creation for human beings is to realize covenant relationship with God, this “anthropocentric” view of creation does not in any way suggest that human beings are to see themselves as wholly superior to non-human creation. Indeed, we will see why the land animals are important witness to human beings with respect to the nature of creaturely life, including humility and dependence.

With respect to the creation of humanity, we will see how humanity is the creaturely repetition of the intra-Trinitarian divine life and why creaturely reality finds its specific and concrete form as a single species created in the duality of the sexes. The key theme for Barth in this passage will be his insistence that the human being cannot understand herself as properly human if she understands herself as a solitary individual.
Barth will pursue this line of thinking in much greater detail in his exegesis of Genesis 2, which we will treat in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Finally, we will argue that Barth’s interpretation of the seventh day of creation is extremely important for understanding Barth’s theological ethics. God’s decision to rest on the seventh day reveals God’s decision to set a limit on creation and determine its specific content, which in turn reveals God as a God of freedom and a God of love. In other words Barth argues that freedom and love can only be exercised within limits. Whereas God chose to limit God’s self to be in relationship with this specific creation and with those who live in it, so too are creatures to understand their life as constituted by limits, which allows them to live freely and to love God in return. Barth’s exegesis of the seventh day will play an important role in his treatment of the creature’s obligation to God on the Sabbath in III.4 § 53 “Freedom for God” and human work more generally in III.4 § 56 “Freedom in limitation” in which Barth discusses the concept of vocation.

In short, for Barth, one of the principal themes of Genesis 1 is that it reveals that creation is sufficient as it is. It is not just any arbitrary place, but it is this place, created in this specific way, and is created in such a way that it is suited and equipped for a specific history, i.e. the history of God’s covenant of grace with God’s creation. Thus, creation is made for God’s creatures. The creature, therefore, should not desire that creation be made in any other way. She is called to delight in her existence as a creature in the creation that is secured with boundaries and limits for her benefit.
2.2 Creaturely Life as a Gift from God for God’s Covenant

With respect to his claim that “creation is the external basis of the covenant,”
Barth understands Genesis 1 to establish that *nature is the equipment for grace.* As the equipment for grace, creation consists of both the material and the space that God has created so that God may execute his covenant with humanity. Furthermore, this creation, because it was created *by God and created for* the express purpose of covenant relations with God, cannot claim any divergent purposes or claims for itself. God in God’s wisdom has made creation suitable for God’s purposes and for nothing else. Barth explains:

Creation is the formal presupposition of the covenant in which God fulfills the will of His free love. God loves His creature and therefore a being which originally belongs to Him as the One who loves, to which nothing that happens from the side of God, the Lord of this covenant, can be foreign, and which in this respect cannot assert or maintain any divergent claims of its own. Creation is one long preparation, and therefore the being and existence of the creature one long readiness, for what God will intend to do with it in the history of the covenant. *Its nature is simply its equipment for grace.* Its creatureliness is pure promise, expectation, and prophecy of that which in His grace, in the execution of His eternal love, an finally and supremely in the consummation of the giving of His Son, God plans for man and will not delay to accomplish for man’s benefit. (III.1, p. 231) [emphasis mine]

It cannot be overemphasized that creation is a *specific* reality and a *specific* place. It is *this* creation and not an arbitrary creation that was foreordained by the wisdom of God for human beings to realize covenant relations with God. Furthermore, the human being is not just any subject, but a *specific* subject, she is not just any creature, but she is *this* creature, the one who is to be God’s partner in God’s covenant history. Thus, the human being is the “nature which God in His grace willed to address and accept and the man predestined for His service.” (III.1, p. 231)
To say that creation is the equipment for grace is not to suggest that it is merely instrumental and as such has no integrity or meaning of its own. While it is true that Barth will insist that creation does not have any independent meaning or purpose apart from God’s covenantal purposes, this does not mean that creation is in any way to be devalued or denigrated. Indeed, throughout our investigation we will see that Barth radically affirms the goodness of creation because it has an ontology that is covenantal in structure. In fact it is precisely because God has equipped creation for grace by providing it with its own covenantal ontology that it must be respected for what it is. This in turn suggests why creation does not exist for its own sake. Barth writes:

It has no claim to a right inherent in its being and nature, to a meaning which has not first been received, to a goal, which has fixed for itself, to a purpose which it has in and for itself, to a dignity independent of the free will of its Creator. (III.1, pp. 94-95)

In other words, creation is not something that can be properly understood or assessed outside of God’s purposes for it. The meaning and value of creation can only be properly understood in relation to the reason and purpose for which God decided to create anything at all. The reason why God decided to create, Barth argues, was because God did not will to be alone in God’s own glory. (III.1, p. 95)

Specifically, because God did not will to be alone, God willed to be in relationship with that which God created outside of God’s self. As a result, God made creation in such a way that it would be naturally equipped to participate in this relationship. Thus, because God made creation for this relationship the creature must understand herself as always already related to God. To forget this fundamental fact is precisely what Barth believed the theology of the ‘orders of creation’ had done.
However, to be clear, creation is not itself the covenant nor is creation to be confused with the covenant. Barth writes:

The existence and being of the one loved are not identical with the fact that it is loved. This can be said only in respect of the love with which God loves Himself—the Father the Son and the Son the Father in the Holy Spirit. [...] The existence and being of the creature willed and constituted by God are the object and to that extent the presupposition of [God’s] love. Thus the covenant is the goal of creation and creation the way to the covenant. (III.1 p. 97)

Creation, then, makes the covenant possible, i.e. creation prepares and establishes the sphere in which the institution and history of the covenant will take place. Creation makes possible the human being who is to be God’s partner in this history. In short, creation is the nature which the grace of God is to adopt and to which God is to turn in this history.

In order to illustrate this point more clearly, Barth argues that understanding creation as the external basis of God’s covenant is similar to the way in which one understands the nature and purpose of a temple which is built in order to accommodate the liturgy that it is going to serve. However, in the case of creation, it is not human hands that have made creation, but rather the love of God that provides the pattern and order of creation. This is what Barth means when he says that creation is the presupposition of God’s love, which is created for the execution of God’s covenant of grace.

Furthermore, the whole of creation is the necessary preparation for grace and thus serves as the prophetic witness to God’s covenantal purposes, the goal of which is articulated in the work of God on the seventh day, i.e. God’s Sabbath rest. Creation and creaturely life are a gift given for the purpose of being with God in God’s Sabbath rest.
As we will see later, Barth’s understanding of God’s rest on the seventh day sets the framework for subsequent human action and is why Barth’s special ethics of creation as articulated in III.4 begins with fellowship with God in the act of prayer, confession, and worship.

After having established the reason and purpose of God’s decision to create and thus establishing that creaturely life is a gift from God and thus also ordered to be in relationship with God, we will now turn to Barth’s interpretation of the architectonic structure of the priestly Genesis saga in order to see how he understands the nature of creaturely life more specifically.

2.3 A Divinely Ordered World for the Sake of Creaturely Life

Barth’s view of the Genesis saga as that which corresponds to God’s eternal decision in Christ is extremely significant for Barth since it captures the nature of the relationship between the divine life of activity and creaturely life of activity. Hence, since Barth understands creaturely reality to correspond to God’s divine reality, Barth understands the architectonic structure of the first creation saga, which reveals God’s works and the nature of creaturely reality, to witness to this correspondence. Barth understands God’s works on days 1-3 to correspond to the works of God on days 4-6. He also argues that all of the works of God on days 1-6 are a great preparation for the Sabbath rest of the seventh day. And, of course, all of these works correspond to God’s eternal decision to elect humanity. Hence, we will follow the order of his exegesis for our purposes as well.
2.3.1 The Triumph of Order over Chaos (Gen 1:1-2)

With the opening line of Genesis, i.e. “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,” Barth wants to emphasize two points. First, it is God who created, which means that creation is intentional and purposeful and not an act of folly. Second, God created the heavens and the earth. The creation of the heavens and the earth themselves reflect the mutual relationship between God and humanity. Barth writes:

Thus, the work of this beginning was not an accidental thing, either self-formed or formed by a strange idea and force, but a cosmos, the cosmos, the divinely ordered world in which heaven and earth—a picture of the relationship between God and man in the covenant of grace—confronted one another in mutual separation and interconnexion as an upper sphere and lower: the one essentially invisible to man; the other essentially visible; the one transcending him in unknown heights, the other his own and entrusted to him. (III.1, p. 99)

Thus, we can see with his interpretation of the very first verse of Genesis 1 that Barth is concerned to show that the cosmos was a divine act of accomplishment in which God already has his relationship to humanity clearly in view. This interpretation also reflects Barth’s concern to rule out from the very beginning any understanding of creation which is separated from God’s covenantal purposes, since as we saw in Chapter 1, Barth believes that such a division between the two leads to idolatry and produces an ethics of self-justification. This means that no other configuration of creation is to be sought after or desired by the creature because no other configuration of creation is for the benefit of the creature. We forget this, literally, at our peril. The current order of the cosmos is sufficient for God’s purposes and our life. To wish for anything else is to misunderstand not only what one already has, but also who one already is.
Barth’s insistence that it is *this* world and no other that is proper to us as creatures can be seen even more clearly in Barth’s interpretation of Gen 1:2. Barth’s interpretation of this verse is not only unique, but is also decisively significant for a proper understanding of the doctrine of creation. Specifically, Barth’s exegesis of this verse bears out his claim that God’s creation corresponds to God’s concrete “yes” and “no” in Jesus Christ. However, as we will see, this does not imply that there is any dualism in Barth’s understanding of creation. Rather, Barth argues that the “chaos reality” that God passes over before he utters his first creative word, “Let there be light,” is ontologically nothing and as such is not properly part of creation or a pre-existing force with which God had to contend with before he created.76

Gen 1:2 reads: “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” Whereas most biblical commentators are concerned with discerning whether or not this verse represents a primal or rudimentary state of the world, which is self-originating or willed and posited by God, Barth says that this is not what is at stake in the verse. Rather, Barth suggests that Gen 1:2 represents the possibility of a world which God in God’s creative decision has ignored and despised, i.e. like a human builder who decides on one project and by so doing

76 For an excellent study on Barth’s understanding of nothingness see Wolf Krötke’s *Barth on Sin and Nothingness*, translated and edited by Philip G. Ziegler and Christiana-Maria Bammel, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005).

77 Barth points out that Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin understand it to be the latter, i.e. the *informis materia quam ex nihilo Deus* [unformed matter which God first created from nothing]. However, Barth insists that this *opinio communis* must be resisted. Barth argues that, “[C]ertainly according to 1 there is a chaos, and a very definite divine relationship to chaos. But the view that God first created chaos, that He accomplished a ‘positing of the formless and unordered universe’ […] and only then called out of this *rudis indigestaque moles* [coarse and disordered mass] the reality of heaven and earth potentially existing in it, is not only entirely foreign to the rest of the Bible but also to these first verses of Genesis. (III.1, p. 100)
doing thus rejects other possibilities. This “possibility” that God rejects can be thought of as sort of a “world-state” over which the creative Word of God did not speak and consequently has no reality of its own. (III.1, p. 108) Barth explains that Gen 1:2 is “a portrait, deliberately taken from myth, of the world which according to His revelation was negated, rejected, ignored, and left behind in His actual creation, i.e. the utterance of his Word.” (III.1, p. 108)

Barth argues that this “world-state” which the divine power of God passed over is real, but that it is real only in an absurd way, i.e. it is real only in the sense that it represents the possibilities for creation that were rejected, but in itself has no meaning. Barth’s interpretation of this passage also explains why Barth insists that the only thing that has any meaning in itself, i.e. the only thing that is truly real, and thus ontologically real, is that which God posits by God’s creative Word. Thus, this world-state that was rejected by God has no existence, essence or goodness. Seen from the standpoint of God, it is the epitome of that which was. It is a state of chaos that was not part of the primal or rudimentary state of the earth which was still to be created and will be declared good.

Barth’s interprets Gen 1:2 as corresponding to God’s eternal decision to elect humanity. That is, “before” God’s eternal decision to be gracious to humanity there were other possible relationships that could have been realized between God and humanity, but God rejected these possibilities. God determined himself to be gracious to humanity, which includes God’s rejection of sin and thus why, as we will see later, sin is ontologically nothing and only exists in an absurd way. That God is the God who is gracious to humanity is only reality that exists for God and for humanity.
2.3.2 Declaration for Life: The Creation of Light: The First Work of God (Gen 1: 3-5)

Barth’s interpretation of Gen 1: 3 is a further explanation as to the significance of God’s decision to pass over chaos reality in Gen 1: 2. Barth understands God’s declaration, “Let there be light!” as the “irruption and revelation of the divine compassion,” since it reveals that “once and for all the Word of God went out against the rejected and vanished reality of an alien and hostile creature.” (III.1, p. 110) While this statement may seem to imply a dualism in creation, i.e. that God has to battle with another hostile “creature” that God did not create, it is helpful to understand that this is not what Barth means. Indeed, it is difficult for Barth to talk of that which has no ontology, without using ontological categories to explain it! For Barth something only truly has creaturely status if it is posited by the creative word of God. Chaos-reality may be considered a “creature” only in the sense that it is that which “exists” [negatively] outside of God and is inferior to God. As such, it is properly understood as “nothing” [das Nichtig]. Chaos-reality only “exists” in that it represents the possibility which has been rejected. Thus, created reality is that which comes into being through God’s speech.

God’s act of speech not only confers upon creaturely reality its essence and existence but God’s speech also reveals something about God, namely that God exists and acts in time. Furthermore, God’s creative speech also demonstrates that the creature comes into being by God who creates through a free and divine declaration. With this insistence Barth avoids any notion of creation as “emanating” from the being of God, thus preserving creaturely being as that which is “wholly other than God” and that which does not possess its own divinity. (III.1, p. 110) Correlatively, because God posits the
creature as wholly other than God, the Word of God also establishes the *disposition of the creature* to live in response to God’s Word. Thus, at the very beginning of Genesis 1 we can see Barth’s efforts to lay the grounds for understanding creaturely life and action as *response-ability*, i.e. being constituted to live in response to God’s creative Word.

Barth’s interpretation of Gen 1: 4, “And God saw that the light was good and God separated the light from the darkness,” is also instructive with respect to the “being” of chaos-reality and how God’s creation corresponds to God’s “yes” and “no” in the person of Christ. Barth understands the first Genesis saga as the prophetic witness to God’s covenant of grace and, like the theme of his favorite Grünewald painting, is always pointing toward the covenant, i.e. God’s reconciliation with humanity. This is no less true for how he interprets the meaning of light and darkness in verse 4.

Unlike the chaos-reality that God passes over and which therefore has no ontological status, Barth argues that darkness is a *creature* of God and therefore has a properly creaturely *role* to play in creation. However, natural darkness has only one role, i.e. to declare the truth that God vanquishes chaos-reality. Light, on the other hand, has a two-fold role. First, it, too, testifies negatively to the fact that chaos-reality has been vanquished. More importantly, light has positive role. Light points to the will of God as the “irresistible and irrevocable declaration of life.” (III.1, p. 117) Here we have Barth’s first definition of what it means to be a creature, namely, to be a creature is to be 1) created by God’s Word and 2) that which testifies and points to God’s work.

Also, since natural light declares the positive will of God for life, Barth argues that it is the condition under which all of God’s subsequent works will take place. God will not create “in darkness,” since this would mean God would create “under the sign of
the proclamation of the present and future of that rejected and vanished reality, i.e. under the sign of untruth.” (III.1, p. 117) This rejected reality will never be today or tomorrow but is always past and not a part of God’s creation. (III.1, p.117) The creation of light will be the announcement of what God is going to do in Gen 1: 6-8 and beyond. This is yet more evidence that the creature is to apprehend the cosmos and all that is created as good and an unequivocal affirmation of life.

2.3.3 Conquering Chaos and Securing a Living Space: The Work of the Second and Third Day (Gen 1: 6-13)

Barth continues to explore the relationship between chaos-reality and creation when he considers God’s work of the second day. Gen 1: 6 reads: “And God said, ‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters’.” For Barth, the waters above the dome represent chaos-reality and the water below the dome represent the waters of the earth.

Strictly speaking, Barth argues that it is not until God begins to establish these boundaries in Gen 1: 6-8 that God actually accomplishes this vanquishing of chaos-reality. Again, since this text is the prophetic witness to God’s action in Christ, Barth interprets Gen 1: 6 as corresponding to God’s vanquishing of chaos-reality, i.e. sin and death, which has taken place in the Christ event. In Christ’s death and resurrection, God himself confronts sin and death and conquers it once and for all. By conquering sin and death God frees the creature from sin, and thereby frees the creature to live as reconciled to God in Christ. What God accomplishes in Christ is reflected in Barth’s exegesis of Gen 1: 6-8 in that it is through the establishing of boundaries, i.e. by separating creation
from chaos reality, that God secures creation to be free from threat and thus may live freely for God.

The creation of light and its separation from darkness in Gen 1: 3-5 was not only itself a pointer to what God would accomplish in Christ, but it is also a pointer to what was actually to be accomplished on the second day. The work of the second day actually secures the earth as a theatre for life and crushes the ‘power’ of the uncreated chaos-reality. Barth writes:

what was present as the sign of darkness when God spoke, being rejected and perishing by His creative utterance, is revealed only when the first step is taken towards the actual establishment of order proclaimed by the creation of light. Perishing with commencing time, in the light which was created by God’s Word, with the dawn and completion of the second day, the infinite waste of waters is revealed as the absolute antithesis of the ordered world of heaven and earth, as an enemy of all life, as the death of every possibility of life. (III.1, p. 133)

Thus, by establishing this boundary, God relegates chaos-reality to an “existence” of separation from the rest of creation. By so doing, God destroys the sovereignty of chaos “in the liquidation of its finality, form, and structure” through a division into “waters above” and “waters below.” In this division chaos can no longer speak a “final inimical mortal word, but can only be a last threat which cannot make man and his world impossible and destroy them.” (III.1, p. 133) In other words, chaos can be nothing more than a threat and has no real power over the created world. One of the tasks of creaturely

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78 By using the term power, one may think that Barth is setting up sort of a Manichean dualism between the power of God and another power. However, Barth understand the ‘power’ of chaos-reality as only a power of being “antithetical” to God’s ordered world. In other words, the sole “being” of chaos-reality, and thus its “power” is only that it “threatens” creation. This is why it must be understood as the “the enemy of all life” and the “death of every possibility of life.” Even in this understanding of chaos-reality, we can see that Barth emphasizes the meaningfulness of an ordered created reality and what must be rejected is any notion of a disordered or “neutral” creation. Thus, here again we can see that Barth supports the notion of a meaningful and ordered created reality, by way of emphasizing that what God conquers is chaos and disorder.
life is to recognize that chaos-reality is the threat that has been rendered powerless by
God. It is only in our blindness that we grant chaos-reality more power and reality than it
actually has.

It will be helpful to pause here for a moment to think about this, since to
understand this will allow one to also understand why Barth will talk about sin as that
which is ontologically nothing and thus explains why sin is absurd. One way to think
about this is to consider how someone might be frightened by her shadow. First, a
shadow is caused by light shining onto an object. Thus, it is in this way that God’s
revelation (signified as light) reveals the truth of nothingness, its empty character, i.e.
that it is “nothing.” Yet it appears to be real and thus it is a threat to us because it
deceives us. One’s shadow has no “being,” it has no ontology, yet it appears to be
something real. Indeed, this is precisely the “power” that sin and nothingness exercises
over us. This is why the creature must rely on the Word of God (light) to tell it the truth.

The Word of God declares to the creature that chaos-reality, which represents sin
and nothingness and death, has already been vanquished by God and thus why the
creature may live freely. It exists as that which is “passing away,” and as such is “part”
of creation, but again only in an absurd way. While chaos still threatens and continues to
threaten, it cannot prevent the cosmos from being what God intends for it. Thus, chaos
has no creative capacity. It now “exists” only as a sign that creation could have been a
catastrophe for the creature. The creature has no power to avert this and only God alone
had the power to avert it. (III.1, p. 133) Barth will continue to fill out the significance of
God’s establishing of boundaries in order to secure the living space for humanity in Gen
2.4 God Gives the Creature Time, Autonomy, and Blessing

As we mentioned earlier, Barth understands the works of days 1-3 as corresponding to God’s works in days 4-6. Thus, God’s declaration “let there be light” on the first day of creation corresponds to the creation of the heavenly luminaries which mediate light on the fourth day in Gen 1: 14-19. God’s separation of the upper and lower firmament corresponds to God’s work in the 5th day where God creates the birds of the sea and the fish of the air. Finally, God’s separation of the land from the water secures the living space for the creation of the land animals and humanity. Thus, this second half of this Genesis saga reveals more fully the nature of creaturely life as that which exists in time, has its own autonomy, and whose action is blessed by God.

2.4.1 Light and the Knowledge of Time: The Work of the Fourth Day (Gen 1: 14-19)

The prophetic witness of Gen 1: 14-19 is significant for Barth’s theology because it is here where Barth thinks that the creature is supplied with the knowledge of time. Significantly, time is one of the “domains” in which the command of God speaks and which constitutes the being of the creature. Barth understands the fourth work of God to declare that the creature lives in the time of light. The purpose of these luminaries is to mediate the objective message of the will of God (light) to all the creatures of the earth, but supremely to humanity for whom the message is present in force and to which humanity must hear and obey. The luminaries, for Barth, are representative of who Christ will be for creation.

The luminaries communicate to the creature that the creature is not heavenly but earthly. And, they declare that even though she is earthy, she is created in the sign of
light and thus possesses time, i.e. the divinely created time of light. The creature not only possesses time, but also is called to have knowledge of it and fulfill it. (III.1, p. 156) In short, the creature needs this light not simply so natural light will shine up on him, but in order that by her senses and reason may participate in it, and herself become light.” (III.1, p. 157) Thus, the “office” of these lights is to “summon man in relation to his Maker to sight, consciousness and activity. If humans lived in a world without this presupposition, they could not have been created in the image of God nor called to be a partner in the divine covenant of grace.” (III.1, p.157) Time is a constitutive feature of creaturely reality and is essential to the relationship between Creator and creature. As such, it is one of the “domains” in which God and the creature encounter one another in the ethical event.

2.4.2 God Blesses Creaturely Autonomy: The Work of the Fifth Day (Gen 1: 20-23)

Barth’s description of creaturely life and action becomes even more specific in his exploration of God’s work of the fifth day. With the appearance of autonomous living creatures we now have an intimation of the creation of humanity. Barth further suggests that the emergence of independent life in both sea and air (areas where humanity cannot inhabit) is a sign of God’s control over these spheres against chaos. Thus, Barth reasons, human beings who live on land should not fear their environment and should be confident in God’s control. If God can secure life for the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, the spheres of creation where humanity cannot survive, how much more should humans feel God’s favor, mercy, and protection when they dwell on the dry land set aside specifically for their benefit. Humanity should feel confident by looking into the spheres of the air
and the sea and not be afraid. (III.1, p. 169) Here, again, is another reinforcement of the theme that the creature should not fear its environment and should understand it purely as benefit.

With the command “be fruitful and multiply” to the birds of the air and fish of the sea, Barth argues that here we have the first instance of God’s blessing on creaturely action. (III.1, p. 169) Barth suggests that this blessing was not necessary for all that had been created previously, i.e. the light, firmament, earth, vegetation and luminaries, since these creatures are witnesses to God in themselves. They do not need a blessing because they have no autonomy; there is no other possibility for these creatures to be and act in any other way. Barth writes, “at the creation of light, the firmament, the earth, vegetation, and luminaries there was no question of any such blessing, nor was it demanded. These things seem to be blessed by being what they are.” (III.1, p. 169) However, since the fish and the birds are autonomous living creatures, the divine blessing will be necessary for the animal creation, especially if it is to continue and multiply into new individuals.

A creature is blessed when it is “authorized and empowered, with a definite promise of success, for one particular action as distinct from another which is also a possibility.” (III.1, p. 170) This is why the animal creation is in special need of the divine blessing.

The procreation of posterity, and therefore the existence of nature in the form of natural history, of a sequence generations, is a definite venture where it has the form of a spontaneous act of a creature qualified for the purpose. And it is a venture for which, by reason of its similarity with the divine activity, it requires divine permission and the divine promise if it is not to be arrogant and purposeless. (III.1, p. 170)
Those things that were created before autonomous beings are blessed in and of themselves, without the need of a special blessing. However, with the creation of autonomous beings, which have the power for spontaneous activity, e.g. procreation, such an activity requires divine permission because of its similarity with divine activity. Here we have another example of how creaturely activity corresponds to God’s own divine activity.

With the emergence of creatures who have the power for spontaneous activity, Barth suggests that the problem of history as a continuation of creation appears for the first time. This “problem” of history appears in the form of the problem of the sequence of procreation, i.e. fatherhood and sonship, which, Barth argues, will be characteristic of the biblical history of the covenant. Thus, Barth suggests that here with the creation of autonomous creatures, we have an “introductory prologue” which announces the theme of covenant history to follow, i.e. the establishment of a covenant between God and his creation which moves independently like God and renews itself by procreation after its kind. (III.1, p. 170) Barth writes:

What is here revealed, still as an element in the history of creation but already as an element in the history of the covenant, is that there will be a God-like creature ordained for fatherhood and sonship and continuing its existence in the relationship of fatherhood and sonship. It is not to strive against Him but to be at peace with Him; not to live in impotence but in power; not in its own arrogance and strength but in the strength of His blessing, authorization and promise, living and active in fruitful begetting. (III.1, p. 170)

The fact that God blesses also reveals that God is a God of grace. God is gracious because God does not will for creaturely nature to be futile or unfruitful. Rather, this blessing reveals the goodness of the Creator who does not allow creaturely nature to exist in relative independence and self-propulsion without permission and hope, but “wills in
all friendliness to bear and surround and rule it in the exercise of the freedom granted to it.” (III.1, p. 170) If God can secure this blessing even in the most inhospitable regions of the air and the sea (where Barth suggests the wrath of God is directly visible), then there is not any part of creation that does not bear witness to the sign of the covenant. (III.1, p. 171) Again, God’s blessing and promise to these creatures are a further indication to humanity that it should not be afraid of its environment nor fear its own purpose. Furthermore, creaturely action is seen as being ordered in a specific direction for a specific purpose. Creaturely action is not to be regarded as neutral but always purposeful and in a direction which itself corresponds to God’s own divine action.

2.5 The Creaturely Witness and Company of the Land Animals

For Barth, Gen 1: 24-30 depicts the creation of the land animals and humanity, which will be the final form of creation to which God will look back from God’s rest on the seventh day. However, while the sixth day is the termination of God’s creative acts, it is not the climax or completion of creation. That will take place on the seventh day. The creation of the land animals serves as a transitional work for Barth in multiple ways. First, the land animals are the last of God’s creations until humanity. Second, they serve as a “prefiguration” of what is to come with humanity. In other words, the work of the sixth day is both a termination of the works of the first five days, and the beginning of a new work as well.

79 Barth calls them the wild beasts. However, in order to carry the distinction which Barth makes in day 5 about the animals who inhabit the air and the sea, it would seem that it would be helpful to call the beasts the “land animals,” since they will serve as an even closer prototype to human beings than the fish and the birds.
As we have seen, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea were created to live in the areas where humans do not dwell. However, we are now told that God creates some animals to live specifically on land, which is the protected place set aside for humanity. The land animals are to be companions for humanity since they are thus more akin to humanity in ways distinctive from the birds and the fish. Also, while the land animals did not receive a direct blessing to be fruitful and multiply themselves, Barth suggests that, as a continuation of the work of the 5th day, the land animals are included in this blessing as well. (III.1, p. 179) Barth also argues that since human beings and animals are created on the same day, human beings cannot be viewed in isolation, but must be considered in their environment and company with the animals.\textsuperscript{80} It is in our relationship with the land animals, Barth argues, that we can come to understand some significant features of our own creaturely reality.

One of these features is that even though human being will be given precedence and granted dominion over the animals, humanity is clearly dependent on the rest of creation, though the rest of creation has no need of humanity whatsoever. Furthermore, humanity always has before it the animal world that also, as created by the will and Word of God, submits to this will and Word of God. Although the animals are not free in the same sense that humanity is free, the animals submit to the will and Word of God in their own real and complete way and present a “humble recognition of their creatureliness.” (III.1, p. 178) The animals do not forget their creaturely status but maintain it in their dignity and limitation. Indeed, Barth insists that in all their unfreedom the animals bring

\textsuperscript{80} This theological commitment might go a long way to further work in animal ethics.
before humanity the perfect essence of uncreated being (i.e. God) long before human
beings in their freedom are aware of it and decide to recognize it. Thus, the animal
kingdom tacitly asks humanity the question: in what way can this also be said of you?
How will you be self-evident praise of the creator? Even though the animals are inferior
to humanity, they have their dignity as humanity’s constant companion and forerunner.
(III.1, pp. 177-178) The fact of this witness and the natural companionship between
human beings and animals also features prominently Barth’s discussion of how human
beings should treat animal life in III.4.

In his ethics of creation III.4 §55.1 “Respect for Life” Barth pauses to consider
the special responsibility that human beings may have with respect to the animals and
non-human creation since “[t]he close connection between man and beasts at any rate is a
fact…and the relationship is so unmistakable.” (III.4, p. 349) Since God commands in
the domain of respect for human life, Barth asks whether there is a corresponding
command in relation to animal life and vegetable life. While he argues that “one must
refuse to build either ethics as a whole or this particular part of ethics on the view and
concept of a life which embraces man, beast, and plant,” he does say it is important to
stop and consider the ethical problem of our relation to the life of animals and to some
extent our relation to plants as well.81 (III.4, p. 349)

81 Barth’s refusal to build an ethics around the shared existence of humanity, animals, and plants is
further illustrative of his refusal to do any natural theology and reinforces his claim that good human action
is only that which witnesses to the good which was accomplished in Christ. Indeed, Barth will say that
human responsibility and “respect for life” towards non-human life is to be considered analogously to
God’s command in the domain of “respect for life”, which is specifically respect for human life. Barth
could not establish a separate “domain” for God’s command with respect to animal and plant life, since it
would not have the same decisive Christological determination as the rest of the four domains.
It must first be explained that Barth does not want to develop an ethics which embraces the concept of life as it is shared by plant, animal, and beast because our responsibility to respecting human life is different from the responsibility humans have toward animal and plant life. Nevertheless, Barth does believe that human beings do have a responsibility toward non-human life. This special responsibility rests primarily on the fact that the world of animals and plants “form the living background to the living-space divinely allotted to man and placed under human control.” (III.4, p. 350) As plants and animals live, so does humanity. However, Barth insists that human beings are not set up as lords over the earth, but as lords on the earth, which was furnished with plants and animals before the creation of humanity. Hence, while animals and plants do not belong to humanity (they belong to God), humanity does take precedence over them, since the plants and animals are humanity’s “means of life.”

According to Barth, humanity has a differentiated responsibility to plants and animals. With respect to plants, Barth understands human vegetable nourishment or nourishment which is secured from the harvest as making “sensible use of its superfluity.” The only possible limit that human beings must exercise with respect to its consumption and use of vegetation and food grown from the harvest, Barth argues, “lies in the nature of man as a rational being and beyond that in his vocation in relation to God and his fellow-men.” (III.4, p. 351) Such limitation includes the denial of complete human license over creation. Barth writes, “on a larger scale there is much senseless waste and destruction from which a reverent humanity should refrain in this sphere and of

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82 Contrast this with Aquinas’ discussion of natural law in which self-preservation is that which belongs properly to all things that live.
which it has obviously been guilty only to its own destruction.” (ibid.) There is no doubt that Barth would applaud the recent movements of environmental awareness and protection as representing responsible human action towards non-human creation, but that he would reject any extreme form of environmental “ethics” which might claim that humanity is acting unethically anytime it fells a tree or picks a flower or kills a bee.

While humanity must have a proper regard for the vegetative and plant life of creation, so, too, must humanity have an even greater respect for animal life. Barth argues that “the nearness of the animal to man irrevocably means that when man kills a best he does something which is at least very similar to homicide.” (III.4, p. 352) If we do have the freedom to kill animals, Barth insists, then it must be undertaken with a special mindful responsibility. Barth does not think that it is self-evident that human beings have the “natural right” to kill animals. For Barth, to exercise lordship over the animals does not mean we have the natural and original right to kill them. God’s original creative intention was for human beings and animals to co-exist with one another without the need for humans to deprive animals of their life. It is only after the fall, Barth contents, that God granted humanity a special permission to kill the animals, but that this permission was principally with respect to the taking of animal life to sacrifice them to God, not to eat the animals for our own pleasure.84

The fact that human beings are commanded to sacrifice the animals is precisely to remind human beings that they themselves have sacrificed their own lives over to death because of their own transgression. Thus, the animals remind human beings of their own

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83 Barth’s full treatment of the relationship of human beings to animals is in III.4, pp. 352-356.

84 Barth points to Gen 4 and Gen 8 to substantiate this claim.
guilt. Indeed, Barth insists that when the human beings are commanded to sacrifice animals this is in fact an act of renouncing their own use of the animals. Only in the form of the sacrificial meal does the human being receive back something of what has been surrendered to God. Thus, Barth argues the killing of the animals should always be undertaken with a special mindfulness and repentance, since God’s giving humanity special permission to kill the animals is in itself a sign of “interim” time between creation and redemption, in which human beings and animals compete with each other. Barth believes that this truth should be made more manifest and even suggests that over every door where human beings exercise lordship over the animals, “especially across every hunting lodge, abattoir, and vivisection chamber, there should be written the letters of fire the words of St. Paul in Rom 8:18f.”

Thus, even in his discussion of human responsibility towards the animals we can see the influence of Barth’s Christological determination of creation.

Let us now turn to the creation of humanity itself.

2.6 The Creation of Humanity as Imago Dei

Whereas the land animals witness to many important elements of creaturely life, autonomy, humility, dependence, etc., Barth argues that human creaturely reality is

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85 Romans 8: 18-25 reads, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes *for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (NRSV)
distinctive because humanity is created *imago dei*. However, Barth’s articulation of the *imago dei* is a decisive break of traditional view of this concept. Whereas much the Christian tradition has understood humanity’s creation as *imago dei* to indicate some distinctive *capacity* which human beings *possess* or which is *inherent in the human person itself* and as distinct from the rest of creation, e.g. rationality, emotional capability, a soul, etc., Barth does not understand the significance of *imago dei* in this way. Rather, Barth argues, to be created *imago dei* is to be created *in correspondence* to God. Specifically, human beings are created in *correspondence to God’s inner-Trinitarian divine life*, which is to be a “being-in-encounter.”

To be a “being in encounter” is to have one’s being constituted by one’s relations, which as we will see are one’s relations with God and one’s fellows. It is with this definition of human being that Barth rejects any attempts to define what a human being is without reference to these relations, which is precisely what he thought the theology and philosophy of his day had failed to do. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Barth believed that any efforts at trying to understand who the human being is independently from her relationship with God and her fellows will lead one to misunderstand both God and humanity.

As we just mentioned, to be created *imago dei* is to be created as a “being-in-encounter” with God and one’s fellow human beings. This understanding of creaturely being corresponds to the nature of God’s own divine being as “being-in-encounter.” However, because we are creatures and God is not, Barth points out that our being that corresponds to God’s being is a correspondence of both like and unlike. Creaturely being is unlike that of God in that humanity is created in the duality of male and female. There is no corresponding sexuality in God. We will explore this point further in a moment. First, let us explore how Barth comes to characterize the nature of the divine life as “being-in-encounter.”

2.6.1 Eternal Encounter and Decision in God: The Trinitarian Basis of Imago Dei

Barth places a significant amount of theological importance on the words “let us” in Gen 1:26. For Barth, this “let us” represents a divine soliloquy which reveals that God is not alone and that an encounter takes place internally in God. God’s proclamation, “let us,” is significantly different from God’s utterance, “let there be light,” in that the latter speech is directed externally, where the former is directed internally. Thus, Barth suggests that the “let us” takes place within the intra-Trinitarian community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and as such reveals an intra-divine unanimity of intention and decision. He writes, “There takes place a divine soliloquy, a consultation as though between several divine counselors, and a divine decision resting upon it.” (III.1, p. 182) While there is a confrontation among the persons of the Trinity with respect to this eternal decision, Barth insists that this does not indicate any disagreement within God, but rather such a confrontation simply demonstrates that God is not solitary. Thus, Barth
believes that the biblical writers have phrased this verse in such a way so as to expressly emphasize the non-solitariness of God on the one hand, and the intra-Trinitarian free agreement on the other. In other words, there is a confrontation in the divine being and sphere but also peace, unity and common determination in this confrontation. (III.1, p. 183) One of the decisive aspects of the corresponding being of humanity is that God created humanity to not be alone.

Barth believes that the biblical witness introduces the divine soliloquy at this point to indicate the significance of what is to follow, i.e. the creation of humanity. The creation of humanity is significant because it will be God’s creation of his own true counterpart with whom God will have a history. Barth explains:

When humanity was to be the subject, it had to be said that the creative basis of God’s existence was and is a history which took place in the divine sphere and essence; a divine movement to and from a divine Other; a divine conversation and summons and a divine correspondence to it. A genuine counterpart in God Himself leading to a unanimous decision is the hidden original [Urbild],

87 In his discussion of humanity as being created imago dei Barth uses four different words: 1) Urbild, 2) Vorbild, 3) Abbild, and 4) Nachbild. We believe Barth uses these four words together as a way to emphasize the prefixes of these words which show the nuanced distinctions among them. For the purposes of this project we are translating: Urbild as original, i.e. “Ur-” = first, prime, original; Vorbild as prototype, i.e. “vor-” = in front of, beforehand, which emphasize sequence; Abbild as copy; and Nachbild as afterimage. The English translation of the *Church Dogmatics* is very confusing because the English translation does not translate these German words consistently. For example, the English edition renders Urbild as both “image” and “prototype” and Vorbild as “likeness” on page 183ff. However, in the excurses, where Barth is trying to think more carefully about his translation of the Hebrew tselm and d’muth, the editor changes the English translation of Urbild to “original” and Vorbild to “prototype.” We think that the choice of these two English terms for Urbild and Vorbild (i.e. original and prototype, respectively) are more helpful to capture the sense of Barth’s theological commitments which will be born out later in his Christology.

We also think that the choice of Urbild [original] and Vorbild [prototype] are best understood in Barth’s discussion in the excurses on p. 197, where Barth is considering the Hebrew terms tselm (Ger. Urbild) and d’muth (Ger. Vorbild). Barth suggests that tselm and d’muth have a double sense. He argues that tselm not only conveys a sense of a representative work of its subject matter, like a painting or an idol, but it also conveys the sense of the original upon which the work was based. Thus, Barth assigns the German Urbild [Lit: “ur” = first/prime/original] to tselm in his translation of the Hebrew. Likewise, Barth argues, the Hebrew d’muth not only has the sense of the imitation, copy, or duplicate form of the subject from which the “likeness” was taken, but that the word d’muth also has the sense of the “prototype” which stands behind/in front of the copy or imitation. Hence, Barth assigns the word Vorbild [Lit. In front
is the basis of a manifest copy [Abbild], a hidden prototype [Vorbild] and a manifest afterimage [Nachbild] in the co-existence of God and humanity, and also the existence of humanity itself. 88 (III.1, p. 183 revised)

The first significant feature of the above quotation is Barth’s comment that God has an encounter with a “genuine counterpart” within God’s own inner life. Furthermore, this encounter leads to a “unanimous decision” to create the human being. The second significant feature of the above quotation is that God’s encounter with God’s divine Other is also a history. This history is a movement and encounter and a summons and conversation. Thus, Barth argues that God’s “being” is God’s “act.” God is, as God is in relationship as triune God. For Barth, the being of God is not static, but dynamic and active, and such activity will be the pattern of all creation itself. In short, the relationality of the mutual confrontation and decision that exists within the inner life of God, i.e. the relational ontology of the Trinity, provides the ontological basis for God’s creation. However, creation, as stated before, is not God, and is still properly understood as “wholly other than God,” yet human being is created in correspondence to God. The nature of this correspondence will emerge more clearly when we examine Barth’s of/before image to d’muth. As mentioned above, we think the emphasis for Vorbild is prototype which implies the sense of coming before the copy in sequence. Thus, we interpret Barth use of the word Urbild to refer principally to the intra-Trinitarian divine essence of “being-in-encounter” and the Vorbild to the prototype of this pattern of relations, which is Christ.

88 The originial German text is as follows: Indem gerade vom Menschen die Rede sein sollte, mußte eben dies gesagt werden: eine im göttlichen Bereich und Wesen stattgefundene Geschichte, eine göttliche Bewegung zu einem göttlich Anderen hin und von diesem zurück, ein göttliches Gespräch, ein göttlicher Aufruf und eine göttliche Entsprechung dazu war und ist der schöpferische Grund seiner Existenz. Ein reales, aber in Einmütigkeit sich entschließendes und entschlossenes Gegenüber in Gott selbst ist das geheime Urbild, auf dem das offenbare Abbild, das geheime Vorbild und das offenbare Nachbild der Koexistenzen Gottes und des Menschen, aber auch die Existenz des Menschen selbst beruht. (KD III.1, s. 205)
interpretation of Genesis 1:26: “Let us create man in our image, after our original and prototype.”

2.6.2 “Image” and “Likeness” of God: Humanity as Created Correspondence

Barth’s German translation of the Hebrew of Gen 1:26 is: “Lasset uns Menschen machen in unserem Urbild nach unserem Vorbild!” [Let us make the human being in our original, after/according to our prototype.] (III.1, p. 197) He argues that this is the decisive insight of the first creation saga because it is repeated twice. However, Barth does not equate “in unserem Urbild” with “nach unserem Vorbild.” For Barth, “In our original [Urbild]” means:

to be created as a being which has its ground and possibility in the fact that in “us”, i.e. in God’s own sphere and being, there exists a divine and therefore self-grounded original [Urbild] to which this being can correspond [entsprechen]; which can therefore legitimize it for all that it is a heterogeneous imitation [Abbildlichkeit und also Andersartigkeit]; which can justify its existence; by which, when existence is given to it, it will in fact be legitimated and justified. That it is created in this original [Urbild] proves that it has its ground in justification [Rechtsgrund]. (III.1, p. 183)

Barth argues that “after/according to our prototype [Vorbild]” means:

to be created as a being whose nature is decisively characterized by the fact that although it is created by God it is not a new nature to the extent that it has a prototype[Vorbild] in the nature of God Himself; to the extent that it is created as a prototype[Vorbild] of this divine original [Urbild], i.e. in the likeness of this image. The being created in the original [Urbild] of this prototype [Vorbild] is the human being [der Mensch]. (III.1, pp. 183-184 revised)\(^89\)

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\(^89\) geschaffen als ein Wesen, dessen Nature dadurch entscheidend charakterisiert ist, daß sie, obwohl von Gott geschaffen, insofern keine neue Natur ist, als sie in der Nature Gottes selbst ein Vorbild hat, insofern also, als sie dieses göttlichen Vorbildes Nachbild, in Nachbildung jenes Vorbildes geschaffen ist. Das in jenem Urbild nach diesem Vorbild geschaffene Wesen ist der Mensch.
This translation of the text and the distinctions between “image” and “likeness,” original and prototype is theologically significant for Barth since it is the way he maintains the relationship and distinctiveness between God, Jesus Christ, and the rest of humanity.

For Barth, to be created in the “original” means to have one’s creaturely reality grounded, and therefore legitimated and justified, *in God*. Here again is Barth’s argument that humanity has no justification *in itself* and why we must only understand our being and justification in relationship to God. God’s inter-Trinitarian relations are the *Urbild* upon which creation is patterned. The creature does not have her ground in herself, nor can she justify and legitimate her creation on her own. Correlatively, because one’s creaturely reality is neither grounded nor justified in one’s own being, it cannot be something that we can be said to *possess*. In other words, our life is not at our disposal to do with as we please. The ground of our reality is in God.

The fact that our creaturely reality is not something we possess is an important theological point which provides the grounds for understanding Barth’s insistence in III.4 §55 “Freedom for Life” that our lives are a *loan*. The fact that our lives are grounded in God, and as such have their dignity, but also are a loan and thus not our possession, produces a tension which clearly captures how Barth understands the nature of creaturely life. On the one hand, since our lives are grounded in God, human creaturely reality is of the highest of dignity and thus is to be respected. That is, we are creatures, with a body and soul, created to be in relationship with God and our fellows in time and thus our lives and those of others are to be respected and treated with reverence. On the other hand, because one is this human being who is created as body and soul in relationship with God and one’s fellows in time, this indicates that our lives are granted to us *for service to God*.
and to the neighbor. Thus, our life is not an absolute value to be protected at all costs, but must be viewed within the horizon of both its ground in God and its purpose of relations for God and others. The way in which Barth understands the relationship of human action with respect to these two boundaries is clearly borne out in his discussion of abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and capital punishment in III.4.

Since the meaning and purpose of our created existence is grounded in God’s original, Barth suggests that our being therefore corresponds to this reality. To be created in the “original” of God, according to a “prototype” is simply to have the pattern of one’s own nature as the pattern of the relationship and differentiation between the I and Thou of God’s own being. Thus, Barth argues, the human being “is created by God in correspondence with this relationship and differentiation in God Himself.” (III.1, p. 197)

It is in this way that we understand creation to have an ontology that is covenental in structure, but that is not equivalent to Christology.

Most importantly, however, Barth also insists that humanity is not called to be the image of God (III.1, p. 197), but rather to be created “in” the image of God. We will examine the implications of this more fully in Chapter 4 when we look at the relationship between Christology and anthropology. For now, however, suffice it to say that this distinction is important because in III.2 Barth will further develop his claim that only Christ will be the image of God. Such a distinction establishes Christ as the prototype according to which the human being (adam) is to be understood as the copy/likeness [Nachbild] of the humanity that is in Christ. However, as we will explore in great detail in Chapter Four, this distinction between Christ as the prototype and human beings made after his likeness does not mean that Christ is the only real creature and humanity is only
a “mere” copy. Suffice it to say for now that human beings and Christ share a common humanity, which Barth describes as “being-in-encounter.” What differentiates Christ from the rest of humanity is how he realizes his humanity in his particular history with God as the concrete fulfillment of the covenant. Indeed, this common humanity is the presupposition of God’s grace. Christ is the only creature who realizes his humanity perfectly because he is without sin.

Since the intra-Trinitarian divine essence, which is constitutive of the I-Thou in encounter, is the Urbild, i.e. original and principle subject to which creation will correspond, Barth argues that Christ must be understood as the prototype [Vorbild] of this “being-in-encounter.” What makes these distinctions difficult is that Christ can be understood as both the original and the prototype, yet these distinctions must be kept.

As God the Son, Christ is the “divine Other,” which God the Father encounters in the intra-Trinitarian divine life. Thus, Christ, as God the Son, is constitutive of the “original” pattern of I-Thou relations. However, Christ, as the “firstborn of all creation,” is also the “prototype” [Vorbild] of this I-Thou pattern. That is, in his creaturely reality, Christ is created in correspondence to the intra-Trinitarian divine life that he shares with God the Father. However, this correspondence will work in two directions. In the vertical direction, the incarnate Son has an I-Thou relation with God the Father. In the horizontal direction, the incarnate Son has an I-Thou relationship with fellow humanity [Mitmenschlichkeit]. Thus, Jesus’ creaturely reality corresponds to the I-Thou pattern of the intra-Trinitarian divine life. Again, as we will see later in III.2, Barth will insist that Christ is both the original human being and the prototype after whom Adam and the rest of humanity are fashioned and to which humanity will correspond. Indeed, for Barth,
Adam (and humanity after Adam) are “reproductions” or “after images” of the “original” and “prototype” which is Christ. Yet, this does not mean human beings other than Christ are “less than human” or “deficient humans.” Even in spite of their sin, human beings are still fully human beings. That is, human nature, i.e. human “being-in-encounter” is not destroyed by sin. However, as we will see, sinful humanity will participate in and take on their real humanity, by which we simply mean their original and undistorted form of human being, when they participate in Christ, who frees humanity from sin and reconciles humanity to God.

Two other ways in which human creaturely reality corresponds to God’s divine life is in humanity’s ability to procreate and have lordship over the animals. These two actions of creaturely life are said to correspond to the divine life because in these two actions human beings exhibit the ability for spontaneous action and decision. However, this human action needs God’s special blessing, since such action could be undertaken in an irresponsible way and towards ends for which it was not intended.

We have just examined how Barth understands humanity as imago dei in its created correspondence to the divine original. Next, we shall look at the specific form of humanity as imago dei that Barth believes reflects created correspondence which is unlike the being of God, i.e. humanity created as male and female.

2.6.3 Male and Female: Imago Dei as Created Correspondence of the Unlike

As we discussed above, Christ as the prototype of the intra-Trinitarian life of “being-in-encounter” must be considered vertically, i.e. between the incarnate Son and God the Father, as well as horizontally, i.e. between Christ and the Church. Likewise,
Barth argues, God’s creation of humanity as “male [Mann]” and “female [Frau]” also corresponds with the humanity of Christ in both the vertical and horizontal directions. In the vertical direction, God’s creation of humanity is the creation of a “real and yet not discordant counterpart” with God. That is, God and humanity (considered in its totality as male and female) have an I-Thou relationship. In the horizontal direction, God’s creation of humanity as male and female is a creaturely repetition of the divine “I” and “Thou” in encounter. Thus, just as Christ is a “real and yet not discordant counterpart” within the Godhead, male and female are also “real and yet not discordant counterparts” in relationship to God (through Christ) and each other. This is what Barth means when he says that humanity is created “after the original” [Nachbild] and the prototype. One of the moves that Barth makes in order to carry through his theology of correspondence is to argue that humanity exists not only as a single species, but also as a single species in the duality of sexes. That humanity exists as a single species in the duality of the sexes is crucial for Barth’s theology because it is the creaturely witness to the divine truth that God is one, but is not alone.  

For Barth, God is One, but God is not alone, i.e. God exists as a “being-in-encounter.” Likewise humanity is one (in terms of being a distinctive species apart from the animals) but humanity is also not alone, i.e. humanity exists as a “being-in-

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90 Indeed, Barth argues that existing as male and female is the only meaningful distinction between human beings. As such, this distinction might be useful in addressing the occurrence in some contemporary theology that discusses race as an ontologically significant difference between human beings.

91 More specifically Barth contrasts humanity with the animal kingdom. In his exegesis Barth seems to be arguing that when the Genesis story depicts the creation of the “wild beasts,” God is creating a “category” which subsumes all of the land dwelling animals in its multiplicity of species. In contrast, when the Genesis saga discusses the creation of “humanity,” Barth understands this to mean that God is creating another “category” of beings into which only one kind of being falls, i.e. human beings as male and female. Barth says that human beings are ens sui generis (III.1, p. 196). This is how Barth argues that humanity is
encounter” in the duality of male and female. It is in this way that humanity is a copy and imitation of God and repeats the confrontation of the I–Thou which has its original and prototype in God’s intra-Trinitarian life. God and Christ are the original and prototype, respectively, and humanity is the copy [Abbildung], imitation and afterimage [Nachbildung] of this original.

For Barth, the fact that God’s uncreated singularity finds correspondence in a created singularity (i.e. humanity as a single unique species) is evidence of God’s incomprehensible special grace. (III.1, p. 186) That is, male/female duality is the condition under which human beings stand before God and before each other. Thus, the I-Thou relationality between man and woman is the true humanum of humanity and therefore also the creaturely image of God. It is in this form that humanity has its special dignity before God, i.e. as male and female in free and differentiated relationship. Thus Barth concludes:

The fact that humanity was created man and woman will be the great paradigm of everything that is to take place between humanity and God, and also of everything that is to take place between the human being and his fellows. The fact that humanity was created and exists as male and female will also prove to be not only a copy [Abbildung] and afterimage [Nachbildung] of humanity’s Creator as such but at the same time a prototype [Vorbild]92 of the history of the covenant and salvation which will take place between humanity and its Creator. In all His future utterances and actions God will acknowledge that He has created humanity as male and female, and in this way in His own original [Urbild] and prototype [Vorbild]. (III.1, pp. 186-187 revised)

“one” in the duality of kind. This is a crucial move by Barth in his exegesis of Genesis which he uses to establish his discussion of imago dei. However, this move almost seems slightly arbitrary and rests on a “categorical” distinction between humanity and the animals. (This would be very difficult to defend, it seems to me, in light of evolutionary theory.) It also seems to be a crucial theological move which rests on a somewhat arbitrary categorization of “kinds” of creatures.

92 English translation has type here for Vorbild. Prototype would be better.
However, it must be emphasized that while being created male and female is a repetition of the divine form of life, this does not suggest that the inner life of God is male and female. The creaturely repetition is only the repetition of the I-Thou being-in-encounter of the uncreated Godhead. Again, humanity was not created to be the image of God, but rather to correspond to the image of God. (III.1, p.197) Being created male and female is a strictly natural creaturely feature that humans hold in common with the animals. (III.1, p. 186) Thus, Barth does not imply that the intra-Trinitarian I-Thou encounter is conditioned by maleness and femaleness. Barth also insists that this strictly natural and creaturely feature, which is held in common with the beasts, is not in any sense an animal element in humanity but rather the distinctively human element. It is distinctly human not in itself, but because it “pleased God to make man [Mensch] in this form of life an image and likeness, a witness, of His own form of life.” (III.1, p. 187) Again, humanity exists as a single species (akin to the single Godhead) in the duality of sexes in free and differentiated encounter (akin to the free and differentiated encounter which exists between the Father and Son in the Holy Spirit in the intra-Trinitarian life). Herein lies is the distinctively human feature of humanity.

In sum, we have seen in this section that to be created imago dei is to be created in correspondence to God’s intra-Trinitarian divine life, i.e. as a “being-in-encounter,” which is the correspondence of both like and unlike between the creature and God.

93 While Barth does not say so ostensibly here, the distinctiveness of human male-female duality with respect to animal male-female duality is that human male-female duality is constitutive of being created imago dei and thus being ordered for covenant relations. It might be interesting to compare Barth and Aquinas on this point.
2.6.4 Affirming Creation: Creaturely Reality as Good (Gen 1: 30c-31)

“And it was so. God saw everything that he had made and called it good.” (Gen 1: 30c-31) Barth understands this verse as God’s confirmation of God’s Word and work in establishing the cosmos and its inhabitants. This confirmation includes 1) the special blessing and final order relating to the nourishment of humanity and the beasts and; 2) the confirmation that humanity, as male and female, exists in correspondence with the divine original prototype. As such humanity has received from God permission and promise for his increase and special function among all creatures. Furthermore, God confirms that in fellowship and in peace with these other creatures, there has been granted the possibility of life corresponding to its creaturely reality. (III.1, p. 212)

What is good about creation? The whole establishment and construction of the cosmos, from the actualization of light to the actualization of humanity is good. Indeed, in the actualization of humanity God has actualized a partner, who is the proper inhabitant of the cosmos and who knows light as light and can have dealings with God. Additionally, to say that creation is good is to say concretely that it was adapted to the purpose for which God had in view, namely as the external basis for the covenant of grace. Thus, creation is sufficient as it is for God’s purposes. Nothing needs to be added to it or subtracted from it. There is not a more perfect version of creation for one to wish. Since God confirms creation as it is and as good, the creature has no grounds to complain. The creature should only respond to the cosmos with praise and thanksgiving. To declare creation good is to declare the totality of creation and its origin as providing the promise under which the rest of subsequent history will stand. As Creator and
absolute Lord over Creation, God’s will was and must be the measure and criterion of all that is good. (III.1, p. 213)

2.7 God Binds Himself to Creation: God’s Freedom and Love in Limitation

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the 7th day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

For Barth, God’s decision to rest on the 7th day is extraordinarily significant. It is the climax of the Genesis 1 saga and reveals four important features about God and creation. Most importantly, however, God’s decision to cease creating and rest on the 7th day is when God determines the true nature of freedom and love.

The four important features that God’s rest on the Sabbath day tells us are: 1) God’s decision to rest means “quite simply, and significantly enough, that He did not continue his work of creation.” (III.1, p. 214); 2) God was content with the creation of the world and humanity; 3) God’s decision to rest is the completion of the history of creation. In other words, this day of God’s rest is the goal and telos of all the work that God had done on the first six days. Finally, God’s work on the seventh day is a transition point. Not only does it signify the completion of the history of creation, but it also points forward to and inaugurates the history of God’s covenant of grace with humanity, which as we will see in the next chapter “begins” with the fall.

To say that God “rested” on the seventh day is to say simply that God stopped creating. It is thus not a day when 1) God rested because God was tired; 2) not a day for God to “touch up” the works of the first six days; and 3) not a question of God needing to
rest because God needed to fortify God’s self for new tasks. Rather, Barth argues that God’s decision to cease creating is a decision that reveals God’s deity. That is, God’s decision to rest on the seventh day reveals God as a God of genuine freedom and love. (III.1, p. 214)

Barth argues that by deciding to rest on the seventh day and cease creating, God made a definite decision to set a limit on creation. This decision to limit creation reveals God to be a God of genuine freedom and not an abstract world-principle. For Barth, a world-principle is not free because it is bound to its own infinite process of self-development. A being is truly free only when it can limit and determine the content of its own activity. Thus, for Barth, God is not divine because God is infinite; rather, God is divine and his deity is revealed in his decision to set a limit and to determine the content to God’s own work. Barth argues that only a being who possesses freedom in this way can be said to truly act. This is absolutely decisive point for Barth’s understanding of the nature of human action.

Barth does not understand God’s decision to rest on the seventh day as God’s decision to exercise some abstract capacity for freedom. Rather, Barth understands God’s decision to rest on the 7th day as establishing what freedom itself actually is. In other words, freedom is not properly understood as a neutral capacity, i.e. a capacity to choose or not choose to do something. Rather, for Barth, to act freely is to act toward an object of love in a particular direction. We will explore Barth’s rendering of freedom in Ch 3 when we discuss Barth’s treatment of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. For

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94 Barth seems to have Hegel’s “world-spirit” in mind here.
now, however, suffice it to say that freedom is to act toward an object of love for the sake of that object.

Barth also argues that God’s decision to limit creation also reveals that God’s divinity is constituted by God’s love. And again, God’s decision to rest and to limit his attention toward his object of love is also to constitute what the nature of love itself is. God refrained from further creative activity on the seventh day because God found the object of God’s love, i.e. humanity, in God’s work of the sixth day. Thus, after the creation of humanity, God had no need for any further works. Barth emphasizes this point in order to establish that God is not some “world-principle” but rather to insist that God is the Creator who desires to be in relationship with God’s creation, and specifically with humanity. For Barth, a world-principle cannot love, because a world-principle cannot cease, and consequently cannot find time for its creature. Thus, a world-principle is never satisfied, is always positing other beings in infinite sequence, and consequently misses every possible object of love. Hence, love must have a definite and limited object. Furthermore, love is a relationship which itself is limited and defined by its object. This is the way that God loves.

To say that love is a relationship in which the one who loves is limited and defined by its object is also a decisively important point for Barth. By arguing that the one who loves is limited by the object of its love, Barth is suggesting that God is now limited and defined by God’s object of love, i.e. humanity. Thus it can be said that God is a “being-in-relationship” to the object of God’s love, i.e. God is the God who is gracious to humanity. The converse is also true. Humanity is only properly described as “the being unto whom God is gracious.” The being of God and the being of humanity can
now no longer be described without relationship to the other. This theological point is carried throughout the entirety of Barth’s ethics of creation. Human action with respect to God and the neighbor are always limited by the nature of this relationship. This is not an imperfection. Human action with respect to God should always be one of prayer and confession and honoring the holy day because those actions reflect the nature of the Creator-creature relationship. Human action with respect to one’s fellows is always limited and constituted by the nature of this relationship. This is why the primary form of relationality between human beings is that between man and woman, parents and children and near and distant neighbors. Each configuration of relationships has its own boundaries and limits that provide the context for evaluating the nature of human action in these domains. So even here in his exegesis of the first Genesis saga, Barth is already anticipating the first two “domains” in which human beings will encounter the command of God.

Furthermore, God constitutes God’s self in relationship to humanity in time through God’s work on the seventh day. That is, who God is in eternity, i.e. the being-in-relationship of the intra-Trinitarian life, is now repeated in the form of an “historical” event. In this historical event of God’s divine self-repetition, creation history is also completed. This act has a number of implications. First, it means that God was not satisfied to merely create the world and then “retire to a superfluous position” leaving the cosmos and humanity “to their own being, purpose, and course,” in accordance with the development of an autonomous law. (III.1, p. 216) Instead, in this act of repeating the

95 We put “historical” in quotes here to denote that for Barth creation history is a “pre-history.”
divine life in time, God accepts the world and humanity *as it is* and *associates* God’s self with it in the fullest possible sense, i.e. in God’s fullness of being as freedom, rest, and joy.

The implication for the creature is that the reality of the creature consists constitutively not only of the fact that it is created by God’s grace and power, but also the fact that *God has willed to co-exist with it*. When God created humanity, God constituted God’s own self with humanity in this “historical” event of the seventh day. This is what it means to speak properly of God’s immanence in the world. In the act of the seventh day, God makes himself temporal, linking himself in a *temporal act* with the being, purpose and course of the world, i.e. with the history of humanity. Thus, God reveals God’s true deity as genuine freedom and love as Creator and unites himself to the world God created. It is *this* act of God that is the crowning moment of creation, not the creation of humanity on the sixth day. Again, here, we have the anticipation of the fourth “domain” in which God and the human being encounter one another in the ethical event, i.e. the domain of “time” in which human beings exercise their vocation, which is also *their* history as part of God’s history.

In sum: God’s decision to rest on the seventh day has decisive meaning for God in that: 1) God repeats nothing less and nothing other than God’s perfect being in time; and 2) God declares himself as such to belong to what God has created so entirely different from God’s self. It was after humanity was created that God ceased from work and set this boundary. For Barth, this cessation of work indicates that God was satisfied with God’s work and God found God’s object of love in humanity. It is with humanity as a counterpart that God associates God’s self in God’s true deity, which is genuine freedom.
and love. Thus, it is on this day that the history of creation is complete, i.e. the theatre in which God will conduct God’s affairs with humanity. It also on this day that God’s covenant history with humanity commences.\(^96\)

This act of God in creation has both an indirect and direct meaning for the creature as well. Barth suggests that the indirect meaning for the creature is that the creature is complete because God has given God’s self to belong to the creature. Thus, God’s creature will, over and over again, have to seek and find what God intends to undertake and do in this fellowship. The direct meaning for the creature is that creation rests with God on the seventh day and shares in God’s freedom, rest, and joy in the first instance. That is, creation itself has no work to rest from, thus its first act of being is to participate in God’s freedom, rest, and joy. In other words, God says to humanity “be who you are,” i.e. to be creatures determined for relationship with God and to participate with God in God’s freedom, rest and joy. Thus, not only is creation’s freedom, rest, and joy grounded in God’s freedom, rest and joy, but creation is invited to respond to God’s invitation to participate in this freedom, rest and joy. (III.1, p. 217) God invites the creature to respond with gratitude and thanksgiving.

Barth understands this invitation to be revealed in God’s act of blessing and sanctification of the seventh day. By blessing and sanctifying the seventh day, God gave the seventh day the power and special determination to have the same content and meaning for the creature that it does for God. That is, it is a day “free from work and a day wholly granted to it.” (III.1, p. 217) For God, the seventh day is the day when God

\(^96\) Barth says it commenced in “secret” on this day but can be seen to have commenced more openly in the second creation saga where God addresses humanity directly.
constituted God’s self to be wholly for humanity. Likewise, it is a day for humanity to accept God’s self-revelation and witness and to realize its own completion in relationship to God. In other words, as God declares God’s self to be a God for humanity, so humanity is invited in the seventh day to affirm this truth of its creaturely reality by being with God in God’s freedom, rest, and joy on the seventh day. As God does, so must the creature do. (III.1, p. 217) This is also the first time that the original (God) acknowledges the copy (humanity). In the recognition of God’s reflection (i.e. humanity), God establishes the paradigm in which humanity is to understand its work and its goal. Indeed, Barth devotes a tremendous amount of space to the nature of human work in the final section of III.4, §56 Freedom in Limitation, especially his discussion of the “active life” in III.4 §56.3.

With regard to understanding the relationship of human labor to the seventh day, Barth argues that one can think of it in two related ways. First, the seventh day reveals God’s limit to the working time of creation, which is also revealed as a genuinely special temporal day recurring after every six days. Thus, Barth argues the goal of creation is continually visible in the sign of this day to the working time of creation. Furthermore, the rest of the 7th day is a goal of creation’s existence which cannot be attained by toil and conflict, but which is granted to creation, and exists for it, beyond toil and conflict. The goal of humanity and creation is rest and fellowship with God. This final rest is both a promise and strength. It is not something humanity can achieve, but rather something that is given to humanity in the first instance as the fulfillment of a promise. Humanity, thus, sanctifies the seventh day with its action by hearing and accepting God’s witness to the truth about its own being and goal.
The work of the seventh day can also be understood in a second sense—this invitation to rest and be in God’s fellowship with joy comes before humanity has had any work to accomplish. That is, the Sabbath rest stands at the beginning of human action, i.e. that work and invitation of God precedes the work of humanity. This implies that God has done all that is necessary in creation. Humanity has nothing to do but recognize that God has done all that is necessary and accept God’s invitation to participate in God’s rest. Thus, humanity has wholly and utterly received the grace of God with this address and invitation. With this invitation begins the history of humanity with God. In other words, for Barth, this invitation of God to humanity begins with the Gospel and not the Law; with freedom and not with obligation; with a holiday and not an imposed task, and with joy and not with toil or trouble. God’s first Word to humanity (by way of performance and not speech) is that humanity is to be free from work and rest with God. This is what it means to say that the 7th day is the “Lord’s Day.”97 (III.1, p. 219)

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored Barth’s interpretation of the first Genesis saga and its theological significance. Throughout our exposition we have endeavored to show how Barth’s exposition of the first Genesis saga reveals Barth’s strong affirmation of the nature and purpose of the created order. Indeed, we have argued that Barth understands creation as the presupposition of the history of the covenant, i.e. as nature equipped for

97 The first creation saga ends with Gen 2:4a which says “these are the generation of the heavens and earth when they were created.” Barth does not treat this verse after he discusses Gen 2:1-3. I think he understands it as the concluding bookend to Gen 1:1 and perhaps a reiteration of the “And it was so.”
grace, and as that which corresponds to God’s eternal decision for election. We have argued that the creaturely correspondence of creation is one of boundaries and limits. While Barth does not articulate the “domains” in which God will command and act here in creation history, since God takes up his history with humanity in the covenant history which begins at the fall, we have seen that the “domains” in which God and humanity will encounter one another have been intimated. That is, in his reflections on humanity as *imago dei*, we see the beginnings of Barth’s understanding of humanity as being created for covenant relations with both God and its fellows. We have also seen the introduction of the concept of *time* as an important feature of creaturely life.

We have also seen a number of decisive features of the Genesis saga that reveal Barth’s affirmation of creation as the “equipment” which is prepared for grace. All the way through we have seen that God’s creation corresponds to his eternal decision to be the God who is gracious to humanity. That is, we have seen how creation itself corresponds to God’s divine “Yes” and divine “No,” which were first uttered in God’s eternal decision to elect humanity to himself. God’s “Yes” and “No” can be seen in creation that God has designed and secured a space for his creature (yes) and rejects chaos (no) as the sign of the possibilities which could have been a disaster for God’s creatures. Creation is a place that is safe and secure from the threat of chaos. Furthermore, God’s decision to create by an act of speech constitutes creaturely reality as being most properly a response to God’s Word, i.e. so that the creature may speak a corresponding “yes” back to God in gratitude for her creation. In his exposition of Gen 1: 14-19 and his reflections on the role of the luminaries as mediators of light, whose
mission is to summon creatures to participate with God in their consciousness and activity, Barth introduces the concept of time as a key feature of creaturely life.

With his exposition of Gen 1: 20-23 we saw that God *blesses* the activity of autonomous creatures so that their actions are not purposeless, but are directed to their proper ends for fulfillment. In Gen 1: 24-30, we saw that Barth interprets the creation of the land animals as the precursors to humanity as being significant for revealing to humanity certain aspects of creaturely life, to include humility and dependence. We also saw how the witness and natural fellowship between land animals and human beings inform Barth’s discussion on the nature of responsibility we have towards animals. A large part of this chapter focused on Barth’s understanding of the creation of humanity as *imago dei*. The key point of that exposition was to explore how Barth understands creaturely life as that which corresponds to the divine life. Specifically, we saw that creaturely life corresponds to the divine life by being created as a single species in the duality of sexes ordered for covenant relations. Barth describes the being of humanity as “being-in-encounter.” However, Barth pointed out that this creaturely correspondence is also a correspondence of the *unlike* in that the duality of the sexes as male and female does not indicate maleness and femaleness in the Godhead.

Finally, we examined Barth’s understanding of the significance of the seventh day of creation in order show how God has set a decisive limit to creation and creaturely life which in turn reveals God’s deity as constituted by God’s freedom of love. With this interpretation of God’s work of the seventh day, Barth argues that one can only properly *act* within limits and with respect to a specific object of love. Furthermore, God’s work of the seventh day also reveals that God wills to be in relationship with God’s creature
and this wills to unite God’s self with the being, course and purpose of the world. Thus, God does not abandon creation to itself, but rather secures the inextricable relationship between God and the world, and God and humanity more specifically, by this act of ceasing to create on the seventh day.

In short: God binds himself to this creation and this human being, which was created in this specific way in order that God could carry out his divine plan to be in covenant relations with that which is outside of God’s self. Given the nature of divine action with respect to creation, the creature is called to gratitude and thanksgiving for all that God has made and to rejoice in this fellowship with God. The creation has been equipped for this purpose and lacks nothing for the fulfillment of this end.

In the next chapter, we shall turn to Barth’s interpretation of the second Genesis saga and how it forms the second aspect of Barth’s doctrinal formulation of the doctrine of creation, i.e. the covenant is the internal basis of creation. Specifically, we will see how Barth’s more detailed explication of the special election of humanity and the role of two trees in the garden of Eden are further indicators of God’s grace and the covenantal structure of creation itself.
CHAPTER 3:

THE COVENENTAL BASIS OF CREATION:

THE ELECTION OF HUMANITY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two we discussed the first aspect of Barth’s doctrine of creation, namely how Barth understands the first creation saga to be the external basis of the covenant. In that discussion we noticed that Barth emphasized the goodness of creation and its suitability for God’s purposes as the equipment for grace. We pointed out how Barth emphasizes the securing of boundaries and setting of limits in order to insist that creation is a specific place with specific features for a specific purpose. Indeed, it is important to understand that it is this creation that God created and no other, and that this creation is the presupposition for the covenant history of grace which commences at the Fall. We also saw how God’s work of creation corresponds to God’s eternal decision to be a God who is gracious to humanity.

In this chapter we will see how the second creation saga is a new angle into the same theme. That is, the second Genesis saga does not pick up where the first Genesis saga left off, but rather forms the second half of Barth’s two-fold doctrine of creation, i.e. the covenant is the internal basis of creation. As we will see, by arguing that the covenant is the internal basis of creation, Barth will insists that the very nature of creation itself is patterned Christologically and oriented in the direction of reconciliation. As we will see in Chapter 4, this does not mean that creation is equivalent to Christology, but
rather that creation is ordered for covenant relations with God and as such is created in a specific way to realize this goal. The themes of limits and boundaries will appear again in Barth’s understanding of the second creation saga in his interpretation of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. We will also see how Barth’s interpretation of the two trees in the Garden of Eden serve to further illustrate Barth’s understanding of the proper relationship between gospel and law and the true nature of freedom. In the second section of this chapter we will see how Barth’s exegesis of the creation of humanity serves to further underscore his insistence that the true nature of humanity must be understood as “being-in-encounter.” That is, for Barth, the human being cannot be properly understood without an understanding of herself as created in relationship to both God and other human beings. Here, again, we will see Barth’s relentless stand against any understanding of the human being as a solitary individual. Furthermore, we will also see the further significance of what it means to say that humanity is created imago dei. Throughout our exposition we will highlight the interrelationship between Barth’s theology and his ethics.

As we just mentioned, Barth interprets the second creation saga as forming the second half of his doctrine of creation, i.e. the covenant is the internal basis of creation. Barth understands God’s desire to be in covenant relation to humanity as the goal of creation and which thereby serves to orient the shape of the created order from the outset of God’s created activity. Hence, it is important to point out that, for Barth, the covenant is not something that God has “added” on to creation but rather is the organizing paradigm for creation itself. Barth writes:

The fact that the covenant is the goal of creation is not something which is added later to the reality of the creature, as though the history of creation might equally
have been succeeded by any other history. It already characterizes creation itself and as such, and therefore the being and existence of the creature. The covenant whose history had still to commence was the covenant which, as the goal appointed for creation and the creature, made creation necessary and possible, and determined and limited the creature. (III.1, p. 231)

Thus, creation and covenant are not to be understood “sequentially” in that God “first” created and “then” God decided to be a covenant-God. Rather, God made the “eternal decision” to be a God who is gracious to humanity and “then” proceeded to create the theatre in which this relationship would unfold. Thus, for Barth, the covenant is not only the goal of creation, but is also the origin from which the purpose of creation springs. This is what Barth means by saying that the covenant “determines and limits the creature.” Creation and the creature cannot be anything but that for which God has intended it. In its creation God has fashioned it for a specific existence in a specific direction from the very outset.

Another significant feature of Barth’s interpretation of the second creation saga is that, whereas he understands the first creation saga as the prophetic witness of God’s covenant intentions, the second creation saga is the sacramental witness to the covenant. Thus, Barth argues that the second creation saga prefigures the covenant that will take place between humanity and God. It will not however, be identical to the covenant. Barth writes:

The main interest now is not how creation promises, proclaims and prophesies the covenant, but how it prefigures and to that extent anticipates it without being identical with it; not how creation prepares the covenant, but how in so doing it is itself already a unique sign of the covenant and a true sacrament; not Jesus Christ as the goal, but Jesus Christ as the beginning (the beginning just because he is the goal) of creation. (III.1, p. 232)
We will discuss in great detail in Chapter 4 how Barth manages to maintain the integrity of creation and not collapse it into Christology. This will be important because Barth is often criticized for collapsing creation into Christology and abolishing creation’s “independent” existence from Christology. This has occurred because, as we have already seen, Barth ground the goodness of creation not in its own independent reality, but in the goodness of Jesus Christ, who, as Barth worked out in his doctrine of election, is the concrete form of the command of God and the fulfillment of the covenant between God and humanity. By grounding the goodness of creation in Jesus Christ, Barth makes both the ontological goodness of creation itself and the noetic basis of that goodness dependent on this Christological determination. However, as we will see, Barth insists that creation has its own integrity, i.e. creation is not God and does not share God’s being. Barth defends this claim by insisting that creation is the presupposition of the covenant and it is this nature that God assumes in the incarnation which remains fully intact in the human person of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, however, even though creation has its own integrity, this commitment does not consequently imply that the purpose of creation is “independent” of God’s purposes. Hence, even though creation has its own integrity, it is ordered specifically towards God’s covenantal relations with humanity.  

98 For example, in Resurrection and Moral Order, p. 86, Oliver O’Donovan accuses Barth of “subordinating creation ontologically to Christology.”

99 This distinction gets confused when theologians want to say that creation is “independent” from Christology. The use of the word “independent” is highly problematic. For Barth, there is nothing about creation and creaturely existence that are “independent” from God. It is precisely the pretense to “independence” which characterizes the Fall and sinful humanity. While it is true that creation has its own integrity, i.e. its own distinct mode of being, its purposes are ordered and directed to serve God’s purposes.
As we mentioned above, Barth’s interpretation of the second creation saga is a new angle on the same theme, i.e. how creation is a sign of God’s covenental purposes. More specifically, Barth understands the second creation saga (Gen 2: 4b -25) principally as the filling out and expansion of Genesis 1: 27, i.e. the creation of humanity. The Priestly account of Genesis 1: 27 discusses the creation of humanity as male and female as one day within the great architectonic seven day scheme of God’s creation of the cosmos. Barth understands the purpose of Jahwist version of creation in Genesis 2 as being more concerned with the filling out of the how and why of humanity’s creation as male and female. Thus, Barth understands that what was begun in Genesis 1:27 is brought to its climax and conclusion in Genesis 2: 18-25. Hence, while there are some parallels between the Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 sagas, i.e. creation of heaven, earth, animals, etc., Barth understands the significance of the Genesis 2 text to be primarily concerned with the creation of humanity, and not the creation of the whole of the cosmos per se. The climax of Barth’s own theological argument in this text will take place when he argues that the creation of humanity as male and female is the sacramental prefigurement of God’s covenental purposes of creation.

Before we begin with our analysis of Barth’s exposition of the Genesis 2 saga a few preliminary notes about Barth’s exegetical method are in order. First, it is quite customary for interpreters of Genesis to read the text as making general claims about anthropology and creation. However, as we insisted in Chapter 1, Barth does not believe that it is appropriate to separate creation from revelation. Thus, Barth resists a general anthropological reading divorced from the covenant history of Israel. Indeed, Barth argues that Genesis 1 and 2 can only be properly understood by projecting God’s
covenant history of Israel backward onto the text.\textsuperscript{100} (III.1, p. 267) Hence for Barth, the Genesis 2 saga must be understood in the first instance as \textit{prefiguring} the covenant history of Israel and then only secondarily and derivatively can any general and universal anthropological claims be made. All other aspects of the Genesis story must be understood as significant principally in light of God’s covenant history with Israel. More controversially, Barth will go on to say that the Genesis 2 saga also, perhaps unwittingly, prefigures and anticipates the new covenant accomplished in Christ. The reader will notice that Barth’s interpretation of the general anthropological reading of the text, which is already conditioned by the backward projection of the covenant history of Israel, is also influenced by Barth’s Christological commitments. Thus, in many places, Barth’s interpretation of the Genesis text may appear to be overly determined by the Christological hermeneutic.

Barth divides the second creation saga into three distinct sections: 1) the creation of the “earth and heavens” and the human form from dust (Gen 2: 4b-7); 2) the planting of the Garden of Eden and the bringing of the human being to the Garden; 3) The creation of woman from man (Gen 2: 18-25). These three distinct sections also correspond to the three important ethical themes, i.e. election, freedom, and responsibility, respectively. Again, we shall explore Barth’s exegesis in the order in which he himself takes it, since Barth understands the order of the text to be important in one’s overall assessment of its theme.

\textsuperscript{100} Whether this hermeneutic is “correct” is difficult to judge. Gerhard von Rad accepts this backward projection of the text. However, Barth doesn’t cite Von Rad. Anyone who denies Barth’s exegetical commitments may be highly suspicious of how Barth’s interprets Genesis 2.
3.2 God’s Personal and Special Election of Humanity

In Gen 2: 4b-7 Barth draws attention to what he believes are four important features of this pericope. First, the Jawhist source provides us with a new name for God which was not disclosed in Gen 1, i.e. Yahweh Elohim. Second, the saga emphasizes that humanity was created for the sake of the earth and to serve the earth and not the other way around. Third, humanity is created from the earth and is thus not to be understood apart from it. Finally, the formation and animation of the human being from dust. Barth will argue that it is God’s specific action of breathing into the human form’s nostrils that not only distinguishes the human being from the beast in a general sense, but more importantly pre-figures God’s special election of Israel.

First, with regard to the new name for God, Barth argues that the Israelite reader or hearer of the story of the Creator would immediately associate the creator of the earth and heavens with the God of Israel, i.e. the God to whom the Israelite and his nation owes everything. (III.1, p. 234) With this statement, we can see Barth’s hermeneutical commitment at work, i.e. Barth projects the covenant history of Israel backwards on to the Genesis texts and the significance that Barth will derive from this association will be crucial.

Secondly, Barth points out that this second creation saga states that, in the beginning, God created the “earth and the heavens.” Here, the Jahwist source reverses the order of the Priestly source of Gen 1 in which God created the “heavens and the earth.” Barth does not think that this reversal indicates a new account of God’s cosmology. Rather, Barth argues that the reversal of this sequence is simply meant to focus the reader on the main concern of Genesis 2, namely the creation of the earth upon
which humanity will be called to live and to serve. Hence, Barth will further insist that the Genesis 2 saga is *not* to be understood primarily as having an anthropocentric focus. In other words, Barth does not think that the earth is primarily designed to serve humanity.\(^{101}\) While this is true to a degree, i.e. that humanity will rely on the vegetation of the earth for food, Barth wants to maintain a more interdependent relationship; namely, that humanity is created for the sake of the earth and to serve it. (III.1, p. 235)

Barth argues that the earth is not destined to be dry and barren, but to be fruitful and to accommodate inhabitation. Therefore, even though God will plant the earth so that it will not remain barren, God needs humanity to make the earth thrive. Thus, humanity is created and ordained to be God’s gardener, ready and able to serve the earth. That humanity will have a concrete duty to cultivate and tend to the things that God has planted will be a theme Barth takes up in his interpretation of the Garden of Eden. (III.1, p. 235)

The third point that Barth wants to emphasize is that not only is humanity called to serve the earth, but that humanity is formed from the dust of the earth. For Barth, this points to the “indispensable humility” of humanity’s existence. (III.1, p. 235) Here again we see Barth’s emphasis that humanity does not have an “independent position” in the totality of creation but is radically dependent on it. Humanity’s “nature” is that of the earth. (III.1, p. 235) Indeed, the Hebrew term *adam* is perhaps best understood simply as “earth creature” since it is the form of human being taken from *adamah* (the earth). It is also important to point out that *adam* is not a proper name in the Hebrew sense of the

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\(^{101}\) Barth’s reading of Genesis 2 has a slightly different emphasis in this regard than his interpretation of Gen 1.
word. Thus, the earth creature that was formed is neither properly male nor female at this point, but representative of an androgynous human form. The specificity of the human being created “male and female” will not unfold until Gen 2: 18-25. Hence, at this stage of his exegesis of Genesis 2, Barth wants to stress that God’s decision to form humanity from the dust of the earth emphasizes humanity’s commonality with other creatures. This point is similar to Barth’s understanding of the relationship and humanity to the land animals in Genesis 1.

What distinguishes humanity from the other creatures is that God formed this particular dust into a human body. We see again a repetition of Barth’s insistence in his interpretation of Genesis 1 of the specificity and intentionality of human creation. However, Barth wants to emphasize that the human frame will have the natural tendency to return to the earth from which it was taken. (III.1, p. 236) Even though humanity was formed from this particular dust into this particular human frame, humanity still has no distinctive claim over the animals on this account. Barth will even go on to add that humanity is not even distinguished from the beast because human beings have a living soul in se. (III.1, p. 236) Rather, Barth wants to emphasize that it was the manner in which God gave humanity a living soul that distinguishes humanity from the beasts. In other words, the critical issue for Barth is not that human beings have a living soul, but rather how they got one.

Without God’s quickening breath, the human form of dust would not have become a living soul. However, despite this quickening breath, the human form is still a problematical, threatened, and transitory existence. Furthermore, Barth wants to be clear that even though God has animated the human form with a living soul, God does not
“owe” the living soul anything. Neither does the soul become humanity’s “own” by virtue of God conferring a quickening upon it. Rather, Barth points out that the human form must be continually renewed. He writes:

If man is not renewed, the fact that he was once quickened will not prevent him from sharing the fate of the beast and becoming again what he was: arid, barren, dead, dust of dust, earth of earth; a soul without form or dwelling, assigned with the body to the depths of the earth, condemned without the Spirit of God to an impotent hopelessness. Thus from the beginning he stands under the law of humility and fear of God. (III.1, p. 236)

Hence, as mentioned above, the manner in which God enervates the human form is the distinction that will elevate the human being over the beasts, i.e. God’s personal act of breathing into the human form. This personal act of breathing into the human form corresponds to God’s divine election of Israel which is itself an act that corresponds to God’s eternal decision to elect humanity.

That God breathes the breath of life into the nostrils of the human form is for Barth the most “direct and personal and special act” of God. (III.1, p. 236) God does not do this to any beast, but only to the human form. It is in this way that the human form became a living soul. Barth writes, “It is to man [Mensch], and to man alone, that God gives breath in this manner. It is man, and man alone, who becomes a living soul in this way. And this, and this alone, is the distinguishing feature of man—his humanity—according to this passage.” (III.1, p. 236) Thus, for Barth, God’s personal breathing of life into the human form is a sign of humanity’s special election. (III.1, p. 236) Barth writes, “The fact that he is not just earth moulded into a body, and not just a soul, but a soul quickened and established and sustained by God in a direct and personal and special encounter of His breath with this frame of dust, is the differentiating exaltation and
distinction of man.” (III.1, p. 237) [emphasis mine] The inextricable relationship between God and humanity is established here and why only God can be humanity’s refuge and hope when things go astray.

Furthermore, Barth argues that not only is God humanity’s refuge and hope, but that humanity serves as a sign of hope to creation as well. The election of humanity is a sign to the whole creaturely world that the creaturely world itself will not remain an arid and barren existence but will also move from death to life. Not only is humanity a sign of this hope by being enervated by God through God’s personal act of breathing into human form, but the creaturely world will also look to humanity to be its husbandman and gardener, i.e. humanity will help deliver creation from death to life as well. (III.1, p. 237) With this statement we can see Barth’s understanding of the Genesis text as anticipating the person and work of Christ who will deliver creation from death to life. Thus, human beings have this commission and responsibility to serve and work on the earth. It is also in this way that humanity fulfills the meaning of its own existence.

However, Barth is quick to point out, lest humanity think too highly of itself, it must not be forgotten that it is not humanity but God who plants the earth in the first place and who will thus fulfill its hope and bring it to perfection. (III.1, p. 237)

So, far we have seen how Barth’s interpretation of Gen 2: 4b-7 discloses certain conclusions about a general anthropology; 1) that the human being is ordained to serve the earth; 2) is to be understood in its relationship to the rest of creation; and 3) is to be a sign of hope to the rest of creation. However, as we have pointed out, the election and calling of Israel stands behind this general anthropology. Barth explains:

Behind this anthropology as such there stands directly—conditioned and predestined by the will and act of Yahweh Elohim—the election and calling of
Israel, its existence and position within the world of nations to which it belongs, its selection and special training from among these nations, its antithesis to them, but also its role as mediator on their behalf, its being (subject to destruction) as light in their darkness, the responsibility of its mission, the exaltation and humility of its hope with the hope of the whole cosmos. (III.1, p. 238)

Barth insists that the Jawhist account of the Genesis saga is not a speculative testimony as to how there first arose and lived individual human beings, or humanity in general. Rather, Barth argues that the Jawhist witness understands his theme to be that of the people of Israel. God’s breathing of life into the human form of dust is to be understood allegorically as representing the fact of God’s special election of Israel.

Barth understands the allegory of the creation of humanity from dust in the following way. He understands the emphasis of the text on the “particular” dust being formed into a particular human body as an allegory for the formation of Israel as a “particular” nation from among all other nations. The act of God’s breathing into the nostrils of the human form is an allegory for God’s special election of Israel from among all other nations. Also, humanity’s call to serve the earth as a sign for creation is an allegory of Israel’s calling to be both a sign of hope for other nations and also the mediator of this hope to other nations as well.102

However, Barth does not stop there. He argues that it is difficult to affirm that the riddle of Israel is the final subjective content of the Genesis 2 passage. Rather, Barth suggests that the “riddle of Israel” is also an eschatological riddle, i.e. a riddle that points beyond itself, namely to Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah of Israel. (III.1, p. 239) Barth

102 This mention of Israel as a mediator indicates Barth’s insistence that Israel remains God’s covenant people, even after the Christ event, and that it is important that Jesus, as the mediator of God to humanity, was Jewish and a descendent of the house of David.
writes, “the man of whom the saga spoke, objectively, if not subjectively, is—in respect to the solution of the riddle of Israel and the fulfillment of its hope—this man Jesus.” (III.1, p. 239) Thus, in addition to the covenant history of Israel which stands behind the general anthropology of the Genesis text, Barth argues there is yet another level of interpretation to be applied to the text; namely, he argues that the decisive interpretation of the Genesis text must be Christological.

He, Jesus Christ, is the man whose existence was necessary for the perfecting of the earth; for the redemption of its aridity, barrenness and death; for the meaningful fulfillment of its God-given hope; and especially for the realization of the hope of Israel. He is the man who, taken from all creation, all humanity and all Israel, and yet belonging to them and a victim of their curse, was in that direct, personal and special immediacy of God to Him a creature, man, the seed of Abraham and the Son of David. He is the man whose confidence and hope was God alone but really God; who is what He is for all, for Israel, all humanity, and even the whole world; who in the deepest humility and the fear of God gave up Himself wholly to the fate of the creature, man and Israel, and in this way was decisively exalted and reigns over all creatures, the King of Israel and Savior of the World, triumphing over all their weakness. (III.1, p. 239)

Hence, we can see that whereas Barth first seems to be interpreting the text in terms of a general anthropology, it becomes subsequently clear that the history of the covenant of Israel, and Christology stands behind this general anthropology.

3.3 Freedom for Life: The Garden of Eden

In his exposition of the Garden of Eden, Barth will continue to explore the text with respect to the covenant history of Israel and Christology. Two important themes emerge from these passages. The first is another repetition of the theme of the specificity of a place set aside for humanity. In the first creation saga we saw that the land was set aside for humanity to dwell with the land animals. In the second creation saga, Barth
considers the specific location, i.e. the Garden of Eden, as the place set aside for
humanity to dwell and live in relationship with God and its fellows.

The significance of the two trees in the garden, i.e. the tree of life and the tree of
the knowledge of good and evil, are also decisively important for Barth’s theology and
his ethics. In his interpretation of the two trees, which will serve as the exegetical basis
for Barth’s understanding of the relationship between gospel and law, we will see how
Barth understands the nature of creaturely freedom with respect to the function of these
two trees. We will see how Barth understands the tree of life as the promise and
affirmation of life, i.e. the gospel, and how the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
also bears witness to God’s declaration for life, but does so in the form of a prohibition,
i.e. law. The transgression of the divine prohibition severs the otherwise original
relationship between the two trees and leads to distorted human knowledge of the original
ordering of relationships established in creation. Furthermore, we will show how Barth
interprets the significance of the two trees corresponds to God’s divine “yes” and “no” in
his eternal decision to elect humanity.

3.3.1 God designates a specific place for humanity to dwell

When he considers the Garden of Eden, Barth asks two questions: 1) what is this
place and 2) where is this place. In considering the first question Barth argues that the
Hebrew term “eden” simply means “delight” and that the Greek translation of the
Hebrew as “Paradise” is misleading. (III.1, p. 250) The garden is to be characterized as
delightful simply because the “fruit was pleasant to the sight and good for food.” (III.1, p.
250) Other than this, the garden had no other great attraction to commend itself. Thus,
Barth argues, Eden is not to be understood as an “Elysium, island of the blessed, a garden of Hesperides, or even a Lubberland.” More specifically, what makes the garden “delightful” is primarily and decisively the fact that it is specially planted by God and therefore belongs to God. In itself, Barth insists the garden is not without its problems, since it contains the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with whose existence the divine permission is linked. Thus, the point that Barth wants to emphasize is that the garden is “special” simply because it is a particular place designated by God. The garden exists on the earth as a place prepared specifically for humanity to dwell and to carry out its duty to serve the earth and is best understood as a “walled-in” park.” (III.1, pp. 250-251)

Furthermore, human existence did not begin in the garden, but was completed in it. Human creation began when adam, the solitary earth creature, was formed from the dust of the barren and arid ground outside of the garden, but the human form was completed when God placed it in the garden. Barth interprets this passage as indicating that human beings have no “natural” home. Rather, the human being’s home is this garden that God plants especially for it. There is no other proper place on earth for

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103 In the Odyssey, the Elysian Fields lay on the western margin of the earth near the encircling stream of Oceanus. There, the mortal relatives of the king of the gods were transported, without tasting death, to enjoy an immortality of bliss (Odyssey 4.563). In Works and Days, Hesiod refers to the “Isle of the blessed” which existed on the margins of the Western Ocean. The Garden of the Hesperides is Hera's orchard in the west, where either a single tree or a grove of immortality-giving golden apples grew. The apples were planted from the fruited branches that Gaia gave to her as a wedding gift when Hera accepted Zeus. The Hesperides were given the task of tending to the grove, but occasionally plucked from it themselves. Not trusting them, Hera also placed in the garden a never-sleeping, hundred-headed dragon named Ladon as an additional safeguard. A lubberland is an imaginary land of extreme luxury and ease.

104 It is fully completed when God presents “woman” to “man”.

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the human being. (III.1, p. 251) This interpretation will be important later when Barth considers the significance of humanity’s expulsion from the garden.

Barth also asks the question, “Where is this place?” He answers that the passage is meant to indicate that the garden, its rivers, and the surrounding land is meant to be not only concrete and geographical, but also semi-concrete and geographically indefinite. Barth argues that the existence of the land of Genesis 2 is concrete and geographical because, “as they speak in temporal terms, they aim to relate real history which has taken place on earth.” (III.1, p. 252) At the same time they are “semi-concrete and geographically indefinite because as sagas they do not aim to present ‘history’ but ‘prehistorical’ history.” (III.1, p. 252) Thus, Barth concludes, “we have to accept both the fact that paradise was planted and existed somewhere and not everywhere or nowhere, but also the fact that there can be no actual investigation of this ‘somewhere.’” It is important for Barth to maintain this description of Eden in order to emphasize, on the one hand, that we are dealing with this world that God created where humanity has its reality and no other place. On the other hand, Barth wants to maintain that there is no definite location on the earth where Eden can be “rediscovered” or investigated by us now in any “historical” way. However, it is a specific place, with boundaries and limits that designate the space for humanity.

After considering the “what” and the “where” of this semi-geographical place, Barth then turns his attention to the general features of the garden. He argues that the general nature of the garden is that of sanctuary. Also, he insists that even though God brings humanity to the garden, humanity in no way possesses it. Humanity is merely
appointed to its place within the garden. More specifically, Barth understands the garden to be a sacred grove. Thus, Barth suggests that humanity’s determination is to be that of a fruit gardener in this sacred grove. However, humanity’s determination to be a fruit gardener does not entail any significant labor on the part of the human being. Barth wants to emphasize that humanity’s determination to be a fruit gardener requires a very minimal amount of labor in order to suggest that human existence in the garden can be read as a parallel account of the Sabbath rest with God articulated in the first Genesis saga. However, Barth will develop this parallel account more fully when he interprets the meaning and significance of the two trees in the garden for humanity’s relationship to God.

One of the main features of the garden is the single river that branches out to fill the four corners of the earth. Barth interprets the single river that branches out and encircles the entire region as representing the source of life, both literally and figuratively. While it is true that water is essential for all creaturely life, the water “is to be regarded as the sum of the divine favour which rules Eden and from Eden over the rest of the earth.” The water is the great need of the earth and as such represents God’s initial divine act of blessing. It is here that Barth suggests that the sacramental character of the sanctuary is revealed.

Even when humanity will no longer live in the garden, the source of life and the divine blessing has its origins in this river located in the garden. Thus, even after humanity is expelled and exiled to another part of the earth, the original divine blessing,

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105 Barth compares this with the priests and Levites who have stewardship over the Temple.
symbolized by the water, will continue to replenish and nourish the earth. Barth concludes, “it is not just life itself, i.e. the possibility of life given by God to the earth and man, but also all the glory and beauty of this life, which have their origin within it.” (III.1, p. 255) Thus, anything that God will do outside of this sanctuary can only be understood in the context of the original blessing and revelation of God that was first actualized in this sanctuary. (III.1, p. 256) Furthermore, the continued existence of the river as the source and origin of all life, even after humanity is expelled from the garden, indicates that God has not retracted God’s original blessing of the earth. The water indicates the primacy of God’s grace and its continuance represents God’s grace as enduring in spite of sin.

Next we will turn our attention to Barth’s interpretation of the two trees in the garden. These two trees represent God’s divine permission and prohibition to humanity. As we will see the divine permission and prohibition to the humanity correspond to God’s divine “Yes” and “No” which took place eternally in God and to which God’s rejection of chaos-reality and its separation from creation also correspond. What Barth has to say about these two trees is highly significant for his understanding of human freedom and the nature of moral action itself.

3.3.2 The tree of life: The sign of the reality of humanity

For Barth the existence of the tree of life is much more than a tree from whose fruit humanity may eat. Interestingly, Barth speculates that it seems as if humanity does not even need to eat of the fruit of this tree, nor does it appear that humanity had actually done so. The “tree of life” appears to be, in the first instance at least, superfluous. (III.1,
p. 256) Of course, Barth imputes much more significance to the tree of life than its merely existing to serve as an available supply of food from which humanity may or may not choose to partake. Rather, Barth interprets the tree of life to be the sign of the reality and the truth of life itself and God’s original blessing of this life. Barth writes: “Its presence means that man is told where he is, to whom the place belongs, and what he may expect and be. It assures him of the benefit of life whose witness he is. For it obviously does not mediate this benefit. It simply indicates and represents [the benefit].” (III.1, p. 256)

In other words, the tree of life is a sign which speaks for itself. It represents the direct reality of the life of the earth, the garden and its trees and humanity as the creatures of God. It is a “confirmation of the fact that [humanity] may really live here where God has given him rest. Hence there was no need for him to eat of the fruit of this tree.” (III.1, pp. 256-257) Thus Barth concludes:

And so the tree of life is really the centre of Paradise; the sign of life as God gave it to man at his creation and as he was permitted to live it as a divine favour; the sign of the home in which man was given rest by God because God Himself, and therefore the source of his life, was no problem to him, but present and near without his so much as having to stretch out his hand. In the beginning there was the joyful message of this life. In the beginning man stood under this sign. No continuation can alter or reverse this. On the contrary, the whole continuation can only confirm that this was man’s beginning. (III.1, p. 257)

In Barth’s terms, this joyful message of this tree of life is the unequivocal divine “yes” to the existence and purpose of human life and creation itself. Like the creation of light in Genesis 1, the first tree declares unequivocally who and what the creature is and that creaturely life is to be lived in a specific direction. The second tree, on the other hand, like God’s rejection of chaos-reality, will represent the divine “no” to the
possibility of a particular form of human life, i.e. the direction in which the creature is *not* called to live. However, as we will see, even with its divine “no”, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil functions positively to affirm the truth about God and the truth about the nature of creaturely life and the freedom granted to it.

3.3.3 The tree of the knowledge of good and evil: The sign of the *possibility* of humanity

The prohibition attached to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil serves a two-fold purpose. When human beings obey God’s prohibition attached to the tree of knowledge of good and evil they both affirm themselves as creatures and affirm God as God. In contrast to the tree of life, which indicates to humanity who they are to be, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil indicates to humanity *what it is not* called to be. In other words, the tree of the knowledge of good and evils indicates the *possibility* of what humanity *could have been*, but which God deemed as *not good* for the creature.

The role of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil functions similarly to God’s action of passing over chaos reality in silence at the beginning of Genesis 1.

The important features of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to which we will attend are: 1) tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not, properly speaking, the tree of death, i.e. the opposite of the tree of life; 2) the tree of the knowledge of good and evil reveals the truth about who God is; 3) the prohibition attached to this tree does not provide humanity with a freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience, but rather establishes freedom as the freedom for obedience. We will explore this latter point in more depth shortly. However, let us first investigate why Barth thinks it is significant that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not the tree of death, properly speaking.
The first point to be made is that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not properly called the “tree of death.” That is, it is not the immediate antithesis to the tree of life. This designation of the second tree as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is of decisive importance for Barth. Barth emphasizes that there is an intermediate step between the eating of the fruit of this tree and dying, namely, acquiring the knowledge of good and evil.

According to Barth, if the human being acquires the knowledge of good and evil then this means that the human being will acquire the ability to judge between what ought to be and what ought not to be. Or put another way, it will fall to the creature to determine who and what she is called to be and the specific direction in which she is called to live. Barth argues that this ability is tantamount to human beings acquiring divine knowledge and allows the creature to stand alongside of God, i.e. having the ability to render the divine Yes and divine No. The serpent truthfully said to the human beings in the garden if they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “your eyes will be opened and you will become like God.” Barth writes:

The Creator distinguishes Himself from the creature by the fact that He exercises this power of distinction; whereas the creature is directed to accept and approve what God who is able and entitled to distinguish has done, does, and will do. If the creature could on its own judgment reject what on God’s judgment it ought to accept, it would be like God, Creator as well as creature. And this is what the name means. It is the essence of the tree. (III.1, p. 258)

The decisive point here is that the creature must accept God’s divine judgment on matters of life and death, salvation and perdition. The creature as a creature is not ordained to occupy the position of Judge, i.e. to render the Yes and No. Interestingly, Barth argues that neither the existence of the tree itself nor its fruit constitutes or contains
this possibility, but rather they merely show that the possibility exists. However, when the human being eats the fruit, the tree reveals and affirms that the human being is in the process of realizing this possibility. This will be an important distinction for Barth when he interprets the text in light of the covenant history of Israel; namely, Barth will argue that this “process of dying” is akin to Israel’s existence in exile, waiting for the promise to be fulfilled while otherwise living under the threat of death, though not actually having been destroyed.\(^{106}\)

Barth insists that the fact that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is accompanied by a prohibition suggests that the tree represents a problem. He points out that it is “something which man—the man who lives under the sign of the tree of life—cannot know of himself, but which he must know and which has therefore to be told him, to be explained and interpreted to him.” (III.1, p. 258) The reality of divinely given creaturely life speaks for itself, as indicated by the existence of the direct and unmediated testimony of the tree of life. However, the possibility of humanity attaining divine likeness is not immediately self-evident to the creature. Thus, the possibility of divine likeness does not obviously commend itself, and hence why the serpent needed to provide encouragement. Barth concludes, “the divine Yes to human life which [the first tree]

\(^{106}\) If the creature attains the knowledge of good and evil then she will die because it is a capacity for which she is not suited. This is why God banishes humanity from the garden so that they will not actually die. Indeed, this is why Barth needs to insist that this is not the tree of death but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because the process of attaining the knowledge of good and evil is an intermediate step in which the process of death follows, and not death itself. God must expel Adam and Eve from the Garden to protect them from the consequences of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Otherwise, if they eat it and stay in the Garden then they will experience eternal death. This is what God in God’s goodness and mercy will not allow. Humanity will die if it usurps the role of Supreme judge because as a creature he does not have the ability to judge correctly. Therefore the creaturely would ultimately wind up condemning himself. This is what God forestalls by banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden.

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pronounces can be heard and understood directly. But now a divine No is added to the divine Yes and therefore there has to be speech.” (III.1, p. 258) It is only through God’s direct speech to humanity that humanity learns that the possibility of attaining divine likeness is not to be realized and that this possibility is ultimately destructive.

However, Barth argues that this divine prohibition is not principally a threat, but rather an act of grace. The spoken prohibition reveals God’s fatherly care in the same way that humanity’s expulsion from the garden is also an act of grace. The meaning of the prohibition is not that God first prohibits and then adds a threat in order to give the prohibition weight. Rather, God prohibits because God wants to safeguard humanity against the threat connected with the doing of what is prohibited. (III.1 p. 259) Similarly to Genesis 1, God’s speech establishes boundaries and limits to free the creature to realize its life and protect it against that which would threaten it. God knows that this threat exists and therefore endeavors to protect the creature from this possibility by prohibiting it. Barth argues that, “this prohibition is the first powerful promise with which God meets death.” (III.1, p. 259) The Christological background to this interpretation is very clearly here.

In light of this spoken prohibition, Barth goes on to consider two questions that emerge as a result of this scene. Why is it the case that the human being will begin to die the moment he eats of the fruit? Why was God’s prohibition not more effective?

First, Barth argues that the human being will die if she eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because the knowledge of good and evil is not properly a creaturely attribute and function. As mentioned above, the knowledge of good and evil is that which radically distinguishes the Creator from the creature. (III.1, p. 259)
It is the judicial wisdom of God to know, and His judicial freedom and office to
decide, what He wills and does on the one hand and does not will or do on the
other, and therefore what is good and evil, for salvation or perdition, for life or
death. It is in this wisdom, freedom and competence of a sovereign Judge that
God created heaven and earth, Paradise and man. God knows what He created
because He willed to create it, because He affirms it, because he found it good
and salutary. He also knows what, in creating heaven and earth, Paradise and
man, He did not create because He did not will to create it, because he negated
and rejected it. In making this decision as the creator He made use of His
knowledge of good and evil. It is as this Judge, on the basis of this judicial
knowledge and sentence that He confronts man as Lord. (III.1, p. 260)

The creaturely life proclaimed silently and positively by the first tree is life on the
basis and under the natural presupposition of this judicial knowledge. Everything is
what it is and how it is because God as the Judge has decided and ordered and willed it
thus and not otherwise. Furthermore, human life is to be lived in such a way that one
accepts this knowledge consciously. This conscious acceptance is what will ultimately
distinguish humanity’s relationship with God from that of the land animals. (III.1, p. 260)
Thus, Barth concludes that humanity is ordained to live in fellowship with God, which
includes the acknowledgment of God’s deity and therefore of God’s judicial office in
creation. The critical question will be whether or not humanity will do so.

If humanity decides to refuse this life of adoration and acceptance, and reaches
out to the possibility that God has rejected, the consequence is dire. Barth argues that if
humanity “gains unnecessary possession of the divine knowledge of God and evil” then it
will have to share with God the whole responsibility of God’s judicial office. This means
that humanity will now be responsible for choosing and rejecting and will have to know
what is good and evil, salvation and perdition. (III.1, p. 261) Consequently, all things
would then depend on the human verdict in the same way that they depend on God’s. As
we saw in Chapter 1, Barth believes that this is precisely what human self-justification entails.

The human being, of course, can not occupy this position and hence will “necessarily collapse under this burden” as if it “were given the whole globe to carry.” (III.1, p. 261) The choice between good and evil and the knowledge essential to this choice is a responsibility that is absolute both in its scope and difficulty. In the face of such a responsibility, humanity will always necessarily fail. Why? Because unlike God’s decision, the human decision will always be a “decision for evil, destruction, and death.” (III.1, p. 261) This failure results “not because he is man, but because he is only man and not God; because the willing of good and salvation and life as such is a concern of God which cannot be transferred to any other being.” (III.1, p. 261, emphasis mine) Barth writes:

Gazing into the abyss on the left hand—which the decision of God has graciously veiled—man can only give way to dizziness and plunge into it. That is why he is graciously kept back from it by the divine decision. It is impossible for any other being to occupy the position of God. In that position [the creature] can only perish. It can only be made to realize that it is not God. Placed there in its creatureliness, it cannot continue as a creature. Placed there, it can only pronounce and execute its own sentence—not because [the creature] is evil, but because God alone is good. (III.1, p. 262)

The knowledge of good and evil is a threat to the very existence of the creature and it is from this threat that God wills to protect humanity.

Furthermore, this possibility of attaining the divine likeness must result in death because only God is good and competent to judge between good and evil; this is the radical distinction between God and humanity. God would have to cease to be God to alter this difference between God’s self and every other being. (III.1, p. 262) Thus, since
God is the God who is gracious to humanity, this threat of death must be averted. God cannot change who God is, thus God offers this prohibition to protect humanity and its creatureliness. This possibility for humanity is not to be realized. It is only possible for God. More importantly, however, in Barth’s view, is that humanity is called to recognize that this possibility is only achievable by God and must be grateful that it is denied this responsibility. Barth concludes, “That man should be summoned to [recognize] this is the positive meaning of the second tree.” (III.1, p. 262) In affirming God’s prohibition the creature both affirms God as creator and itself as a creature.

After answering the question as to why humanity would necessarily suffer death after eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Barth raises a second question, why was the divine prohibition not more effective? In other words, why did God’s Word take the form of a prohibition that the creature had the ability to transgress?

In order to answer this question, perhaps it is helpful to begin with an understanding of what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not a trap that God has laid for humanity, nor is it a “bridgehead left to the kingdom of darkness by indifference or weakness on the part of God,” nor is it some sort of trial. (III.1, pp. 263-264) Rather, Barth argues, it is in the planting of this tree that we have to do with “a well-planned arrangement of the divine wisdom and justice.” (III.1, p. 263)

Barth suggests that this second tree, like the first tree, is a special ornament of the garden. It is a special ornament of the garden because the glory of humanity created by God would not be complete without it. (III.1, p. 263) What is it about this tree that makes
the glory of humanity, and therefore the glory of God complete? For Barth the answer is that in planting of the second tree, God confronts humanity with its freedom.

However, Barth does not characterize human freedom as the freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience. Nor is human freedom the freedom to choose between good and evil, at least understood in the sense that obeying God’s prohibition is “choosing good” and by being disobedient humanity is “choosing evil.” Rather, for Barth, human freedom can only be properly understood as a freedom to affirm its own existence by being obedient to God, i.e. to be who it is. This decision to affirm its own existence is most properly as a conscious act of gratitude. Barth writes:

There can be no mistaking the fact that with the existence of this tree and with the utterance of the prohibition man is brought to a crossroads; that in the midst of Paradise and therefore of the act of his creation, a question is put to him which he must answer with his existence. In the face of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil the divinely given life of man assumes the nature of a task. It is to be lived in acknowledgement of the judicial office of God, in conscious gratitude, and to that extent in the form of decision and obedience. (III.1, p. 263) [Emphasis mine]

The emphasis here is important. Humanity’s confrontation with the tree of the knowledge of God and evil reveals the truth about humanity and God. Only God may occupy the office of Judge and render the divine decision concerning good and evil. The human being is a creature that is created with a freedom to consciously acknowledge and affirm its creaturely existence before God. As an act of gratitude, the creature affirms its life, i.e. a life to be of the earth, and to serve the earth, and to be a witness to the earth for God. To eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is to deny not only the truth of one’s own existence, but also the truth about God.
Barth wants to maintain, however, that this freedom granted to the creature to consciously affirm the truth of its existence is *real* freedom. Barth argues this point by saying that the eating of the fruit of the tree is not physically necessary for the human creature. Thus, God did not “pre-ordain” humanity to “fall.” Humanity has other fruit to eat so its survival is not at stake. However, even though the fruit is forbidden, the eating of the fruit of the tree is not made physically impossible either. Barth argues that “some play” is given to humanity in the freedom ascribed to it. (III.2, p. 263)

This sense of “some play” illustrates what Barth means when he says that the eating of the fruit of the knowledge of the tree of good and evil is *not a choice between obedience and disobedience*. In other words, creaturely freedom cannot properly be understood as a “freedom of indifference,”\(^\text{107}\) since the divine Yes and No has already been rendered in the course of creation. Furthermore, humanity, along with the rest of creation, has been created under the divine Yes. Thus, Barth argues, the absolute freedom to “obey” or “disobey” mischaracterizes what is at stake in the creature’s freedom to affirm its existence. He states:

> God makes Himself known to [the human being] as the One who, in and with his creation, has ruled as Judge over good and evil, who has made him good, who has therefore ordained and equipped him only for what is good, and who, as his Creator cut him off from evil, i.e. from what He Himself as Creator negated and rejected. (III.1, p. 263-264)

One cannot understand human freedom to be absolute in scope since “no play is given him on the edge of the abyss.” The creature is not created to occupy some neutral space midway between obedience and disobedience. Rather, the creature’s place is with

\(^{107}\) Barth doesn’t actually use this phrase but it captures the modern sense of freedom against which Barth is arguing.
and before God, who has already decided between good and evil, salvation and perdition. Therefore, creaturely freedom is a *freedom in limitation*, i.e. a freedom exercised within the scope of its own creaturely being and the conditions of the created order. Barth goes on to argue that no other decision than that of obedience will correspond to the place inhabited by the creature and no other decision can be expected of the creature.

Obedience is commensurate with the creature’s very being and thus the creature is expected to be nothing less that what she was created to be. (III.1, p. 264)

Furthermore, since this invitation to freedom is God’s affirmation of the creature, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil cannot be understood as a temptation. In other words, God’s prohibition is not designed to tempt the creature to violate its own being. Rather, when faced with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God not only invites the creature to confirm its own being but to confirm its acceptance of the truth about God as well. Hence Barth argues that this invitation reveals the *order of the relationship between God and humanity*. He writes, “The purpose of God in granting man freedom to obey is to verify as such the obedience proposed in and with his creation, i.e. to confirm it, to actualize it in its own decision.” (III.1, p. 264) What is implied by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and underlined by the prohibition, is simply that the given possibility of obedience is not the possibility of one choice as opposed to another, but of a free decision to obey. (III.1, p. 265)

Taken on its own, this last sentence may not seem to indicate a meaningful distinction between the phrase “possibility of one choice as opposed to another” and “free decision.” What exactly is the difference between characterizing freedom as a “free decision” as opposed to a “choice” between obedience and disobedience? In Barth’s
mind, the difference appears to be this: to characterize freedom as a “choice between obedience and obedience” is to suggest that the creature stands in some “neutral” space with the ability to place itself under the divine Yes and the divine No. In other words, in choosing to “obey,” the creature would then move from the neutral space to a place under the divine Yes; in choosing to disobey, the creature would move herself from the neutral space and place herself under the divine No. This is equivalent to the creature deciding whether or not she is to be elected or rejected. For Barth, both of these scenarios are impossible.

In the first place, it is God who has created the creature, which thus implies that the creature always already stands under the divine Yes of election in Christ. Secondly, because God has already decided to affirm the creature, it is impossible for the creature to annihilate its own existence, i.e. by having the power to place itself under the divine No. The creature has no power to undo what God has already willed. Again, the choice to disobey, to affirm one’s being as standing under the divine No is a decision that is not within the scope of the creatures power. The creature’s very existence testifies to God’s divine Yes and thus the creature really has no “power” to “choose” its way out of God’s original divine decision in some definitive ontological way. Hence, while it appears that Barth removes any meaningful characterization of human freedom by denying that human freedom to “obey or disobey,” the opposite is actually the case.

The freedom to disobey would result in the creature having the power both to deny and to annihilate her own existence, to render Christ’s saving act null and void. In Barth’s view, the human being has no such freedom. To deny and to annihilate one’s own existence, Barth argues, would be the exact opposite of freedom. Thus, Barth
characterizes freedom as a freedom to affirm ontically what is already true ontologically. In other words, to affirm and witness with one’s life and action, what is already true, election in Christ. Consequently, when evaluating Barth’s understanding of human freedom, one must keep in mind that the creature is always already created and existing under the divine Yes—there is no other place in which the creature can really (ontologically) stand. That is, there is no neutral space. The creature always already exists in a specific creation as a specific creature under certain limits. Thus, freedom, in Barth’s terms, is always a freedom to affirm its own being and in so doing affirm the truth about God’s divine Yes. This is a meaningful freedom because if humanity were not granted this freedom, it would not be able to have fellowship with God.

Furthermore, God expects the creature to repeat and affirm the Divine Yes. That the creature has the capacity to do so belongs to the structure of creatureliness itself.

(III.1, p. 265) Barth writes:

[Freedom] certainly does not consist in his standing between good and evil and being able to choose between the two. But it does consist in the fact that the man who stands thus before the God who in his creation has determined him for good is not only subject to this divine decision but can respect it in the form of his own decision. This is the freedom which God gave him at his creation. It is in this and no other way that He has determined him in His own decision for good. He expects and has made him capable of confirmation, of the obedience of his own free will and act. (III.1, p. 265)

It is constitutive of human nature and the realization of that nature to affirm one’s existence by heeding God’s prohibition. The failure to make this affirmation can only be described as inexplicable and absurd, which is the very definition of sin.

Barth also wants to emphasize that the question of human freedom does not arise when God animated the human form of dust by breathing into its nostrils. Rather, the
question of freedom arises only when the creature is confronted by God’s Word. Barth argues that creation is only completed after God reveals God’s self to be the Sovereign Judge of good and evil, thus giving humanity the freedom and responsibility to affirm not only its own creaturely existence but also God’s divine existence as well.

It is only to man confronted by the revelation of God that freedom is given as he is confronted by God in His Word. From this standpoint his creation is completed only as God makes Himself known to him as the Sovereign Judge of good and evil, commanding him to cleave to Him as this Judge and forbidding him to try in any sense to be this judge himself. *By reason of this address and summons, and the responsibility thus ascribed to him, man becomes and is free; free for what is expected and required of him; free to confirm not himself, but God’s decision accomplished in and with his creation.* (III.1, p. 265) [Emphasis mine]

This confrontation with God’s Word is also the ethical event. Human freedom is freedom to acknowledge God’s Word, i.e. the Divine Yes and No. It is in this freedom that the creature both affirms itself and affirms God as the sovereign Judge and Creator over all that is. In other words, human freedom, in Barth’s view, is nothing more than a freedom to be humble.

Finally, Barth argues that it is in this way that human and divine fellowship takes place. When the creature recognizes God’s divine judicial office and keeps to its own place, the creature holds fellowship and participates in God’s own wisdom in a way that the plants and animals cannot. Barth writes:

In making use of the freedom given him, and therefore acknowledging the divine decision in the obedience of his own, man undoubtedly participates in the wisdom and righteousness in which God made His decision. The wisdom and righteousness of God are the rock on which he too can now stand […] It is not without man but with him—and with him in his own decision and act—that God is wise and righteous, the sovereign Judge who judges rightly. This true union with man, this true exaltation of the creature, is what God wills when He gives him freedom to obey. (III.1, p. 266)
Without this freedom granted to the creature, Barth argues, God would have given the creature an inferior love. That is, it would not really have been a greater benefit if God had “made things easier” for the creature by sparing her the decision to obey, i.e. denying the creature her freedom and therefore making a paradise without any problems. (III.1, p. 266) Indeed, Barth argues that if God had made the transgression of the divine prohibition impossible, then this would have implied that God had showed the creature an inferior love. If God had protected the creature in this way, i.e. by denying the creature the opportunity for this ethical encounter, if God had from the very outset exempted the creature from the question of its existence, then God obviously would not have called the creature into fellowship and therefore into true union with God. (III.1, p. 266) Barth concludes:

> It was not the fatal divine likeness of a personal knowledge of good and evil, but fellowship exercised in freedom with the God who had willed the good and rejected the evil which was the genuinely alluring and inviting thing in Paradise, the door which was not merely open but ordained for entry. The tree of knowledge could become a danger to man only if he faced it in a freedom appropriated in misuse of the freedom given him. In face of the realization of this possibility, God the Creator needed no justification. (III.1, p. 266)

To summarize: The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not a trap. It is not a way for God to put humanity on trial. Rather, the existence of the tree of good and evil functions positively in that it discloses the truth about God as the Sovereign Judge of good and evil and the creature’s inability to assume this role. Furthermore, the divine prohibition attached to this tree serves to inaugurate true fellowship between the creature and God. It represents the nature of the ethical event of encounter between humanity and God. This tree stands to confirm not only the truth of human freedom, but also reveals to
the creature what human freedom actually is, namely, the freedom for the creature to affirm the truth about its own being and the truth about God.

3.3.4 Israel’s covenant history and the Garden of Eden

We recall that in Barth’s interpretation of Gen 2: 4b-7 that the covenant history of Israel stood behind Barth’s anthropological interpretation of those verses. Furthermore, Barth argued that the Genesis saga also unwittingly pointed to Christ as the decisive interpretation of the meaning of those verses as well. This is no less true for Barth’s interpretation of Gen 2: 8-17. Barth’s interpretation of the Garden of Eden, the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represent, respectively, the promised land, the gospel, and the law. In our interpretation of Barth’s treatment of this text, we will see more clearly how he understands the proper relationship between gospel and law, revelation and creation, which he believed had been severed in his own day.

With regard to the Garden of Eden, Barth suggests that the first striking feature of the Gen 2: 8-17 passage is that creation of the earth and humanity finds its continuation in the planting of the special Garden in Eden and the placing of humanity in the garden. Barth argues that a parallel can be seen when the land of Canaan is arbitrarily singled out as a special place for God’s people to dwell with God. Barth does not think that Canaan is Eden (geographically speaking), but the important parallel to be considered is that there is a special, fruitful, earthy place that is not a utopia or Elysia, but a place that is singled out by God for a particular purpose. Like Eden, Canaan will be the place where Israel is to find its home and have its history enacted. To further his case, Barth argues that such an interpretation would not be foreign to Israelite hearers of the saga:
No Israelite hearer or reader of this saga could be surprised to hear of the act of God the Creator in establishing this place. For he himself was the witness of an event closely corresponding to it. He lived in the midst of the fulfillment of the promise given to his fathers of a good land, good above all other lands, and destined to be the sanctuary of God. (III.1, pp. 267-268)

Thus, Barth believes that since the salvation history between God and Israel to be projected backwards onto the text, this suggests that the people of Israel also understood its covenant history with God as the meaning and purpose of creation.

Israel’s exile and return from exile are also pre-figured in Genesis 2. Whereas humanity was brought to the Garden by God and given it its home, so, too, did God lead Israel to its promised land. And, just as humanity will be expelled from the Garden, so, too, will Israel be exiled from the promised land. For both the human beings portrayed in Gen 2 and the people of Israel, the exile from the Garden/promised land will be both an act of divine judgment and an act of divine grace. (III.1, p. 268-269) Barth argues, however, that the decisive parallel between the events depicted in the Garden and the covenant history of Israel centers around the relationship of the two trees that form the center of the garden, which he understands to represent the gospel and the law. Our exposition of this next section should help further elucidate Barth’s ‘gospel-law thesis’ that we examined in Chapter One.

3.3.4.1 The Tree of Life: The Tabernacle and the Temple

As we mentioned above, the tree of life is the sign of the reality of humanity and the direct justification of human life which is revealed directly to the human being without any mediation. With regard to the covenant history of Israel, Barth argues that
this tree can also be understood as the voice of God heard and attested to by Moses and the Prophets. (III.1, p. 272) The tree of life can also be understood to represent the tabernacle and also later the temple and the special ministry entrusted to it. Since, the tabernacle and the temple were understood to be the place where God’s presence was immediately located, Barth argues the tabernacle and later the temple was the whole concrete center of Israel’s being in the land. Hence, the tree of life/tabernacle/temple are a sign of the absolute goodness of God and the sign that Israel could live.

This sign told Israel that everything that had to be done for its sake had already taken place and was accomplished; namely, that God had made Israel a nation (God’s breathing life into the dust), which was brought to the promised land (the garden). It is the tabernacle and later the temple (tree of life) which testifies to this work of God already accomplished and that God is always present to Israel. Hence, the tabernacle and the temple represent the hope which cannot be taken from Israel. Barth suggests that the tree of life also represents the Law of God to which Israel could cleave and always live. Here we see the inextricable original relationship of the gospel and the law.

3.3.4.2 The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: The Law and the Prophets

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil will also mean for Israel the same thing that it reveals to the first human beings in the garden. That is, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a warning sign of a possibility which, if realized, will necessarily be the opposite of the life and salvation promised to it—it will involve Israel’s destruction and ruin. God alone in God’s wisdom and righteousness has given Israel its land. Israel has its promise and hope solely in the divine decision verified in
this fact. For this people, everything depends upon its acceptance of the sovereignty and uniqueness of God’s decision and thus cannot approach God and in its own knowledge of good and evil and try to choose from God’s seat of judgment. God knows that humanity can only find true joy in God’s decision and Israel’s distinction from other nations is that it is elected without having elected itself.

To rejoice in God’s promise, Israel has to live in this goodness of God’s election that has no basis except in God, i.e. on the ground of God’s knowledge of good and evil. Thus, Israel must not make itself like other nations; neither may it serve other gods or make gods of their own. (III.1, pp. 269-270) To do this is idolatry, which is the “clearest exponent of the knowledge of good and evil usurped by man” and the sign of the mistaken path on which one nation after another rises and falls. (III.1, p. 271) This is why God gives Israel the prohibition, i.e. so that it does not follow the path of idolatry and destroy itself. To live by any other means than God’s free goodness (represented by the tree of life), i.e. to live by its own self-justification and attain glory for itself (eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), Israel (as a nation) will surely die.

After showing how the covenant history of Israel is to be understood in relationship to the two trees, Barth raises the same questions concerning the efficacy of the divine prohibition with regard to Israel. 1) Why must Israel suffer and vanish the moment it tries to ascribe to itself that which is given to it by God’s decision? 2) Why is God’s grace not powerful enough to make superfluous the special sanctifying of Israel and all the injunctions and prohibitions? The answer that Barth gave previously also holds true with respect to the covenant history of Israel.
Israel will “die” when it eats of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because “in the strength of a good which it ascribes to itself it cannot continue either before God or man, either spiritually or politically, either in the preservation of its national unity and freedom or the maintenance of the land given to it.” (III.1, pp. 271-272) Only YHWH is the righteousness of Israel and it is only YHWH’s righteousness that exalts Israel. Sin, then, is the surrender of YHWH’s righteousness for one’s own righteousness and it is this surrender of YHWH’s righteousness that leads to the destruction of Israel. Hence, Israel must cleave to the “law of God,” which requires them to obey the prohibition and be content to be in the presence of the tree of life, i.e. to be content with the grace of God. (III.1, p. 272) With this interpretation of the covenant history of Israel with respect to the role of the two trees in the garden we see some of Barth’s main themes and concerns that we addressed in Chapter 1, i.e. the problem of humanity attempting to secure its own righteousness, its own self-justification, apart from the grace of God.

With regard to the second question, i.e. why is God’s grace not powerful enough to make this prohibition superfluous, Barth again gives the same answer that he gave previously, i.e. that if God’s grace was so powerful as to make the prohibition superfluous or meaningless then this would indicate that God does not take Israel’s covenant fellowship seriously. Barth insists that God wills to be the God of Israel, but wills to do so in covenant relationship. Thus, God requires that Israel have the freedom to be obedient. (III.1, p. 272) The truth and general validity of Genesis 2: 8-17 depends on the fact that it is said with God and Israel in view. (III.1, p. 273)
However, like his exegesis of Gen 2: 4b-7, Barth suggests that the question of the final, objective, Christological meaning must again be raised with this passage. He argues that the question of the subjective meaning of the text, i.e. the meaning corresponding to the intention of the passage “might have been answered and exhausted by the reference to the history of Israel and the general anthropology secondarily and implicitly revealed in it.” (III.1, p. 273) However, Barth argues that the history of Israel does not exhaust the interpretation of the Genesis text. Why is this? Because of the relationship of Genesis 2 to Genesis 3 and the relationship of Genesis 2 to the rest of the Old Testament.

Barth argues that the Garden of Eden represents only a “type” of the covenant which God desires to have with humanity. For example, Barth argues that the Garden of Eden represents a “type” of the good land that YHWH Elohim willed to give to his people. The account of the two trees represents the “type” of order in which YHWH Elohim and his revelation will encounter humanity and in the way in which humanity will encounter YHWH. (III.1, p. 273) However, once the human beings/Israel violate the divine prohibition, human beings/Israel live a life only under the threat of death. Thus, the covenant history of Israel, considered on its own, is the “anti-type” to the “type” of the covenant that was envisioned in the garden. Once Adam/Israel transgress the divine prohibition, Adam/Israel live only in the knowledge of good and evil and their relationship with God is now lived under this condition. As a result, the dialectical unity of the Gospel (tree of life) and Law (tree of the knowledge of good and evil), which existed prior to the Fall, is now dissolved and Adam/Israel live under the Law.
However, Barth argues that the covenant history that ensues between Adam/Israel and God after the Fall cannot completely account for the hope of the fulfillment of God’s promises and the work of the prophets which point to this eventual fulfillment. That is, if there was no witness to this future promise of fulfillment then, Barth argues, the “type” of the covenant that was attested to in Gen 2 would merely be an illusion and not a reality. This is why Barth argues that the solution to this problem must be the Christian one.

For Barth, the Christian solution to the Genesis 2 text proceeds from the fact that the meaning and reality of the history of the garden is to be found in the history of Israel. (III.1, p. 275) However, the Christian answer does not understand the history of Israel as a reality that is self-enclosed. Rather, it is a reality that from the very outset opens forward and points to the goal and reality beyond itself—namely, through God’s own fulfillment of the covenant through God’s intercession for humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence, the history of the garden acquires its form from the history of Israel, but it is only a provisional form. It does not show how this goal was reached, or how the covenant was actually accomplished and fulfilled. Barth writes:

The history of Israel controls in certain respects the problem of the covenant of God and man indicated in the story of Paradise. It shows how in accordance with the history of Paradise God will actually accept man, and how He wills to hold fellowship with him. It also shows the great gulf which is to be overcome. It shows God in all the glory of His goodness and man in all his sin, need, and shame. It shows how God in all faithfulness conducts His will for the covenant to its realization. It shows also how this realization can only be the work of His incomprehensible mercy, and how it can only become an event through a passing and renewal of man and of the world; through a passing and renewal which from the standpoint of man is incomprehensible, in which God Himself will not only ultimately accept man but will Himself have to intercede for him, finally realizing the covenant in His own person and thus enforcing definitively the judicial knowledge in which He was the Creator of all things. (III.1, p. 275)
In short, the history of Israel speaks of divine mercy and human sin, of gospel and law, election and rejection.

However, Barth argues that the history of Israel, taken on its own, speaks of these things in such an antithetical and self-contradictory way that if we lose or fail to see the sign which points forward to the reality which stands behind the history of the garden, then the unity and reality of the whole will be lost. Barth writes:

[T]he history of Paradise, because it is itself a reflection of the history of Israel, can only in its juxtaposition of the two trees present this unity only ambiguously and, as it were, dialectically so long as we do not read it with reference to one point where the covenant of God with man is accomplished and fulfilled and where there is only one tree [tree of life/Christ] instead of two. (III.1, p. 275)

In other words, the creation saga is no illusion. The history of Israel recorded in the Old Testament is really more than a history of contradiction if it has actually and objectively found its goal, intended for it from the very outset, in the person and death and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The history of Israel is more than a contradiction if it is true that it pleased God to become and be this person, who fulfills the covenant himself. In God’s act of becoming incarnate and fulfilling the covenant, God thus ratifies the judicial recognition of God’s own work of creation. (III.1, p. 276)

In conclusion, only the accomplished work of Jesus Christ can reveal the true unity of Genesis 2 and 3 and the unity between Genesis 2 and the rest of the Old Testament. Barth argues that the apostles and the evangelists will reveal the fact that the history of Israel already has its full share in the reality manifested by Jesus Christ. Thus, Barth concludes, “we no longer look in vain from restricted Israel to humanity at large, from the particular to the general, nor do we ask in vain concerning the general
anthropology so enigmatically proclaimed in Gen 2.” (III.1, p. 276) One must look to the person and work of Christ as providing the completed and full subjective meaning of the text.

3.4 Partnership and Responsibility Before God: The Creation of Humanity

In the forgoing subsections we have continued to see Barth stress the specificity of creation and its determination for God’s purposes. We have also explored Barth’s definition of human freedom, as freedom for obedience, in his exposition of the significance of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. Throughout our examination, we have seen how Barth apprehends God’s work of creation and human life and action to correspond to God’s eternal decision to be gracious to humanity. In this subsection, we will focus on how Barth understands the important ethical concept of responsibility, which he develops in his discussion on the creation of humanity as male and female. Throughout our discussion we will also point out how Barth’s interpretation of the text is crucial to Barth’s understanding of the nature of the relationship between men and women more generally and in marriage specifically. In III.4 §54.1 “Man and Woman” under the larger paragraph heading of “Freedom in Fellowship”, Barth specifically states that his exposition of Genesis 1:27f and 2:18f in CD III.1 §41 are of particular relevance to his discussion in his special ethics of creation.

Barth’s exegetical strategy for Gen 2: 18-25 is no different from his exegetical methods of the previous two sections. That is, Barth articulates a general anthropology that he believes is evident in the Genesis texts, but insists that the covenant history of Israel stands behind this anthropology. Furthermore, as above, Barth argues that only a
Christological interpretation of the Gen 2: 18-25 provides the final and definitive interpretation of the text. However, for our purposes, we are going to present Barth’s Christological rendering of the text as we go along, instead of waiting until the end as we have done in the preceding sections, since Barth’s Christology so clearly influences his general anthropological comments.

In his examination of Gen 2: 18-25, Barth poses several questions to the text. Why could *adam* not be alone and why did he need the woman for his helpmeet and to find his completion in her? Why did *adam* not recognize the animals as his helpmeet? Why did God put *adam* into a deep sleep before God created woman and form woman from his rib? Why did the man jubilantly exclaim: “This is now, at last, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”? Why does the man need to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, so that the man and the woman become one flesh? Finally, Barth asks: Why were the man and the woman naked and not ashamed? It is important to keep in mind that Barth’s understanding of the man as representing Jesus and the woman as representing the church drives the interpretation of each of the six questions he has posed to the text.

3.4.1 Solitary humanity is not good: Why *adam* could not be alone

To the question: why did God not allow *adam* to exist alone, Barth answers that if *adam* were solitary he would not be a good creation. Why is this? God does not will to be in relationship with a humanity that is not created in the duality of the sexes. This fundamental commitment is consistent with his efforts to refute the modern view that the human being can be understood as a self-sufficient and solitary individual.
In our discussion of Gen 1: 27, we pointed out that for Barth, God’s intra-Trinitarian divine life is that of “being-in-encounter” and that God desires to be in covenant fellowship with humanity who is not a solitary being, but is the creaturely repetition of that divine form of life itself, i.e. a being-in-encounter. Hence, for Barth solitary adam is not created imago dei and is thus not declared ‘good’ by God, until the creation of the woman has taken place. (III.1, p. 290) Only humanity, created male and female, is created imago dei and therefore good. More specifically, solitary adam is not the subject presupposed as the partner of God in the covenant history which is to follow, but humanity as a single species created in the duality of the sexes. In short, Barth argues that if created adam were to remain solitary, creation as a whole would not be good, because it would lack the internal basis of the covenant. Thus, it is with humanity as male and female, i.e. humanity in this two-fold form of “being-in-encounter” that God wills to be in relationship.

Barth argues that determining humanity in this two-fold form is the subject of the divine soliloquy of Genesis 2. He writes, “The content of this Word [i.e. “it is not good that man should be alone…”] was the covenant, determined already though not yet instituted, in which God the Lord willed to have dealings with a two-fold being.” (III1, p. 290) To be God’s partner in this covenant, solitary adam cannot remain solitary and must have a partner. However, a true partner, i.e. “helpmeet” [Hilfe], requires a being who is both similar to adam yet different from him.

What is sought is a being resembling man but different from him. If it were only like him, a repetition, a numerical multiplication, his solitariness would not be eliminated, for it would not confront him as another but he would merely recognize himself in it. Again, if [the partner] were only different from him, a being of a wholly different order, his solitariness would not be eliminated, for it would confront him as another, yet not as another which actually belongs to him,
but in the way in which the earth or tree or river confronts him as an element in his sphere, not as a fellow-occupant of this sphere fulfilling the duty allotted within it. (III.1, p. 290)

To be created “good” *adam* needs a being who is both like himself and yet different from himself, so that he would not only recognize himself, but also recognize another human being which was not like himself. It is only in this way, Barth argues, that woman is to him “a Thou as truly as he is an I and he is to it a Thou as truly as it is an I.” (III.1, p. 290) This is essentially why Barth argues that homosexuality is not a legitimate form of human relations in III. 4, since it reflects a desire to ‘be-in-relation’ with a being who is only “like” oneself and not with someone who is *both* the same *and* different. (III.4, p. 166) For Barth, homosexuality not only reinforces the solitariness of *adam*, but he interprets homosexuality as the rejection and denial of one’s fellow human partner of the opposite sex. For, Barth this is tantamount to one of the other persons of the Trinity rejecting an encounter with one of the other persons of the Trinity. In short, Barth believes that homosexuality is a denial of the two-fold form of humanity, which is also to reject God’s decision to create humanity in this two-fold form, and thus also a denial of the covenant and the goodness of creation itself. Thus, in Barth’s theology, it would be absurd for someone to say that God “created” her as a homosexual. It would also be absurd for someone to say that God “commanded” her to be homosexual or that one has a “vocation” to homosexuality. Thus, it is here that we can see that the covenantal ontology of creation provides a normative framework for Barth’s ethics.108

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108 The difficulty of course here is that for Barth the “other” is defined exclusively with respect to someone of the opposite sex. A question one might ask Barth is how he can then at the same time say that God can command one to the “single life” and to celibacy. Is this not, too, a command to be a solitary and self-sufficient individual? Is the vocation to the single life not also a rejection of the other? We think that
male and female is the God’s preparation of nature for grace. (III.1, p. 290)\textsuperscript{109} To act in any way which denies this reality is to deny one’s own humanity and is consequently a rejection of grace.

The Christological background that undergirds this anthropological reading is Jesus and the Church and Barth draws on Eph 5.25 in his interpretation as well. It cannot be emphasized enough that for Barth, even \textit{Christ} cannot be conceived of without his fellow humanity. Barth argues that Christ’s own incarnation is not complete until his fellow humanity (the “others”) are brought into the church. Thus, if Christ as the first-born of all creation cannot be conceived of without fellow humanity, much less can any other human being understand herself as alone and solitary. Creation is made \textit{for Christ} to realize his vocation, but Christ cannot realize this vocation, e.g. to \textit{be} the Son of God and Son of Man, without the rest of humanity. So Christ, creation, and humanity are inextricably bound to one another.

Because the man Jesus, the Son of God, whose earthly existence was envisaged at the creation of heaven and earth, and the Son of Man, whose manifestation and work were envisaged in the election of Israel, was not to be alone; because in His own followers, the Church which believes in Him, He was to have His counterpart, His environment, His helpmeet and servants. It was not apart from them but with them that He was the firstborn from the dead. And therefore it was not without but with them that He was already the first-born of creation. For His own incarnation was completed only with the bringing of the “others” and their reception into the Church. (III.1, p. 321)

\textsuperscript{109} This is another important feature of Barth’s theology. Humanity is not prepared for grace because it has some “internal capacity”, e.g. a supernatural existential (Rahner). Rather, humanity is prepared for grace by being created in the duality of the sexes. For Barth, humanity is prepared for God’s grace by being created \textit{in relationship} to other human beings who are both alike but different. Thus, the form of creaturely relations is I-Thou, which prepares the way for a \textit{graced} existence. It is not something that God will abolish or remove. As we mentioned in our exposition of Genesis 1, the \textit{imago dei} cannot be destroyed.
In sum, Barth insists that we cannot properly understand the human being as a solitary or self-sufficient individual without the aid of the “other.” Just as Christ himself cannot be properly understood without his relationship to the Church, neither can the human being be understood without reference to the human being of the opposite sex. As God in his triune existence always already exists in relationship with himself, God creates a creaturely reality which corresponds to this relationship. Only humanity in its two-fold form as “male and female” was declared good by God, and thus suitable for God’s covenant intention with humanity. In III.4 Barth articulates in more detail the character of this “domain” in which God commands, i.e. male and female relations, and how God orders it accordingly. For Barth the single human being never exists properly as such, but only in the domain of fellow-humanity as male and female. As a solitary being adam is not suited to God’s covenant intentions and needed to be completed with the creation of woman. As the earth creature becomes humanity in its two-fold form of male and female, so, too, is creation completed as the presupposition of grace.

3.4.2 Recognizing incompleteness: Why adam was not content to co-exist with the animals

Barth’s emphasis on the importance of humanity as a single species in the duality of sexes also explains Barth’s answer to the question why adam was not content to co-exist with the animals. Solitary adam could not be content with the animals because they were not true partners, i.e. not a Thou to his I and vice versa. Even more importantly in this passage, Barth argues that adam’s refusal to find the animals to be suitable partners is also the first point at which adam affirms his humanity before God. It is here that Barth
stresses the importance of recognition of the truth about one’s self and why such a recognition needs to be confirmed before God with a creaturely “yes.”

After adam named all of the animals, Barth argues that adam was confronted with a gap in creation. That is, adam did not find a helpmeet and thus could not experience himself as fully human in the solitary company of the animals. Furthermore, Barth emphasizes that by refusing to recognize any of the animals as his helpmeet adam was confirming his own humanity. God created adam as the one who, in full exercise of his freedom, could give the beasts their names and co-exist with them in love or fear. However, he could not recognize them as his equals or choose them as his helpmeet.

As man, man was free to prefer solitude to the exchange of his solitude for false company. He was free to accept the impasse, rejecting every ostensible offer and waiting for the true helpmeet. Having seen, understood and named all of the animals, and ordered his relationship to them, he was free to remain unsatisfied, for it is better to be unsatisfied than to be half-satisfied or wrongly satisfied. (III.1, p. 293)

In other words, by refusing to recognize the animals as his helpmeet, adam was confirming his humanity; again, adam confirmed ontically what he was ontologically.

However, adam’s choice and decision not to recognize the animals as his helpmeet was not akin to God’s divine judgment of good and evil. In other words, adam’s rejection of the animals was not the equivalent of pronouncing the animals as “evil.” Rather, adam’s rejection of the animals as helpmeets is “simply a confirmation of his own creation in which God disposed concerning him and made him man.” (III.1, p. 293) With this decision, the solitary adam confirms that he is elected and is prepared to remain unsatisfied, rather than deny his true humanity. It is in this refusal, Barth argues,
that *adam* exercises his most proper freedom, choice and decision and this decision clears the way for the creation of woman. (III.1, p. 293-294)

The Christological background of this interpretation of *adam’s* refusal to recognize the animals as true partners is that Christ had to *recognize* and determine who would be his followers. Christ’s followers do not elect themselves but must first be recognized and called by Christ. Barth writes.

From the standpoint of the New Testament we must answer that it is because the calling and ingathering of the church of Jesus Christ, for whose sake He was born and crucified and raised again from the dead, was to be a matter of His own free election; because His own were to become His own followers in virtue of the fact that He recognized them as such, that He decided for them, and called them, and formed of them His own *entourage*. Like had to come to like, and He Himself had to decide who were to be like Him; He Himself had to be the measure by which the could be like Him and therefore His followers, describe as such. As the Son of God and the Son of Man He Himself had to recognize and address them as such. (III.1, p. 321)

We think that Barth’s insistence on the role that *recognition* plays with respect to affirming one’s fellow humanity may be helpful with respect to thinking about the nature of personhood more generally. If personhood is determined by simply recognizing one as a fellow member of the species, specifically as a fellow person who shares the same *humanity as Christ*, then this would be an alternative approach to trying to establish personhood based on some manifestation or possession of a capacity, e.g. reason, consciousness, etc. Thus, robots with artificial intelligence would never properly be considered persons, nor would higher primates with demonstrated intelligence. The question with respect to genetically engineered “superhumans” is another question. The test would be whether or not Christ would recognize a genetically modified superhuman as “like” himself and therefore elected for fellowship with God. Or, if “superhumans”
are ever engineered to a point where they cannot be true partners with their fellow humanity then a case might be made on theological grounds to remove their status as persons.

3.4.3 The mystery of divine action: Why *adam* was put to sleep

The fact that woman has her origins from the sleeping *adam* has caused no end of controversy in the ongoing relations between the sexes. This rendering of the creation of woman has led people to think woman is a deficient male and that the woman only has salvation through the male, etc. Indeed, most readers find Barth’s famous rendering of the man as A and the woman as B and has having a natural inequality rather suspect, even though Barth himself bends over backwards both in III.1 and in III.4 trying to say such a relationship is not meant to yield oppression and submission by either of the partners. It is beyond the scope of this project to defend or criticize Barth on this point. However, Barth’s dogmatic reading of the text in this case is particularly instructive for understanding how he portrays the relationship between the man and the woman in remaining subsections of this chapter.

Barth understands the removal of *adam*’s rib as analogous to Christ’s death for the reconciliation of the Church. The church emerges when he endured the pain of death and allowed a part of his own life to be taken from him. The church is “formed” from

that which is wholly Christ’s and which he now surrenders and thus the church receives from Christ Christ’s own essence and existence. In return Christ receives the church, accepting its weakness and making it a part of His own body, thus the church is not without Christ and Christ is not without the church. Christ recognizes the church as his own body, formed from what was taken from him, and alive through his death. When Christ acknowledges the church, human weakness is enfolded and borne by His glory, and is itself quickened by his death. (III.1, p. 321)

The emphasis on *adam* being put to sleep serves to emphasize that the church did not have any part in its own formation; the church originates as an act of God. (III.1, p. 294) The formation of the church through Christ’s death is also the secret of creation, it is the mystery of God’s divine will and which is itself the good. Here again we can see the way God’s divine election of humanity finds its correspondence in creation, and in this text specifically in Barth’s rendering of the relationship between the man and the woman.

3.4.4 Recognition and Joy: The man’s jubilant exclamation: “Diesen nun endlich!”

Barth argues that the whole of the Genesis 2 saga aims at this exclamation from *adam*, “At last, this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this shall be called Woman, because this was taken out of Man!”111 With this proclamation, Barth argues that creation itself has reached its goal. (III.1, p. 291) That is, with the naming of woman [*Männin*] Barth argues that *adam* moves from the mere association [*Umwelt*] that *adam*

111 The German text reads, “Diese nun endlich! Gebein von meinem Gebein und Fleisch von meinem Fleisch! Diese soll Männin heißen; denn vom Manne is Diese genommen.” (KD III.1, s 343). Note that the texts says *Männin* and not *Frau* for woman.
has with the animals to that of fellowship [Mitwelt]. It is a fellowship that takes place between man and woman. (III.1, p. 300)

Barth argues that what constitutes this climax of this text is not the fact that the man says Yes to the woman, but that in this affirmation he says *Yes to God in the presence of the woman*. The man’s exclamation at the sight of the woman represents the free thought of humanity that is directed to God. It is a decision by humanity to recognize and accept God’s grace. Barth writes:

> It is in this way that he really welcomes and receives her. It is in this way that he honors her as the one whom he will now be able to address as “thou” and before whom he will commence to say “I”. The supremely subjective thing aimed at here has its created ground and truth in the supremely objective, because regarding and indicating woman, man gives the glory neither to himself nor woman, but to God and His finished work. Even subjectively, even as the establishment of his own relationship to woman, his confession could not have greater force than it has in virtue of the fact that materially it is a simple recapitulation of the divine work. (III.1, p. 300)

In short, whereas *adam’s* rejection of the animals represented a responsible No, the man’s exclamation at the sight of the woman represents humanity’s responsible Yes to God. (III.1, p. 291) The man’s joyful confession is an affirmation of God’s divine work. Thus, creation is completed when God brings the woman to the man and the man has uttered this decisive proclamation: “At last, this is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.”

Barth places a tremendous amount of theological weight on the phrase “THIS at last” [*Diese nun endlich!*]. For Barth the “this” refers decisively to the woman, who the man recognizes as his helpmeet. He writes:

> The “this” certainly refers to the helpmeet which according to the view of God expressed in Gen 2: 18 man needed for his own humanity but could not find in the animal kingdom. “This,” this *femininum*, indeed this *femina*—for what
distinguishes her from the beast is the fact that she is not only \textit{feminum} but \textit{femina}—supplies this need. (III.1, p. 300)

In other words, Barth is arguing that the solitary \textit{adam} could not fully realize his humanity if he had no partner in woman. Furthermore, Barth argues that \textit{adam} realized that he \textit{lacked} something before the emergence of the woman. Thus, Barth argues that the “this” means the banishment of \textit{adam’s} want.

In the quote above, one notices that Barth distinguishes between \textit{feminum} (female) and \textit{femina} (woman). Recall that in Genesis 1, Barth emphasized that humanity shared a male and female sexual duality with the beasts and that sexual differentiation is a specific feature of creaturely reality. However, Barth’s more specific designation of the female human being as “woman” suggests that Barth believes that there is a significant qualitative distinction between biological sexual differentiation, and the role that sexual differentiation plays with respect to the human being’s understanding of herself as \textit{human}. Indeed, for Barth the fact that \textit{adam recognizes} the woman as biologically “other” than himself is essential for \textit{adam’s} comprehension of who he is as a human being. Hence, it seems that Barth is arguing \textit{against} a strict sexual reductionism, i.e. to be a man is to be reduced to being of the male sex, and to be a woman means reduced to being of the female sex. Rather, Barth seems to be suggesting that to be a man is to be more than “male” and to be a “woman” is to be more than female. This “more than” appears to reside in the \textit{relationship} of the male to the female, i.e. in their created humanity as being-in-encounter in which each is recognized as “other,” which also carries with it a concomitant freedom “to be for” the other. In other words, sexual differentiation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for articulating what Barth
means by “man” and “woman.” Additionally, Barth is also insisting that the idea of “completion” and “freedom” are bound up with the relationship between man and woman as well.

Barth asks the question why “this”? He answers that: “[This]” is itself human [Menschlich], yet not another human being [aber eben nicht nur ein anderes Menschen Wesen], but “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Barth writes:

This, then is woman: the one so near to the man [Mann] who through her existence has become man [Mensch], and who is therefore indispensable to him for his own sake. If she were not this to him, if she were neutral, distant, and dispensable in relation to him; if she were to him another being, human but only feminine, she would not be woman! (III.1, p. 300) [emphasis mine]

The key point to be taken from this quote is that solitary adam becomes Mann/Male through the existence of woman. Thus, solitary adam undergoes what appears to be an ontological change in his encounter with the woman. He is no longer a solitary earth creature, i.e. the adam which is not the presupposition for God’s covenant. In his encounter with woman he becomes a human being, i.e. a “being-in-encounter” in the two-fold form of male and female with whom God will have covenant relations. It is

112 German KD III.1, s. 344. This distinction is interesting. Barth here seems to mean that woman is not a different classification of human being in the same way that the animals are of a different species. This was a key distinction for Barth in Genesis 1 as well. However, logically it would seem that to recognize another of the same generic “kind” would require that one must classify her as another “human being.” Barth’s Christological hermeneutic is behind this comment very clearly and seems to be reflective of Barth’s insistence that Jesus shares a common humanity with the rest of the human race.

113 Das also ist die Frau: die dem Menschen–dem durch ihre Existenz zum Mann gewordenen Menschen so Nahe und um seiner selbst willen so Unentbehrliche. Wäre sie ihm das nicht, stünde sie ihm neutral, fern und entbehrlich gegenüber, wäre sie ihm ein anderes, menschliches, nur eben feminines Wesen, so wäre sie nicht die Frau. (s. 344) It seems as if the English translator simply ignored the ‘die dem Menschen” before the dash. Again, the Christological hermeneutic sheds light on Barth’s interpretive decisions.
only with the creation and encounter with “woman” that *adam* and the human race itself is pronounced “good.”

Barth furthers his argument about the relationship of the woman and to the man by commenting on the *naming* of the woman [*Männin*]. He says that the point of the name given by the saga is that “woman is of man” [*die Frau des Mannes Frau ist.*] (III.1, p. 310, s. 344). In order to explain this, Barth first goes on to say what this relationship *does not* mean. He says that this does not mean that woman is “mannish” [*männlich*], nor is she his property [*Eigentum*], nor does it mean that she is not a human being [*Mensch*] in the full sense. (III.1, p. 301) Rather, Barth argues that to be taken out of the man simply means that she “belongs” to man.

What it does mean is that in her being and existence she belongs to him [*zu ihm gehöht*]; that she is ordained to be his helpmeet [*ihm zur Hilfe bestimmt*]; that without detriment to her independence she is the part of him which was lost and is found again—“taken out of him.”

Thus, Barth argues, it is proper for the woman to be beside the man and in this position is her humanity [*Menschlichkeit*].

Barth’s argument that the woman’s humanity lies in her place alongside of the man because she “belongs to him” and is “taken out of him” can be confusing. On the one hand, Barth insists that the relationship between the man and the woman “is not one of reciprocity and equality.” (III.1, p. 301) Yet at the same time he wants to argue that the woman is “no less than man [*Mann*]” and indeed her glory is greater than the man’s. How can Barth reconcile these seemingly contradictory statements?

114 Thus here again there is a fine distinction. One needs to differentiate between “belonging to” and “being the property of.” Barth is making the distinction but is not drawing it out.
On the one hand, Barth argues that that the relationship between the man and the woman is not one of reciprocity and equality because the man [Mann] was not taken out of the woman, but the woman was taken out of the man [Mann]. Thus, Barth argues the woman “belongs” primarily to the man and not the other way around. (III.1, p. 301) Even though the man belongs to woman “secondarily,” Barth argues that the man’s supremacy is “not a question of value, dignity, or honour, but of order [der Ordnung].” (III.1, p. 301, emphasis mine) He argues that this supremacy of order does not denote a higher humanity of the man, i.e. this supremacy of order is of no shame to the woman nor is to any credit to the man. Indeed, Barth argues, this supremacy of order is an “acknowledgement of her glory, which in a particular and decisive respect is greater even than that of man.” (III.1, p. 301-302) Barth explains:

Again, from the standpoint of this passage, we can only say that those who do not know woman [Frau] in this relationship to man [Mann] do not know her at all. A whole host of masculine [Männergedanken] and feminine [Frauengedanken] reflections concerning woman [Frau] completely miss her reality [Wirklichkeit] because this element [woman’s superior glory] is either not taken into consideration at all or is not taken into consideration properly. (III.1, p. 301)

Thus it is here that Barth wants to hold in tension the man’s superiority over the woman because he was first in “order” with the truth that woman’s “glory” is even greater than that of man. The woman’s “glory” is greater than that of man. Only with these two things in mind, Barth argues, can reflections on the man and the woman be properly considered.115

115 It seems that the man’s superiority of “order” does not really mean anything other than he was first. In the same way that the first-born of siblings are not greater or more loved, just first and not second. However, it would have been interesting if Barth would have incorporated some thoughts about the great reversals of birth order in the Old Testament, e.g. Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, etc.
Barth also gives further significance to the importance of woman [Männin] who is taken out of man. Namely, Barth argues that behind the creation of the woman is the divine initiative [Zugriff] and attack [Angriff] upon solitary humanity [den einsamen Menschen]. (III.1, p. 302, s. 345) By attack [Angriff] Barth means physical attack. This “physical attack” occurs when God caused adam to fall into a deep sleep and removed his rib. Interestingly, too, Barth discusses the removal of the rib as God inflicting a mortal wound on adam. 116 Barth argues that adam had to give up something in order for God to complete creation. He writes that, “Without even being asked, man had to yield something which belonged to him by divine and natural right. He had to allow the infliction upon himself of a mortal wound.” (III.1, p. 302) The solitary adam’s donation of his rib entailed “sacrifice, pain, and mortal peril.” (III.1, p. 302) He concludes:

God spared him [adam], and yet the strange mixture of the perfect joy of finding and the never-absent pain of deprivation in his relationship to woman is the constant reminder of that from which he was spared. Woman is his great but also his strange glory. She is this because her creation signifies the completion and to that extent the declaration of his own creation, and because it is her existence which signifies the completion of the humanity of his own creation. She is this also because by his Yes to woman, by the recognition of his free thought and the confession of his free word, man participates a second time in her creation and therefore in his own creation, and in this way—honourably enough—in the completion of creation as a whole. Woman now stands before him as his glory, and it is her glory to be his glory in this multiple sense. It is for this reason that she is called “woman” [Männin] that she is “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh” and therefore “this” [Diese nun endlich!]. (III.1, p. 302)

Woman does not stand before the man accidentally or arbitrarily, rather, “She is his glory as he himself is the glory of God (1 Cor 11:7). Without her he would be without glory.” (III.1, p. 303) The Christological grounding of this interpretation could not be

116 Again, one can see how Barth’s Christological hermeneutic is influencing his interpretation of this passage. The “mortal wound” Barth is referring to intimates Christ’s crucifixion.
more clear. The Church did not first recognize Jesus but was first recognized by him. The church is Jesus’ counterpart, since it is only in his vocation as the savior of humanity that Christ’s vocation is fulfilled. With the election of the church, Jesus’ own election as the Son of God and Son of Man is itself complete. (III.1, p. 321-322)

3.4.5 The subordination of the man in marriage: Why the man must leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife

In his exegesis of Gen 2 Barth tries to reconcile what he believes to be an apparent contradiction between Genesis 2:23 and Genesis 2:24. Barth understands Genesis 2:23 as indicating that there is a clear supremacy of the man over the woman by the virtue of his “birth order.” However, he understands Gen 2:24, i.e. where the man “leaves his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall become one flesh,” as indicating a subordination of the man to the woman in marriage since the man is now a “follower and adherent of the woman.” In other words verse 24 seems to imply that the status of the man’s superiority has changed. However, Barth argues that this contradiction is only apparent. He solves the contradiction by saying that the man’s “supremacy” is ordered to his eventual “subordination” to the woman in the arrangement of marriage. However, Barth will then go on to say that it is only in his position of subordination to the woman that the man can rightfully rule over her. In other words, the lordship of the man over woman in marriage is grounded in the man’s humility and subordinate status in marriage. How does Barth arrive at this conclusion?

117 Should we use “super-ordination” instead of supremacy? Also, one wonders why Barth wants to insist on the use of the term “supremacy” when he otherwise tries to bend over backward to say that the supremacy is only one of order.
Recall that solitary adam's humanity is only completed in his encounter with the woman. That is, without the woman, solitary adam is not good. Thus, for Barth the presence of the woman [Frau] for the man [Mann] is of decisive importance for the man. Without the woman the man does not realize his humanity. The man needs a helpmeet. Thus, he has to seek and desire and sacrifice to find her. In this sense the man is utterly dependent upon the woman and, hence, the man is the “weaker half” in the arrangement.

(III.1, p. 305) Barth writes:

Everything depends, therefore, upon man’s [Mannes] really seeking and finding the good thing without which his own humanity is incomplete, and on woman’s being this good thing for him. This act, then, must really be the act which completes the emergence of man and the decision and choice of his free thought and word. Man’s tearing himself away from his roots must not be a rebellious self-emancipation, but the offering of the required sacrifice, the realization of the autonomy gained and granted at this cost. He must not seek his I but his Thou—his “helpmeet.” […] In the manifold meaning of this concept he must really seek and find in her his own glory. And she for her part must desire only to be his glory. The will and purpose of God for both must find realization in this event. It would bode ill for both man and woman if the event rested on accident and arbitrariness or blunder and misunderstanding. (III.1, p. 305-306)

Thus, from this angle, Barth is confirming an interpretation of the text where the man is considered the “weaker half” and is utterly dependent on woman for the completion of his creation and therefore his humanity.

Barth then must show how this previously articulated “superiority” of man is now at the service of his subordination to woman. His argument is roughly as follows: It was understood that the man [Mann] had a certain supremacy because he was “first” and as “first” he was thus in the position of acknowledging the lack of a helpmeet in the animal kingdom. However, with the fashioning of woman, God placed the man [Mann] in a position of acknowledging her as the fulfillment of the lack that he was confronted with
when he looked for a helpmeet in the animal kingdom. In his acknowledgement of the woman as “Diese nun endlich!” the man acknowledged and confirmed before God his own humanity, thus signaling the completion of his own creation. Because the man was in the position of acknowledging and confirming the truth about the woman, Barth interpreted this verse to suggest that the man has “superiority” over the woman.

However, because the woman was the fulfillment of that which he lacked, the man was thus driven to “seek after her and find her,” i.e. the man needed to leave his father and mother and cleaves to his wife. It is in this sense that man the man is said to be the weaker half, dependent and a “follower” of woman. Hence we can see how Barth denotes the “superiority” of the man only a superiority of “order” which simply represents the “first” position that he was in which required his rejecting the animals as helpmeets and affirming that woman as his true partner. However, since the man cannot realize his full humanity without the woman, he must become a follower of her and to desire union with her. Thus, he becomes the “weaker” half of the partnership and assumes a position of subordination to the whole arrangement.

The goal of the act of creation in which woman [Frau] is taken from man [Mann] and becomes “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh,” “woman” [Männin] is the lack and fulfillment by which man [Mann] is bound to his elect as he has bound himself to her by his own choice. The goal of his recognition and definition of woman [Frau], of his “this,” is the unity in which alone man and woman can be together “twice man” [zweisam Mensch], in love and the marriage based upon it. The goal of the whole supremacy shown at this point is his subordination to the whole arrangement. (III.1, p. 306, s. 350)

In other words, when the text reads “And therefore, man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife,” the therefore explains to what service the supremacy of man [Mann] is for, i.e. to be in union with the woman. The subordination of the man to
the woman in marriage is for the sake of the union of the two. Only in his humiliation as the one who must seek and desire and sacrifice for the woman can the man be the lord of the woman and the stronger partner. (III.1, p. 306)

Hence, Barth is suggesting a paradox. The man is not “superior” in himself with respect to the woman considered in herself. The man’s superiority can only be understood in terms of the relationship of the man and the woman. It is only in the relationship of the man and the woman and what has gone before this union in which the nature of the man’s “superiority” can be put in perspective. The “superiority” mentioned by Barth is simply that of the man’s order [Ordnung]. That is, he was created first and as such was given a particular responsibility by God in which God required him to affirm his humanity by acknowledging and confessing the truth about woman as being “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.” It is by this confession and acknowledgement, in which the man realizes that the woman fulfills what he lacked, thus revealing his utter dependence on her. Thus, this “superiority” reveals to the man a “humility” in which he understands his “weakness.” Paradoxically, it is the man’s humility and weakness that authorizes his position as “lord” over her.

While Barth does not necessarily explain how this great reversal is transformed, i.e. superiority $\rightarrow$ subordination $\rightarrow$ lord, it does appear as if Barth is suggesting that the original “superiority” of the man is reversed and then transformed, such that the original superiority is not the same as the “lordship” with which the man [Mann] now exercises over the woman. That is, the original superiority is that of “order”, but the “lordship” of which Barth speaks is not derived directly from the original “order” but is derived from his subsequent position as the “weaker” half of the unity of the two. The Christological
grounding of the text is here again quite strong. Jesus must leave the glory of his Father for the sake of his own followers; because his mother and brothers and sisters will be those, and only those, who as his followers do his will. Jesus will declare his full solidarity with them, genuinely uniting Himself with them. (III.1, p. 322)

3.4.6 God stands for humanity: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed”

In his interpretation of Gen 2: 25 Barth considers further the status of human beings in creation. He asks whether or not Genesis 2:25 indicates some doctrine of the primal innocence of humanity in its “first estate” [Urstand]. Barth argues that it would not be correct to understand this verse as representing a “first estate” of humanity which exists properly in history. That is, it is not a state of innocence that existed in history in which humanity perfectly exercised their freedom and thus subsequently fell, thereby creating “two estates” of human beings in history, i.e. one of innocence and one of guilt. Rather, Barth argues there is only one “estate” of humanity, and that is one of sin and guilt which humanity brought upon itself. If there is to be any doctrine of the primal innocence of humanity, then it belongs properly to God’s estate of creation. This is important for Barth because here he insists that there was never a time when humanity could stand on its own before God without Christ. There has never been a “time” when humanity was self-grounded and self-sufficient, without the need of grace before God. In this passage we can sense the echoes of Barth’s rejection of law and gospel division that we discussed in Chapter One.
Barth interprets the verse “and they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed” (Gen 2: 25) as a way to further explain that the Fall is a result of humanity wanting to “stand for themselves” before God. Recall that Barth understands the tree of life as representing the actuality of the human being as living completely in God’s grace in a fundamental and radical way. That is, in creation, human beings are given everything they need for life. There is nothing they need to add to it and there is nothing that is lacking. Barth understands verse 25 as testifying to this point as well, i.e. God’s clothing of humanity in nakedness is a gift of grace and proper to humanity’s being. Humanity does not need clothes and there is nothing that they need to add to their being. This is why it can be said that the human beings were naked and not ashamed. In other words, again, humanity confirmed ontically what was true ontologically. Barth writes:

Their own “standing” could consist only in the fact that they accepted this; that they found nothing to add of their own to the work and gift of God because they lacked nothing; that in this way their free act was simply a confirmation of the fact that they allowed God to be wholly for them, without wishing to improve or complete His purpose and the works of His hands by their own purpose and work. (III.1, p. 307, s. 354) 

The point Barth is emphasizing is that if there is such a thing as a “first estate” of humanity’s innocence, then this innocence cannot be separated from God’s creative act or can be said to have been achieved through humanity’s own efforts apart from God. In other words, Barth wants to guard against any belief that the primal innocence of humanity is somehow humanity’s own achievement. On the contrary, Barth argues, the true “first estate” of humanity, i.e. that which was brought about by human achievement and a statement of his own willful self-assertion is its state of guilt. (III.1, p. 307-308).
The fact that humanity was good and innocent is not part of its own history, but the consummation and climax of the history of creation.\(^{118}\) (III.1, p. 308)

Barth also expounds on the idea that in the original ordered state of man and woman to each other they were “naked and not ashamed.” Barth describes their innocence in this way:

Their innocence was in God and their being before and with him; in the sign of the ‘tree of life’; in the freedom in which they rejoiced in the life given by Him and to be given back to Him; in their self-evident restriction from the ‘tree of knowledge’ as a frontier which they had no desire to cross and the prohibition of which was only a confirmation of what they could not possibly will themselves. (III.1, p. 310)

In short, Barth argues that their innocence was their *creatureliness*, i.e. their dependence upon God for all that they have and their acceptance of grace as sufficient for life and in which there was no place for disgrace or shame. (III.1, p. 310) Thus, part of the tragedy of the Fall is that, along with their innocence, the first human being also *lost the correlative knowledge of the truth* that their nakedness was nothing of which to be ashamed. By eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge of the first human couple had become corrupted and their nakedness, which had been previously recognized as the glory of God, was now understood from a state of corruption, i.e. as a cause for shame and disgrace. (III.1, p. 310)

With the corruption of their knowledge, so too, came the corruption of their relationship with each other and with God. Barth describes the result of this corruption in the following way:

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\(^{118}\) This is another instance where Barth’s understanding of “creation history” and the “history of the covenant” is theologically significant. Barth here guards against an “original state of nature” which has fallen.
When their relationship to God was disturbed, their mutual relationship was also disturbed; everything that belongs together disintegrated; everything that was created in a definite order was thrown into confusion. Humanity became a sexless and therefore anaemic and finally a soulless ideal hopelessly confronting abstract masculinity on the one side and abstract femininity on the other. And leading to the conflicts between the blind dominion of man and the jealous movement for feminine emancipation; between evil eroticism and the absence of eroticism; between demonic bourgeois views of love and marriage; between dissipation and respectability. (III.1, p. 310)

There are three key points worth mentioning with respect to this quote. The first is that it is clear with his mention of the “jealous movement for feminine emancipation” that Barth is concerned with how the gender relations had come to be construed as a result of first-wave feminism. Since Barth discusses the “jealous movement” in juxtaposition with the “blind dominion” of man, it is very clear that Barth understands that the proper relationship between men and women has been lost as a result of both sexes failing to properly understand their relationship as “counter-parts.” Such a lack of understanding between the sexes, correlativey, confirms that Barth believes that there is a definite order of relations that was thrown into confusion.

Finally, Barth also seems to affirm here what could be called the “natural goodness” of the human erotic impulse. That is, Barth implies that eroticism, which has often been viewed negatively in the Christian tradition, is not itself a result of the fall. Barth affirms the erotic impulse as part of the goodness of God’s creation and as the desire to simply “delight” both in God and in one’s fellows without any correlative concern for what “use” the other might be for one’s own projects or goals. For Barth, the erotic impulse only becomes a problem when its purposes are viewed from the state of corruption of human knowledge. Thus, the corrupted view of eroticism results in human relations becoming subject to “evil” eroticism or which are without any erotic element at
all. In short, this quote affirms that Barth understands that there is a moral order in creation and that what belongs to this creation is good and must be affirmed. It is when human knowledge of the created order is viewed without respect to grace, that the true meaning and purpose of things are distorted and misunderstood.

Barth is not suggesting that the ontological order of creation itself is overthrown as a result of sin. For Barth sin has no creative capacity. Sin leads the human person to fundamentally misunderstand the very nature of creation itself and her place within it. Thus, shame is contrary to the nature of humanity that God created and thus belongs only to the subsequent history of humanity, i.e. the history of the covenant, in which the consequences of this disorder must then be reckoned with.

Another crucial feature of Genesis 2:25 is that in this verse, for the first time, God considers the man and the woman together as responsible subjects. Hence, Barth argues, the problem of Gen 2:18, i.e. the solitary adam, is no longer a problem. In Gen 2:25 humanity is no longer considered as a single being, but as a couple. Barth writes:

Both together are the acting responsible subject man [Mensch]. With the creation of woman as the climax of his own creation, and his acknowledgment of her, man [Mannes] has lost his position of sole responsibility. He is no longer the only spokesman as in v. 23. From now on woman will be there, and with him she will be “man” [Mensch] and will stand before God as such. God’s whole intercourse with man [Mensch] will now be strictly related to man [Mensch] conjoined as “male” and “female” and existing as I and Thou, and therefore to humanity [Menschlichkeit]. (III.1, p. 308)

Barth’s emphasis is that God has dealings with humanity conjoined together as male and female, who exist together in an I-Thou relationship. Again, this is why God commands in the domain of “man and woman” and Barth devotes an entire section in III.4 describing how God commands humanity in their relationship as men and women.
The relationship between the man and woman is not that of two autonomous beings considered independently from their relationship with each other. Rather, Barth argues that the humanity of each is determined by its relationship to the other. For example, the woman does not have her full humanity without being understood in her relationship to the man. The man does not have his full humanity unless he is understood in his relationship to the woman. Thus, Barth argues, there is no abstract manhood [Männlichkeit] nor is there any abstract womanhood [Weiblichkeit]. Again, Barth discusses why there can be no abstract concepts of being a man and a woman without relationship to the other in III.4 as well. The Christological background of the text is here also instructive. Jesus “stands” for humanity before God not only as the elect but also as the rejected (naked). It will be in Christ’s humiliation and death on the cross that humanity too will come to recognize itself in its sin and poverty (its nakedness). Yet because Christ is not ashamed of his humiliation, nor is he ashamed of his followers, because they will be his brothers and sisters, his followers need not be ashamed of their humiliation since Christ bears it with them and for them as their brother. (III.1, p. 322)

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined how Barth understands God’s covenantal purposes for creation as providing the “internal basis of creation.” Specifically, we say how Barth’s doctrine of election finds its correspondence in the work of creation. Whereas we saw how this correspondence is reflected on a greater cosmic scale and in creation more generally in the previous chapter, in this chapter we have how the correspondence is worked out more specifically in God’s special election of humanity as
God’s covenant partner. As a result we have seen how many of the key components of Barth’s theological ethics are also worked out as well. Barth’s emphasis on the personal and inextricable relationship between God and humanity is evidenced throughout his interpretation of the text and Barth’s insistence that humanity is not a neutral, solitary, or self-sufficient human being is also evident at every point as well.

For example, in the first part of this chapter we saw how Barth understand God’s formation of the humanity from the dust of the ground by breathing into the human form as a sign of God’s personal and special election of humanity in distinction from the rest of creation. This encounter with the human form signals God’s direct, personal and special relationship with humanity. Furthermore, that God formed the human being out of the dust of the ground serves to emphasize that the form of the human being is specific and not arbitrary, and created by God for a specific purpose. The specificity of creation as the place set aside for God’s covenant relations with humanity to take place is also evident in Barth’s understanding of the Garden of Eden.

In our exploration of Barth’s interpretation of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, we saw some principal themes of Barth’s theological ethics emerge. We noticed how Barth’s understanding of the two trees corresponds to God’s divine “yes” and “no” in election. The fact that the two trees correspond to God’s divine “yes” and “no” influences how Barth understands the nature of creaturely freedom. For Barth, creaturely freedom must be understood in terms of obedience to God’s Word. Any understanding of freedom as indicating some neutral capacity would thus suggest that the creature had the ability to determine herself as either elected or rejected. For Barth, this is not a possibility for the creature. The creature cannot determine for herself whether she stands
under the divine “yes” or the divine “no.” God has determined from all eternity that the creature stands under the divine “yes” and it is for her to affirm this truth. The creature affirms this truth by standing both under the “yes” of the tree of life and obeying the prohibition of the “no.” This is why creaturely freedom is that of obedience to God’s Word which is undertaken with gratitude. Through obedience to God’s Word the creature affirms both herself as a creature and God as God, recognizing that she does not have the capability of standing in the position of supreme judge of good and evil. Through her obedience the creature recognizes her status as creature, nothing more and nothing less. In our analysis of Barth’s discussion of the two trees we have seen what Barth means by freedom and limitation and what it means to say that the creatures live radically by grace alone.

One of the consistent themes throughout Barth’s interpretation of the text is Barth rejection of any understanding of the human being as solitary or self-sufficient, or any abstract concept of “humanity” or “male” and “female.” For Barth the concept of humanity and even the individual terms male and female can only be properly discussed in light of the truth that humanity is created as a single species in the duality of the sexes. Thus, to say “human being”, “male” or “female” is always to understand the terms as being constituted by a relationship, both with God and one’s fellow humanity. For Barth, the creation of humanity as male and female is the presupposition for God’s electing grace. This is also one of the principal domains in which God commands, the specifics of which are worked out in detail in Barth’s section “Freedom for Fellowship” in III.4. God does not deal with humanity in its solitary form as either male or female, but as a single species in this duality. This emphasis on duality is important in that Barth reinforces his
claim that the human being is neither a solitary, neutral or created indifferently. God chose to create humanity in *this specific form*, such that it would be the form of relations in which humanity encounters God and one another. Humanity is responsible before God in this form and in no other.

Now that we have examined how Barth understands the Christological determination of creation and why it takes this shape as “being-in-encounter” we will now turn to a more detailed exploration of how Barth understands the relationship between creation, Christology, and anthropology. Specifically, we will argue that Barth’s Christology provides the foundation from which one can radically affirm the goodness of human nature. Furthermore, we will argue that it is by affirming the enduring goodness of the basic form of humanity, which remains intact through creation, fall and redemption, that God’s faithfulness as Creator is ratified.
CHAPTER 4:
THE CHRISTOLOGICAL ONTOLOGY OF THE CREATURE

4.1 Introduction

At the beginning of this dissertation we made the observation that one of Barth’s principle motivations for approaching the doctrine of creation in the way that he did was his concern that the course that Protestant theology had taken through the 18th and 19th centuries had produced an understanding of the world as a world without God and an understanding of God as God without the world. Furthermore, Barth also believed that Protestant theology, through the influence of the philosophical trends of modernity, had produced an understanding of the human being that could be understood independently of her relationship with God and the world as well. Even worse, in Barth’s view, was a concept of the human being which could be understood in isolation from other human beings. In short, Barth was convinced that the 20th century was operating under the view that the human being was an isolated and autonomous being which was essentially unrelated to God, the world, and her fellows. Nietzsche’s famous articulation of humanity as Übermensch captures this problematic development perfectly. Hence, Barth counters Nietzsche’s Übermensch with a definition of the human being as Mitmenschlichkeit, i.e. the idea of the human being as “co-humanity.”

However, the critic of Barth is not interested simply in whether he can depict humanity in a way that resists errors but rather in whether or not Barth can and does
coherently establish that his Christology does not overwhelm the rest of his ontology.

Therefore, the primary concern of this chapter will be to show that Barth’s understanding of the meaning of God’s election of both God’s self and humanity in Christ suggests to him an indestructible creaturely ontology sustained by God, which in turn allows him to use both the similarities and differences that he marks between Christ and the creature to formulate this creaturely ontology with its own, full integrity.

It must first be made clear that Barth himself recognizes the problem posed by his method. It is worth quoting him at length to show the several dimensions of the problem he identifies:

If other men were beings whose humanity stood under an absolutely different and even contradictory determination from that of Jesus, it would be idle and confusing to call both Jesus and these others “men.” For in the two cases the term would refer to quite different beings which would be better denoted by different terms. It would also be difficult to see how the “man” Jesus could be for and from and to other, “men,” how he could be inwardly affected by their being, how He could be called and sent to be their Savior and commissioned and empowered to accomplish their deliverance, how He could interpose Himself with His human life for these other beings, acting and suffering and conquering in the place and as their Representative… [Furthermore,] if God had given to man a nature neutral and opposed to His grace and love and therefore to the fellow-humanity of Jesus, alien and antithetical from the very outset to covenant-partnership with Himself, how would He have made him the being marked off for this partnership? A second creation would have been needed to make this partnership possible and actual. And this second creation, in contrast to the new creation attested in Scripture, would have to be regarded as the contradiction to the first creation, materially altering and even replacing it. (III.2, pp. 223-225) [emphasis mine]

With this statement Barth identifies at least four issues. First, he admits that if there is no commonality between Jesus humanity and ours, his project of developing anthropology entirely from a Christo-theological starting point fails at the outset to establish the logical connection among the concepts involved. Secondly, and more
deeply, this failure would reflect a basic ontological difference between Christ and humanity that would rule out Christ’s ability to act on our behalf in giving the definitive shape to humanity as its Savior and Representative. This would mean, thirdly, that there would be no clearly sustained covenant partner for God. If existence is to be structured covenantally by God, as Barth suggests, there must be a being with its own integrity to act as covenant partner. Only such a one, whose nature is neither alien nor opposed to the grace of God but confronts it with a certain familiarity, makes the gracious, ongoing work of God the Creator possible. (III.2, p. 224) Perhaps, Barth admits, God could act to create such a partner ex nihilo but such action would be tantamount to the abandonment of the present creation. For Barth, it therefore would amount to the fourth and worst problem, namely that his whole emphasis on God as a covenant God faithful to this creation—the emphasis attested by Scripture—would fall to the ground (and thereby unravel the rest of his theology!).

By contrast, Barth suggests that in this same Scripture, Jesus attests himself as the savior of God’s original creation, declaring “Behold I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5) (i.e. renewing all things that already exist), not “Behold, I have destroyed creation and created a new one.” In Barth’s estimation, the “new” creation spoken of throughout Scripture thus might be more helpfully understood as a “renewal” of creation. It is the renewal of the existing material creation that God had already made good. Otherwise, for Barth, there would be no continuity between the orders of creation and redemption and thus it would make little sense to say that creation was “redeemed.” Nevertheless, Scripture can attest to creation as “new” in Christ because the threat of chaos and nothingness have been destroyed definitively by him, freeing creation to be what God
originally intended it to be. Here we see that Barth is as committed as any Thomist to the proposition that grace does not destroy but completes “nature,” as long as we understand “nature” according to the created ontology indicated and established by Christ.\(^{119}\)

We should also recall, already here at the beginning of our investigation, that for Barth, the doctrine of creation can be summarized in the two-fold statement that creation is the external basis of the covenant and the covenant is the internal basis of creation. The argument throughout this chapter proceeds as an illustration of the fact that in III.2, which frames the idea of humanity as “co-humanity” by further developing the basic outlines he set forth in III.1, Barth sets forth his doctrine of the creature as a further specification of the external-internal creational structure. For him, human nature as “co-humanity” is the external basis (i.e. presupposition) of the covenant and the covenant of God in Jesus Christ is the internal basis of human nature as “co-humanity.” Thus, we suggest, Barth demonstrates that for him, the human creature whose basic form is “co-humanity” is \textit{the unerring presupposition} from which God’s reconciling work proceeds. This demonstration proves in turn that Barth’s focus on the Christological foundation of theological anthropology does not mean that he ignores, devalues, or denigrates the integrity of creation itself.

In the first section below, we will explore this commitment by showing how and why Barth thinks sin makes reaching an accurate anthropological view impossible for the unaided human interpreter. We will see how Barth’s Christological ontology is not only the key to solving this problem, but at the same time demonstrates what Barth believes to

\(^{119}\) Which is not to undersell the very real differences indicated by this distinction of terms. An investigation of these differences could itself occupy its own proper study or studies.
be the highest possible commitment on God’s part to preserving the integrity of the creature that we are looking for.

Some commentators have alleged that Barth’s depiction of Christ’s ontological support of humanity, even if it establishes the integrity of the human creature, is entirely anthropocentric and thus does not adequately address the integrity of creation as such. That is, critics argue in effect, he has no effective cosmology. We will therefore pause our explication of the relation of Christology to anthropology to develop in the next section (4.3) a reply to this charge. Here we will show why Barth understands the doctrine of creation as most properly a doctrine of theological anthropology and why he believes that the doctrine of creation cannot effectively encompass any comprehensive reflections about non-human creation. While Barth’s lack of sustained attention to the reality of non-human creation may, indeed, be a shortcoming of Barth’s doctrine of creation, we will argue that this does not mean that Barth has a lack of respect for the same.

After our consideration of cosmology, we will continue our primary investigation by laying out the complex set of relations between Christ’s divinity, Christ’s humanity, and the rest of humanity that need to be established in order to demonstrate our thesis that Christology is not equivalent to anthropology. In section 4.4 we will explore Barth’s understanding of Jesus’ divinity and Jesus’ humanity and how these are related in the one human subject of Jesus Christ. In examining Jesus’ unique ontology we will show that while Christ is fully human just as we are, the way in which Jesus lives out his vocation

120 For the basic charge, see e.g. James Gustafson. *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective I: Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), p. 94f.
as the Son of God will preclude us from directly equating Christology with anthropology. In Section 4.5 and 4.6 we will see how Jesus’ divine determination as the Son of God yields a two-fold understanding of Christ’s humanity, i.e. “Jesus man for God” and “Jesus man for his fellows”, which in turn reveals the two-fold determination of human being. Jesus as “man for God,” reveals the material content of human being, i.e. human being is determined as the covenant partner of God. Jesus as “man for his fellows” reveals the basic form of human being, i.e. human being as “co-humanity,” a human being with her fellows.

For Barth, it is this basic creatureliness, i.e. our humanity as “co-humanity” which is proper to human being as such. It is this basic form of humanity as co-humanity which can neither be destroyed by sin nor fundamentally altered by grace that is revealed to us in the creaturely life and work of Christ. Indeed, as God chose Christ from all eternity to be the covenant partner of God, so too does God summon the human creature, in its basic and indestructible form of co-humanity, to be a covenant partner of God in a freedom for life and love expressed through the history of her life with God. Thus, in what appears to be a benign neglect of the goodness of creation in his thin treatment of cosmology at the beginning of III.2, Barth’s decision to develop a theological anthropology on the basis of Christology, without equating the two, prepares the way for one of the most radical affirmations of the indestructible goodness of creation and human nature, which persists through creation, fall, and redemption. Indeed, it is precisely because we share this basic and indestructible human nature with Christ that Christ can be our Representative before God and serve as our Savior and Deliver when sin threatens to alienate us from God, the world, others, and ourselves. Finally, we will see that only
by affirming this indestructible nature of humanity can one do justice to the enduring faithfulness of God and know what it means to say God is the Creator and that creation is God’s creation.

4.2 Why Anthropology Needs Christology

For Barth, there is *ab initio* a deeply-seated problem in attempting to articulate any anthropology *per se*. The problem arises out of the relation of humanity to its sinful condition. In this section, we will explore the three-fold form this problem takes as historical-textual, definitional, and existential. Establishing these problems shows exactly why the turn to Christology to develop an anthropology is a necessary move. Furthermore, in showing how Christ thus provides the gracious answer to these difficulties, we will also uncover how Christ as Word of God expresses God’s (and Barth’s) central commitment to an inalienable human ontology with its own integrity.

In the first place, there is for Barth the ‘historical’ problem that also inscribes itself as a textual problem. Recall Barth’s exegesis of Genesis 2. There he suggested that there is never a “moment” in the history of the relationship between God and humanity when the human being stood before God in her original determination as a sinless human being. Rather, the creation of humanity and its “fall” occur simultaneously. On the basis of this reading of Genesis, there simply is no *direct* knowledge of what the human being is in her original determination [*der Richtigkeit seines von Gott geschaffenen*

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121 Barth writes that the history of humanity and God “begins with the fact that at the very moment when God acts with the greatest faithfulness towards man His creature, man in supreme unfaithfulness takes sides against God his creator.” (III.2, p. 26)
Wesens]. Rather, the Word here only reveals the human being to us in its perversion [Verkehrung] and corruption [Verderbnis].

(III.2, p. 26, s. 29)

In the second place, there is a problem in defining sin itself and thus in grasping what it means to be a sinner. For Barth, there can be no abstract definition of sin. In his view, sin is rebellion, but rebellion must rebel against something prior:

The whole witness of the Bible shows that sin does not originate in the void, as the transgression of universal law, but in rebellion against the concrete reality which sums up all the divine laws, i.e. that God is gracious to man and that man is the being unto whom God is gracious. Sin originates in wanton rebellion against God who has given Himself to mankind in the person of His Son. To this extent it has to be said that sin is impossible without grace and that it has its perverse origin in the grace of God. Man would not sin if God were not this God and man were not this creature. (III.2, p. 35)

For Barth, God’s action is always prior, and this action simply is grace. Grace is thus the precondition for sin and for our grasp of its meaning, though we must be careful not to understand this precondition as a causal origin. Rather, sin is precisely the resistance whereby the human person attempts to become her own “perverse” origin over against the grace of God. However, for Barth, it is not the case that the human being is

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122 The point to understand is that Barth is arguing that we do not have any direct knowledge about the truth about ourselves, either in our sinful determination or our original determination, without the Word of God, which is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Barth here is making the claim that the Word of God, as the person and work of Christ, tells us directly of our sinful self-determination, but also indirectly reveals our original determination to be for God.

123 And of course, sin and grace themselves simply name the contours of the relationship with God which is the only context in which humanity has meaning at all.

A point of confusion regarding Barth’s text could possibly arise here. Barth says in the middle of III.2, p. 35 that “sin has no basis in grace”, but then states toward the end of this excursus, as seen in the above quote that “sin has its perverse origin in the grace of God.” Although this may appear as two contradictory statements, what Barth is trying to emphasize is that sin is not part of creation and therefore not naturally inevitable. Furthermore, Barth does not think that sin “originates” from grace itself, but rather he thinks that sin can only be understood as the antithesis of grace, i.e. in the same way that darkness cannot “originate” in light, but can only be understood as darkness in relationship to light.
“first” a sinner and “then” only after this fact an object of God’s grace. Rather, from eternity, the human being was first and foremost an object of God’s grace. It is only because of *this preceding fact of grace* that humanity is simultaneously disclosed as the creature that sins against God’s grace.¹²⁴

In the third place, the simultaneity of creation and fall indicates a deeper problem in the situation of the human knower. For Barth, that humanity rebels against God and its own very being is something that is inexplicable and does not originate from creaturely nature itself. Nevertheless, whatever happens later in the history between God and humanity happens on the presupposition that the situation of humanity is now one of contradiction with itself and with God. (III.2, p. 26) This theological fact about the human being leads Barth to argue that we can have no direct knowledge of ourselves in our original determination. Left to our own devices, i.e. looking only to ourselves or to other sources outside of ourselves, we would not know the truth that we are, at the depth of our very being, sinners who cannot stand before God.¹²⁵ In other words, the self-contradiction that results from our contradiction of God is extremely serious and prevents us from understanding ourselves.

We may now see how it is Christ himself, and thus a Christological entry point for theological anthropology, that resolves all of these problems for Barth. Regarding the first, he says, God’s revelation already supersedes this problem insofar as knowing Christ indirectly mediates to us a genuine grasp of the original determination of the human

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¹²⁴ “Who would ever realize and admit, except on the basis of the revealed judgment of God, that he is the enemy and betrayer of God himself?” (III.2, p. 30)

¹²⁵ III.2, p.30.
In the sinless Jesus, we have a view of what humanity truly is, including – in response to the second problem – its foundation in grace. Knowledge of this foundation accordingly allows a concrete definition of our rebellion. Importantly, for Barth these epistemological problems are not simply resolved by considering some depiction of Jesus in the Bible or other text. The burden is not on us. Rather, “as the man Jesus is Himself the revealing Word of God, He is the source of our knowledge of the nature of man as created by God.” (III.2, p. 41) Jesus himself continues actively to reveal to us the true meaning of our humanity.

Perhaps most centrally, and in response to the third problem especially, what Jesus Christ reveals and renews is the ontological fact that God has created human persons with an indestructible integrity and goodness. Specifically, it is in God’s attitude toward Jesus, and in Jesus’ own work, that God reveals God’s attitude toward us—God is the ever-faithful Creator. God’s attitude toward Jesus reveals sin in its terrible gravity and judges it with supreme force. Furthermore, God’s attitude towards Jesus also shows us that humanity itself cannot atone for the gravity of sin, and thus reveals further that God decided to elect Himself to atone for the sin of humanity. This signifies that divine grace must also be the primary category for which we understand God’s relationship to us. While sin is extremely serious, the gravity of which cannot be ignored, sin cannot be taken more seriously than grace. (III.2, p. 41)

In the election of Christ, God speaks an indefatigable “Yes” to Creation. This “Yes” is that creation should prevail and be delivered from evil, i.e. prevail against all that which God rejected. However, this menacing kingdom of nothingness is something which the creature herself has no will/power to overcome. The creature cannot maintain
the frontier which separates creation from nothingness. Only the divine and creative act of God can maintain this frontier. (III.2, p. 143) The fact that the creature is incapable of overcoming it is demonstrated by what Barth calls the “irrational” and “inexplicable” fall of humanity. That is, sin is humanity’s “irrational” and “inexplicable” affirmation of the “nothing” which God the creator negated. (III.2, p. 143) In other words, sin is humanity’s inexplicable “Yes” to God’s “No.” Such an affirmation of that which God rejected is not only inexplicable, but contrary to human being itself. It defies explanation that humanity would affirm that which corrupts its very being. Thus, Barth argues, the saving and preserving will of God is not aimed at sin directly, but is directed against the nothing affirmed in sin. Barth writes:

God hastens to help being against non-being in order to destroy the power of the latter, to free the creature by negating its negation…to constitute a humanity and a world which has nothing more to fear from those frontiers because the abyss of evil has lost its power to attract, and in which God alone is King in his kingdom. (III.2, p. 146)

Thus, Barth does not suggest that creation is evil in itself or that human nature is evil in itself. Rather, he insists that sin does not properly belong to the created order nor to the being of the creature.

With the election of Jesus before the creation of the world, God has also, in the same decision, resolved to protect creation from the threat of evil. Hence, in Jesus, the will of God has already been fulfilled, the enemy of being has already been slain and the freedom of being has been attained. This is why Jesus is the archetypal human being whom all threatened and enslaved creatures must follow. Humanity is triumphant against sin, i.e. non-being, precisely because it is “with Jesus”, i.e. fellow-elect of God by the very fact of Jesus’ election. This is why Barth concludes that sin is an ontological
impossibility for humanity. (III.2, p. 146) Because we are, by definition, with Jesus, we are then, by definition, without sin. Only by making the mistake of articulating a concept of humanity in abstracto is one led to understanding humanity as defenseless against sin. (III.2, p. 146)

Barth also points out that if our basic determination is to be with God, then our being does not include sin. Instead, being in sin is a kind of nonsensical choice of the human person against her own being:

To be in sin, in godlessness, is a mode of being contrary to our humanity. For the man who is with Jesus—and this is man’s ontological determination—is with God. If he denies God he denies himself. He is then something which he cannot be in the Counterpart in which he is. He chooses his own impossibility. (III.2, p. 136)

Hence, it is not proper to say that our human nature is evil or corrupt in itself. Our human nature is most properly described as being related to God through Jesus Christ. This is the aspect of our humanity which is indestructible and unchanging.

Likewise, it is important to understand that sin is not creative. Barth insists that sin does not have the power to inaugurate a new creation, since humans are not God and sin is their own “impossible” choice. Thus, sin cannot make the creature into a different being. Sin can alienate humanity from God and distort human nature, but it cannot annihilate human nature or turn the essence of creature into something else. Barth insists that this human essence is common to Jew and Gentile, the obedient and disobedient, to the apostles and Pharisees, to Peter and to Judas. (III.2, p. 41)

We may therefore indicate clearly at the outset that Barth desires to articulate and preserve a basic form of humanity is not particular to Christians. Thus human nature is basic to the human being qua human being. This is the human nature created by God
which is good and not evil and must be accepted against the background of the truth of the humanity of Jesus. (III.2, p. 274)

For Barth it is important that we do not deny that there is this indestructible determination of humanity as co-humanity, which is itself the creaturely nature of the covenant partner and as such the external basis of the covenant. To deny this would be to deny the continuity of the human subject as creature, sinner, and a sinner redeemed by grace. Any attempt to contest or denigrate this aspect of our human nature, Barth argues, does nothing to magnify the glory of God or God’s grace. We do not need to be made small in order for God to be great. On the contrary, to contest the enduring goodness of the basic form of humanity is to contest the goodness and faithfulness of God in creation. (III.2, p. 275)

The nature of humanity is then only the natural exercise and actualization of the basic form of humanity itself. Thus, Barth emphatically insists that what we have as the basic determination of humanity is not a gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, nor is it the action of humanity exercising Christian love. The basic form of humanity is not restricted to the Christian community, i.e. to the “children of light” but rather is basic to all the “children of the world.” (Lk 16) Hence, Barth argues that his definition of human nature is true irrespective of what the human being may become in the course of her history. (III.2, p. 276)

Here we see Barth’s adamant affirmation of God’s adamant affirmation of the integrity and goodness of the human creature. Poignantly, he uses this affirmation to draw our attention to the irony that perhaps the greatest tragedy of the epistemological blindness created by our sinfulness is that it causes us to miss the enduring nature of our
goodness. Even if we could recognize our sinful situation of self-contradiction, he suggests, we would be unable from this recognition to develop an appreciation of the fact that even in this state we still persist as God’s creatures. (III.2, p. 30) Enter once more the revelatory grace of Christ, the Word of God. It is once again the activity of this Word to inform us not only that we were created in grace but also that our self-contradiction is not the final truth about us. (III.2, p. 31)

To summarize: The primary obstacle to obtaining the truth about the reality of human nature is the fact of sin. For Barth, there was never a time in the history of humanity with God when the human being was not a sinner. At the moment of creation, when God made the eternal decision to be God for humanity, humanity made the inexplicable decision to be humanity against God. Because this self-contradiction is the presupposition from which theological anthropology must proceed, Barth argues that sin obscures the true reality of human nature if the account in Genesis were to stand alone. Furthermore, even such a suggestion of “sin” remains meaningless without a full view of the grace against which it defines itself by rebelling. Finally, we have seen that even left to our own judgments and insights, we would neither come to the conclusion that our nature is completely obscured and corrupted by sin, nor would we discern that, even in spite of this fact, we still remain God’s creatures and God still remains faithful to us. Yet such for Barth is the basic truth conveyed when rightly articulating that God is the Creator.

Nevertheless for Barth, Christ the Word of God acts to give and preserve, and in that preservation to reveal, the true nature of the human person as a good being in its own right, created in a relation to God that sustains her as God’s covenant partner. Christ is
the grace (in at least three ways) that enables us to see clearly who God originally determined us to be, even as it enables us to become once more and remain those very creatures. In some ways, the rest of this chapter is simply a vindication of the claim that Barth remains faithful to this commitment throughout the complex moves he makes to show how Christ’s own being determines ours.

4.3 Barth’s Cosmological Agnosticism

In this section we will examine why Barth believes that the doctrine of creation must be principally concerned with theological anthropology. Does the grace and preservation just described apply only to human persons? We will suggest that Barth includes all of creation in the redemptive work by Christ, but that his view of what the Word of God reveals (or rather, does not reveal) about the cosmos makes him agnostic rather than indifferent regarding non-human ontology. As we shall see, the Word of God takes the relationship between God and the human creature as its primary concern. We will show also, however, that this primacy does not signify that humanity simply exists and acts independently of the cosmos. Rather, we will argue that the location of humanity within the cosmos is decisive for understanding humanity. This argument, too, also supports our claim that Barth’s depiction of the integrity of non-human life indicates his respect for the wider creation and his refusal to sublate it into either the redemptive order or anthropology.

For Barth the term “creation” encompasses both 1) the action of the Creator and 2) the product of the Creator, i.e. the creature. (III.2, p. 3) In other words, the terms Creator and creature cannot be understood without reference to the other. Indeed, we can
see this basic commitment reflected in Barth approach to the doctrine of creation in the *Church Dogmatics*. In III.1 Barth deals with God’s *activity* toward the creature, i.e. God’s creation of the world and God’s decision to unite God’s self with the world. In III.2 Barth explores the *work* and product of the Creator as such, i.e. the creature. Barth insists that we can only understand the doctrine of creation properly by committing ourselves to the fact that God does not create the world and then retreat to a distance, leaving it to its own devices. Rather, Barth argues, to say that God is the Creator is also to say that it is *part of the nature of God to be concerned with the whole meaning and purpose of God’s work*. Furthermore, God’s will and God’s own inmost being is manifested in God’s work of creation. Therefore, in the existence of creation, God co-ordinates God’s self with his work, i.e. the creature, and co-ordinates the creature to God’s self. (III.2, p. 3)

While it is true that Barth pays almost exclusive attention to the doctrine of the *human* creature, this does not mean that Barth thinks that the human being is God’s *only* creature. For Barth, the human being is *a* creature, but not *the* creature. *The* creature of God is the totality of the whole created cosmos, i.e. the reality posited by God and distinct from God. (III.2, p. 3) Already we saw in Chapter 2 that Barth acknowledges that the human being is insignificant in many ways and insists that she is deeply dependent on many aspects of the rest of creation that are superior to her. Moreover, he argues, *all creatures* have their being with God. Referring to John 1, 1 Corinthians, and Hebrews 1 Barth insists that:

we must [not] rush to the perverse conclusion that the particular thing which is so basically true of man is not also true of other creatures in their way, namely that they are originally and decisively with Jesus and in this way with God their Creator and thus participants in being. (III.2, p. 137)
Thus, Barth argues that Jesus is always the meaning and motive for all creation. With this theological presupposition, Barth goes on to suggest that it is reasonable to affirm that all creatures have Jesus as a divine counterpart and as such also have the same ontological basis, i.e. their being in relationship to God. Likewise, Barth argues, when God became human all that God designed to do for the rest of creation was accomplished. That is, when God became human, God necessarily became God for the animals and the rest of non-human creation, too.

However, Barth insists, other creatures do not have their being with God in the same way that human beings are with God. (III.2, p. 137) According to him, what distinguishes the human being from the rest of creation is that the human being is the being to whom God’s Word is directly addressed and is the being through which God decided to manifest God’s self in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the fact of the Incarnation that motivates Barth to develop his doctrine of creation almost exclusively as a doctrine of the human being, i.e. theological anthropology. While we can say that non-human creation, in its way, is also with Jesus, we cannot say that God became like them. God did not become incarnate as a plant or animal but became incarnate as a human being. And as usual, Barth’s ontological doctrine has epistemological ramifications. Since Christ addresses himself to humanity as the Word which establishes our being in his, we have no word regarding Christ’s self-relation to other creatures. Thus Barth argues that we do not know what it means to say that non-human creation has the same ontological basis in Jesus himself. This view leads him to see agnosticism as the most respectful attitude both toward the realities of other creatures and toward the revelation of the Word itself.
We can see the same kind of agnosticism at work in Barth’s doctrine of the cosmos, broadly speaking. According to him, the Word of God does not contain any account of the ontology of the created totality of the cosmos any more than it does of specific ontologies. (III.2, p. 6) This does not mean, obviously, that there is not an ontology of the whole created cosmos. Rather, Barth argues, we simply do not have any direct knowledge of what it is. By direct knowledge, Barth means that we cannot look at creation itself and learn of God’s relationship and purpose for the cosmos. For Barth, any knowledge that we have of the cosmos is simply a “world-view” which is necessarily always provisional, must always be used provisionally, and must always be used in service to humanity’s relationship with God and the wider cosmos. (III.2, p. 8) In sum, Barth argues that the Word of God speaks primarily of the relationship between God and humanity and it does not disclose either directly or indirectly anything about the independent being and nature of the cosmos itself. (III.2, p. 11)

Barth maintains this position because he thinks that any effort to secure direct or indirect knowledge of the cosmos leads to the inevitable dissociation between God and God’s creation, which contradicts the very definition of creation as he sees it. Barth writes:

When knowledge of the created world is divorced from that of the covenant, God the Creator becomes a vague factor which is meaningless in practice and therefore dispensable, and the creature can then emerge as a self-contained totality in which man is simply one among many other component parts. The created world dissociated from its transcendent Creator loses its natural axis. (III.2, p. 11)

He further explains that when the created world is dissociated from its transcendent Creator that:
a need is inevitably felt to explain [the created world] artificially in terms of itself, to enquire arbitrarily into its inner principle, constitution, and meaning, and no less arbitrarily, i.e. according to the choice of this principle, to refashion it, i.e. to reconstruct it, to impose upon it a corresponding structure. It is in this way that cosmology comes into being. And it does so in an unspiritual sphere where for want of a better word we try to entice from the cosmos its own word and secret, or rather—as if it could and must speak of itself, as if it lay in human power to compel it to do so—to place this word on its lips. When faith makes alliance with philosophies, it moves into this unspiritual sphere. (III.2, p. 11) [emphasis mine]

Thus for Barth, the danger to be avoided is the attempt to develop an understanding of the nature of heaven and earth in terms of itself, i.e. without reference to God who created it in the first place. Hence, Barth concludes, the Christian confession has no basis in the sphere of cosmologies which are, by their very nature, developed independently from an understanding of God the Creator. Faith cannot have anything other than an external, provisional, and even paradoxical relationship with cosmologies, which themselves are constantly changing based on what philosophical system is in fashion at the time.126 (III.2, p. 11)

Interestingly enough, for Barth, there is a sense in which heaven and earth may themselves be characterized as creatures. (III.2, p. 6) He suggests correlatively that, even though the Word of God does not give us an ontology of heaven and earth, it does tell us something about heaven and earth. Specifically, the Word of God tells us that heaven and earth are the heaven and earth of the human being who is a covenant partner of God.

126 Barth acknowledges that Christianity has made use of the many different cosmologies which have been in fashion throughout history. However, he argues that the Christian faith itself does not originate in these cosmologies nor is it dependent on the accuracy of these world-views. For Barth, the Christian faith is principally concerned with the relationship between God and humanity, not with cosmology as such. The Christian faith makes use of these cosmologies only in order to talk about the relationship between God and humanity, the theme which is most proper to the Word of God. (III.2, pp. 8-10)
Thus, it is only through the Word of God directly addressed to humanity that one learns of the indissoluble connection that heaven and earth have with the covenant. The Word of God testifies to heaven as the sum of the created reality which is invisible, unknown, and inaccessible to humanity. Heaven represents the divine horizon of human life. (III.2, p. 12) The Word of God also points to earth as the sum of the created reality which is visible, known, and under human control. Thus, Barth concludes, this dual structure of heaven and earth shows us that the world is not unlike that which takes place in the covenant between God and humanity. Heaven corresponds to the being and action of God; earth corresponds to the being and action of humanity. The conjunction of heaven and earth corresponds to the covenant in which both the being and action of the divine and human meet. (III.2, p. 12) Barth writes:

The created world surrounding man, the totality of the created existence above and below him is the prototype [Vorbild] and pattern [Abbild] of that which he is addressed by the Word of God, of his life in communion [Lebensgemeinschaft] with the Creator. That the cosmos finds itself in this harmony with the history enacted in it is what the Word of God declares also about the cosmos as it addresses man in his existence under heaven and earth. This—and nothing more than this. The doctrine of creation must confine itself within these limits. (III.2 p. 12, s. 11)

Thus, the doctrine of creation must be principally concerned with its primary subject, i.e. the relationship between humanity and God.

However, Barth argues that the Word of God is not concerned with an abstract view of the human being divorced from the cosmos in which she lives. Rather, the Word of God is concerned with humanity in the cosmos, i.e. the human being under heaven and on earth. As we noted above, the cosmos has this dual structure of heaven and earth. To be under heaven, in Barth’s view, is to be delimited by heaven as a realm of being which
itself is created. Heaven absolutely transcends humanity and is therefore a realm of being higher than humanity. Thus, even though heaven is real, it is basically hidden from and inaccessible to human creation. It corresponds to the transcendence of God, but it is not equal to God because it is still created. (III.2, p. 14)

The Word of God is also concerned with the human being on earth. Like heaven, the earth is a realm of being which is also created. However, unlike heaven, which is unknowable and inaccessible to humanity, the realm of the earth is knowable and under human control. The earth corresponds to, but is not equal to, the lowliness of humanity before God and God’s condescension to humanity. (III.2, p. 14) Thus, Barth concludes, humanity exists in this two-fold determination as humanity under heaven and on earth. For Barth, we cannot properly conceive of the human being without reference to this two-fold determination of her being in the cosmos. The human being and the world in which she lives must be considered together.

Conversely, if humanity exists in this two-fold determination, then the cosmos, whatever else we may say about it, exists as heaven and earth, i.e. as the beyond and the present, respectively. The cosmos is that which limits and which is limited for humanity. (III.2, p. 14) Barth insists that the question of the possibility of the cosmos without humanity is as pointless as a question of the possibility that it might not be, or might not have been created by God. God created the cosmos so that God could be in covenant relations with human beings. Human beings exists only as they are in this cosmos created for this purpose. (III.2, p. 14)

However, Barth also notes that the function and the dignity of cosmology cannot be ascribed to anthropology, because the creature cannot be equated with the cosmos.
Humanity is not the cosmos *in nuce*. The essence of the cosmos is not contained within the life of humanity, as though the cosmos could not exist over and above its special relationship to humanity. While Barth will argue that we can only have knowledge of the cosmos indirectly through God’s address to humanity, this does *not mean* that the being of the cosmos is necessarily exhausted in its relationship to humanity. (III.2, p. 15)

Furthermore, the cosmos surrounding humanity is neither *alien to God* nor wholly independent and sovereign in the face of God. To say that creation is not wholly independent and sovereign is to say that creation does not follow an intrinsic law which operates *independently* of God’s purposes. Whatever cosmic reality is, Barth argues, it is conditioned by God and belongs to God. However, even though the cosmos is conditioned by God and belongs to God, the cosmos itself *cannot disclose* the meaning and purpose of the lordship of God the Creator nor can it disclose to us the nature of the *praise* offered to God from creation. Barth argues that such purposes are not evident from the bare existence of creation itself. In short, Barth takes a primarily *agnostic view* of the totality of the whole created cosmos. However, Barth will say that what the Word of God does tell us about that totality of the whole created cosmos is that God *loves* it and that, with God’s own self-disclosure in the person and work of Christ, creation is called to love and praise the Creator. Thus, Barth argues, we can only have *indirect knowledge* of the purpose of creation by way of the knowledge that we have of the purpose of humanity as revealed by Christ. (III.2, p. 18)

In sum, Barth argues that the doctrine of creation should principally confine itself to expounding a theological anthropology because it is the human being who is the object of God’s purpose for the whole created cosmos. It is in the human being, Barth argues,
that the purpose of the cosmos is revealed. “All things in heaven and on earth are the objects of divine purpose. But this purpose is not disclosed in all things; it is disclosed only in man.” (III.2, p. 16) As we have seen, this does not mean that the cosmos gets effaced by human concerns or being; rather, human being is in fact positioned by the cosmos, for Barth. Beyond this positioning, however, the human person must take her further and stronger definition from what is revealed in the Incarnate Christ. For unlike the relationship between God and non-human creation, which is a secret and inaccessible to human beings, the relationship between human beings and God is not secret, but made manifest in the person of work of Christ. This is why, for Barth, the doctrine of creation should be principally concerned with theological anthropology. It is to the relationship between theological anthropology and Christology that we now return.

4.4 Jesus, Man for God: The Distinctiveness of Christ’s Humanity (1)

In the previous sections we have seen how Barth understands our humanity as strongly defined by Christ. We thus will concern ourselves here with the basic differences between Christ and the rest of human beings that suggest to Barth in an initial way that theological anthropology remains distinct from Christology.

4.4.1 Defining the distinction

First, Barth argues, even though Jesus’ human nature is the same as ours, his human nature is preserved by the unique relationship that he has with God which, as such, has never existed between God and the rest of humanity directly and which will
never be repeated with anyone other than Christ. (III.2, p. 49) Thus, Jesus is unlike us in the first instance because of his relationship to God as the Son of God.

This divine distinction has a further, more specific implication in regard to the unique sinlessness of Jesus as human being. We have seen above that Jesus possesses a human nature that is neither concealed nor distorted by sin in its original essence [ursprünglichen Gestalt]. Here Barth wants to underscore that Jesus’ sinlessness does not consist in any special quality of his humanity by which he is, as it were, physically incapable of sin. (III.2, p. 51) What protects Jesus in his human nature from temptation is not the particularity of his creatureliness but rather the particularity of the way in which he is a creature. As a creature, Jesus is the Son of God and as such, is also Creator and Lord. The quality of this relationship to the Father, for Barth, is that the eternal mercy of God, which refuses to be limited and suspended, expresses and maintains itself in Christ’s vulnerable human nature. Without the eternal mercy of God, Barth argues, Jesus’ human nature, which is still creaturely and as such is neither creative nor divine would not have remained sinless. (III.1, p. 51) This is why, Barth points out, the New Testament speaks of Jesus’ liability to temptation.

Barth further explains that Jesus could not succumb to sin because, as the Son of God and Bearer of Humanity, Jesus is also Lord of Humanity. As such, Jesus has the power of the Creator who is active within humanity. (III.1, p. 51) Barth writes, “Jesus asserts Himself against temptation with the freedom and power with which God as Creator confronted chaos, separating light from darkness and uttering his Yes to the real and the definitive No to the unreal.” (III.2, p. 52) In short, it is Jesus’ divinity which gives him the power to resist the temptation of sin.
Particularly in this distinction, Barth treads a narrow path. On the one hand, Barth’s distinction of Jesus’ humanity according to his divine mode of being allows Barth to mark an essential difference preventing an easy deduction of anthropology from Christology. On the other hand, Barth must be careful not to suggest thereby that Christ’s divinity makes his humanity so radically different from ours that there can be no real connection between them. Barth needs this connection to support not just his general method but particularly, as we saw in the opening section, his insistence that human nature remains essentially/ontologically uncorrupted by sin. The explanation of Jesus’ sinlessness given above however forces us to ask whether or not sin was still inevitable for the rest of humanity if the power to resist temptation is predicated on the co-inherence of the divine and human natures. If it is the case that Jesus was able to resist temptation and not sin solely because of the co-inherence of the divine and human natures in him, then it seems fair to say at the least that even though Jesus’ humanity is the same as ours, as a human subject he is still in fact uniquely different from us. This seems to be the case not only because Jesus himself is constituted by the co-inherence of his divine and human natures, but also because Jesus is in relationship with God and with us in a different way as we are with God and we are with each other.

In the second place, as we mentioned in previous chapters, Jesus is the original [Urbild] and prototype [Vorbild] of humanity. Barth writes, “Our primary emphasis must be on the fact that on the ground of His unique relation to God [Jesus’ humanity] is first His and then only for this reason ours.” (III.1, p. 50) Jesus is a human being as God created all human beings to be. Thus, what constitutes true human nature [wirkliche Menschen Wesen] in us depends upon what it is in Jesus. Human nature is actualized in
Jesus as the original [Urbild] and in us only as the copy [Abbild]. However, this does not mean that our humanity is any less real than Jesus’ humanity, it only means that Jesus is the source of our humanity. Here too, Barth treads a delicate line between similarity and difference.

Jesus’ unique centrality as Prototype arises most basically for Barth from God’s election of Jesus as the human being. As we saw in our exegesis of the creation sagas, Barth understands the importance of the divine soliloquy, i.e. “let us make man in our own image,” as representing God’s eternal decision to be God for humanity. Correlatively, in the eternity of the divine counsel, which Barth understands as the meaning and basis of all creation and the work of Jesus’ life accomplished at the heart of time, this decision also established who and what the true human being [wirkliche Mensch] is. Hence, for Barth, in this eternal decision, which was made at the heart of time, the constitution of Jesus, and therefore the rest of humanity, was fixed and sealed once and for all. For this reason, the human nature that constitutes Jesus is the same for every other human being. No human being can elude this prototype [Urbild]. We are partakers of human nature because Jesus is the first partaker of it. It is for this reason that it is our nature.

As one bearing a sinless and manifest human nature and as singular Prototype, Jesus is thus unlike other human beings. Barth states directly that on account of these issues, there can be no question of the direct equation of human nature as we know it in ourselves with the human nature of Jesus. Therefore, we cannot simply deduce a theological anthropology directly from Christology. (III.2, p. 47)
4.4.2 Plumbing the distinction

Nevertheless, the radical determination of Jesus’ humanity by his divinity, and the distinctiveness of his humanity from ours that it implies, raises the question as to whether Barth can establish clear contours of Jesus as a human creature amidst this determination. Since Jesus’ humanity is to be the Prototype for ours, according to Barth, we must therefore probe a bit further in search of these contours. Our inquiry will show that Barth continues to deploy tightly-controlled similarities and differences to suggest how Christ’s divinity determines but does not overdetermine his humanity while also distinguishing his humanity from our own even in its similarity. We will show in the first place that Christ’s humanity appears in the form of an earthly history with distinctive work it accomplishes. At the same time, we will see that Barth carefully suggests how Jesus’ divinity shapes this creaturely history and distinguishes it from our own.

Barth opens §44 “Man as the Creature of God” with the first subsection entitled “Jesus, man for God.” In this subsection Barth lays out his decisive theological commitment that the man Jesus is always to be identified with his *history* [*Geschichte*]. This history is Jesus’ exercise of his *office* as Prophet, Priest, and King. In other words, Jesus’ history is the history of God’s saving action in human history. (III.2, p. 58) A central implication of such a commitment is that Jesus does not possess a humanity that we can assess or abstract from his work. Here we have Barth’s understanding of being as “being-in-action.” The human nature of Jesus cannot be known ontically or noetically as a neutral point. Jesus can only explain himself to us through his life and work; he is not himself explained by his human nature as such. (III.2, p. 59) And yet, this self-explanation clearly manifests to us Jesus’ real creaturely, human being.
The character and content of the history in which God actualizes Jesus’ humanity is his work as Savior. (III.2, p. 60) We cannot consider the question “Who is Jesus?” separately from the question “What does Jesus do?” For Barth, the answer to each question is explained by the answer to the other. What Jesus does is who Jesus is; who Jesus is is what Jesus does. Barth argues that this truth can be seen in Jesus’ name: “Jesus” means “YHWH saves.” (III.2, pp. 61-62)

However, Barth also wants to be clear that the work of God that Jesus does is not a work that is alien to his being. There is nothing imposed upon him from outside of himself. His creaturehood is neither dissolved nor finds any need to differentiate itself from the divine determination:

[Jesus] does not become estranged from Himself by the fact that in doing this work he is one with God, and in this oneness of being with God—to the exclusion of all other being—He has his own being…Jesus would not be accomplishing His own work, but would become alien and unfaithful to Himself if He were to do any other but the work of God. And, it would not be His own, but an alien being which did not consist in His oneness of being with God. He is Himself as He does the work of God and in so doing is one with God…Hence, the fact that He does the work of God, and in so doing is one with God, does not mean that He Himself—the man as such—is subsumed in the process. On the contrary, it is in this way, in the doing of the work of God, and therefore in his oneness of being with God that He is Himself, this man. It is in this way that Jesus exists as a creature, which cannot be dissolved in its Creator, which cannot itself be or become the Creator, but which has its own reality and worth in face of the Creator, deriving its own righteousness from the Creator. (III.2, pp. 63-64)

Hence, we see that Barth defines creatureliness, in Christ, as a life of action in response to God. Christ realizes his own creatureliness as he enacts his history as man for God in the three-fold creaturely offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus’ divinity does not subsume his humanity, but the two co-inhere together to allow Jesus to exercise the distinctive calling of his particular creaturely life. Again, it is important to emphasize
that God does not accomplish his saving work simply through his deity, but through the creaturely work of Christ who is the bearer of the three-fold human office as Prophet, Priest, and King.

Having established that even in his divinity Christ is still a creature, Barth goes on to discuss six features of Jesus’ creaturely being that are revealed by his divine nature. The first is that Jesus is the one creaturely being in whose existence God’s being is immediate and direct. In other words, the identity of God the Creator is immediately and directly present in Jesus. (III.2, p. 68, 132)

The second feature is that Jesus is the creaturely being in whose existence God’s act of deliverance has taken place for all other human beings. (III.2, p. 133) That is, the presence of God in Jesus is a series of actions in a specific direction, i.e. that of salvation. The relationship between Jesus and other human beings is not a static state [Zustand], but a relationship of action with meaning and purpose. It is only through the creaturely action of Jesus that God’s purposes of divine deliverance can be known.127

Third, Jesus is the creaturely being in whom God as the Savior of all humanity also reveals and affirms God’s own glory as the Creator. Jesus’ enacted history reveals the freedom, glory, and love of God and attests them particularly in the deliverance from sin worked in Him. (III.2, p. 69, 133)

Fourth, Jesus is the creaturely being who, as such, embodies the sovereignty of God. Stated conversely, God’s sovereignty actualizes Jesus’ creaturely being. (III.2, p. 133) With this statement, Barth makes several important distinctions. First, he

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127 For Barth we can only know the inner life of the Trinity because we know that God is not other than who God is in God’s self-disclosure in Christ.
emphasizes that Jesus does not exist “outside of” the Sovereignty of God, i.e. that God is somehow external to him. Neither is Jesus “real” man \textit{wirkliche Mensch} simply because he is a being with a soul and body existing in time. Jesus is not two juxtaposed realities, Barth argues, but \textit{one divine reality}, in whom, as such, the human is posited, contained and included. In other words, Jesus, this \textit{man}, is the imminent kingdom of God—nothing more and nothing in and for Himself. (III.2, pp. 69-70)

Fifth, Jesus is the creaturely being whose existence consists in the fulfillment of the will of God. (III.2, p. 133) Simply stated: Jesus is the history of God’s purposive act of love. Sixth, and finally, Jesus is the creaturely being who as such not only exists from God and in God but absolutely \textit{for God} and not \textit{for Himself}. In other words, Jesus is the creaturely being whose purpose is the service of God. Thus, the basis of Jesus’ life is also its goal. Jesus derives from God, is in God, and is therefore God. (III.1, p. 71)

After having articulated these six features of Jesus’ creaturely being which are proper to him because of his \textit{divine} nature, Barth goes on to point out that because these creaturely features are unique to Jesus, this creaturely nature of Jesus can only be a \textit{foundation} for theological anthropology. We cannot make these statements about Jesus’ creaturely being and apply them \textit{directly} to our own human creaturely nature. Like the broader differences described above, these indicate for Barth that theological anthropology cannot be Christology and vice versa.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{128} With this statement, Barth should be relieved of any charge of Christomonism. As Eberhard Jüngel has pointed out, one cannot understand Barth’s theology as Christomonism because Christology is not a “principle” from which an anthropology can be simply deduced. He writes: “The only important thing is to concentrate on the concrete existence of Jesus Christ. But this concrete existence constitutes a \textit{history} in which we cannot speak of God apart from the man Jesus, nor about the man Jesus apart from God. At the same time, we cannot speak of the history of Jesus Christ without speaking of all human beings, for the royal man was there in such a way precisely because he was there for humankind. In so far
For Barth these distinctions between Jesus and the rest of humanity imply that Jesus has a different status [Stand] than we do in relationship to God but not a different constitution [Beschaffenheit] from ours. (III.2, p. 53) The fact that Jesus is both utterly unlike us as God, but also utterly like us as a human being, constitutes the whole secret of his person. (III.2, p. 53) In developing his ontology of Christ, Barth seeks to preserve this mystery even as he shows that Christ does have a human nature neither alien to nor overdetermined by his divinity.

4.5 Humanity for God: From Jesus’ Humanity to Our Own

Thus far we have seen how Barth’s understands the unique ontology/history of Christ as distinct from our own leads him in a general way to the claim that theological anthropology cannot be directly equivalent to Christology. Barth secured this point by showing that Jesus is “man for God” in a way that is mutually compatible between the natures and yet cannot be repeated in any other human being. However, we are now prompted to inquire into Barth’s more specific arguments for a specific form of the human creature, asking whether and how he can make the transition from Christ’s distinctiveness to his commonality with the human creature. We will see that Barth continues to work out the complex triangulation he has established between Christ’s divine mode of being, which determines his humanity, and its relationship to our humanity. Barth’s ability to claim that he has a distinct anthropology that is not equivalent to Christology rests on a successful navigation of this difficult structure. We

as that was the case, God was there for all persons.” Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy, Trans. Garrett E. Paul, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 128-129.
will argue that via his insistence on the radical implications of correlations between Christ’s divine and human natures and Christ’s existence “for and with his fellows,” Barth does succeed in his enterprise in the necessary way.

In this section, we will concentrate on how Barth develops these elements to arrive at a definition of humanity “as seen from above,” which view he details particularly in III.2 §44. Since it is Jesus’ election and divinity (as we shall see more closely) that sets the parameters for humanity, it is important to Barth’s project to begin from this vantage point, though it is also the more difficult one to clarify. In the next section, we will turn to III.2 §45 to see how, once he has clarified these ‘divine determinations,’ Barth is able to move to develop a cogent, corresponding view of humanity “from below.”

4.5.1 Jesus’ being for God determines and limits our own being for God

In the first place, even though Barth insists that a theological anthropology cannot be deduced directly from Christology as we saw earlier, he argues that there are six theological anthropological corollaries to the six features of Jesus’ unique creaturely being which are proper to Jesus in his divine nature. These six corollaries represent the similarities between Jesus’ creaturely nature and ours and thus provide the limits, Barth argues, within which theology must move in its search for a theological concept of human being. I have rephrased these six corollaries roughly as follows: (III.1, pp. 73-74)

1) The being of every (other) human being is to be understood, at least mediately and indirectly, as conditioned by the priority of the man Jesus, in his relationship to God. [Our human being as a relationship for God]

2) The being of every (other) human being as such must exist and have her being in a history which stands in a clear and recognizable relationship to the divine
deliverance enacted in the man Jesus. [Our human being as the object of Divine Deliverance]

3) The being of every (other) human being is not an end in itself but has its true determination in the glory of God (by the very fact that it can participate in that history). [Our human being exists for God’s own glory]

4) It is essential to the being of every (other) human being that as she exists, God is over her as her Lord and she herself stands under the lordship of God the Lord. [Our human being stands under God’s Lordship/Freedom]

5) The being of every (other) human being will consist in the history in which God is active as her deliverer. [Our human being is for God’s purpose/love]

6) The being of every (other) human being can only be understood in the fact that her existence is an active participation in what God does and means for her. It is an event in which she renders God’s service, in which she for her part is for God. [Our human being is for God’s service]

These six corollaries signify that every other human creature is related to God in these six ways, even though not in the same direct way as Jesus Christ. The creaturely being of Jesus discloses the shape of our relationship to God and what our creaturely existence is for. We have highlighted the six features of Jesus’ divinity with the six theological corollaries below in order to show the juxtaposition of similarity and difference that Barth is trying to articulate:

1) In Jesus, God’s being is immediate and direct;  
   Our human being for God is indirect and mediated through Jesus

2) In Jesus, God’s act of divine deliverance has taken place;  
   Our human being is the object of divine deliverance

3) In Jesus, God’s glory is revealed and affirmed;  
   Our human being exists for God’s own glory

4) In Jesus, the Lordship and Freedom of God is embodied;  
   Our human being stands under God’s Lordship and Freedom

5) In Jesus, the will and purpose of God as love is embodied;  
   Our human being is for God’s purpose/love
6) Jesus exists both from God and for the service of God:
   Our human being is for God’s service

   These six corollaries establish the limits within which we must understand human
   nature. For Barth, any understanding of human being which is not 1) related to God
   through Jesus; 2) understood as the object of God’s saving work; 3) existing for the sake
   of God glory; 4) standing under God’s Lordship and Freedom; 5) existing for God’s
   purpose and love; or 6) wholly at the service of God, exceeds the limits that define what
   is proper to human being. Thus, the first significance for our humanity of Jesus’ unique
   mode of exercising his human vocation is that the direction of our humanity certainly can
   follow no other path than the outline “pioneered” by him.

   However, even after establishing these six corollaries of every “other” human
   being to the man Jesus, Barth insists that he has still not attained the concept of human
   being as such. Again, he reiterates the fact that the concept of human being cannot be
deducted so comparatively easily from the nature of Jesus. (III.2, p. 74) He argues that
we can only uncover the true concept of human being only when we ask what it means
that Jesus himself was a human being, how we compare to him, and what relationship
Jesus as a human being has with us as human beings. (III.2, p. 74) Barth endeavors to
answer this question in the third subsection of §44 “Real Man.”

4.5.2 Christ, Elected to be for and with his fellows

   In his discussion of Jesus as “real” man Barth states, “The ontological
determination of humanity is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the
man Jesus.” (III.2, p. 133) By this, Barth wants to suggest that the fact that Jesus is one
human being among others establishes the truth that all human beings are elected to be
for God. More specifically, Barth is arguing that to be human means “being-with-Jesus.”

Barth arrives at this conclusion because his doctrine of election, as developed in II.2, indicates that God willed to know all creation only in Christ:

According to Scripture, the divine election of grace is an activity of God which has a definite goal and limit. Its direct and proper object is not individuals generally, but one individual [Jesus]---and only in Him the people called and united by Him, and only in that people individuals in general in their private relationships with God. It is only in that one man that a human determination corresponds to the divine determining. In the strict sense only He [Jesus] can be understood and described as “elected” (and “rejected”). (II.2, p. 43)

For Barth, the only proper object of divine election is Jesus Christ, who is as such the original and first Representative of God’s determination of human being. The rest of humanity is elected only within the context of the divine election of Jesus Christ as the true man [wirkliche Mensch] and as God’s true and original covenant-partner. At the same time, this is clearly the true election of every human being in this one real man: “the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious toward man, uniting Himself with him.” (II.2, p. 101)

Importantly, this determination by God to be in relationship with humanity “ad extra” only in the Son proceeds for Barth from an even more primordial self-determination by the Trinity “ad intra”:

in [God], in the primal and basic decision in which He wills to be and actually is God, in the mystery of what takes place from and to all eternity within Himself, within His triune being, God is none other than the One who in His Son or Word elects Himself, and in and with Himself elects his people. (II.2, p. 76)

129 In contrast to Calvin, Barth does not understand the will of God to be ordered to two different classes of people, e.g. the elect and the reject, but rather only to Christ. The election of individuals is an election that is understood only in a secondary sense.
God’s eternal decision to elect Himself describes the being of God. In other words, God decided to be this God, i.e. the God who elects to be in covenant relations with humanity in this particular way and not any other. Correlatively, God’s being is determined by this decision and the resulting relationship that is established between God the Father and God the Son in God the Spirit. The being of God is his electing will to be for humanity. Therefore, Barth finds that he cannot understand God outside of these relationships. There is nothing “behind” this relationality that we can call “God.”

Barth concludes that it is the divine confrontation that takes place between God the Father and God the Son in God the Spirit which is thus determinative for the being of Jesus. It is determinative not only for his divinity, but for his humanity as well. In God’s decision to be this God, i.e. to elect himself to be in covenant relations with humanity, Jesus was determined to be this particular human being with this particular vocation. However, to understand the particular way in which Jesus is a human being, he cannot be considered in abstraction from his relationship to God the Father as God the Son. Jesus is who he is only as he is constituted by this relationship. Thus, Barth argues, to be human is to be primarily constituted by our relationships with God and our fellow human beings, through Jesus’ relationship to us. That is, there is no other ontology, also as it includes anthropology, than the relational one established by God’s triune election of God’s self. We will explore this idea more fully in a moment but the central point at present is that in Barth’s mind, it is simply as wrong-headed to try to “get behind” a relational humanity as it is to try to “get behind” the relational Trinity.

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130 It is important to point out that when God elects himself to be the God who is gracious to humanity, this also implies that Jesus, as the 2nd person of the Trinity, also elects to be the Son of God in this way as well.
Thus, Barth draws the conclusion that since Jesus is “truly human” and has been
determined by God from all eternity to represent humanity before God, the existence of
Jesus establishes the ontological determination of every other human being. Barth writes:

Because this One [Jesus] is also man, every man in his place and time has
changed, i.e. he is something other than what he would have been if this One had
not been man, too. It belongs to his human essence that Jesus, too, is man, and
that in [Jesus], every man has a human Neighbor, Companion, Brother. (III.2, p.
133)

Hence, just as the being of Jesus cannot be understood without reference to his
relationship with God the Father as God the Son in God the Spirit, Barth insists that we
cannot understand ourselves as human beings independently of the existence of Jesus.
Humanity cannot be understood to exist without reference to the being of Jesus Christ,
our human brother, neighbor, and counter-part.

4.5.3 The ontology of human being as “being-in-encounter”

Barth offers a more specific description of what this ontology of relations actually
is, namely, it is a “being-in-encounter” with a transcendent and divine other. Jesus is
ontologically constituted by his relationship with God, which is the divine encounter
between God the Father and God the Son in God the Spirit. Similarly, we too are
constituted by our relationship with Jesus, who, although he is also human, is also for us
the transcendent and divine other. (III.2, p. 134) Thus, what constitutes us as every
(other) human being is that we, too, are a being-in-encounter with the transcendent and
divine other. We, however, encounter the divine and transcendent other in the being of
Jesus Christ. It is from our encounter with Jesus as the transcendent and divine other that
we, too, can understand ourselves as truly human beings. (III.2, p. 134) It is also in this way that we, too, are “men for God.”

What exactly does it mean to encounter a “transcendent and divine other”? Barth wants to be clear that it does not mean that this divine other *dwell* in us nor does it mean, vice versa, that this transcendent deity exists *abstractly* outside of ourselves. Rather, since as we have seen, Jesus embodies deity in a human form that is a history and fellowship, *we confront this divine other in fellowship and history*. Like much else, Barth does not think we can fully explicate exactly what this ontology of encounter means. Yet we can say that since Christ is unique in his relationship to God, it makes sense to hold that our encounter with him *would not be experienced in the same way with any other creaturely being*. (III.2, p. 134-135) Correlatively, because Jesus is unique in his relationship to God *he is unique in relationship to all other human beings* (III.2, p. 135), which allows him to have the kind of necessary cosmic scope. Thus, Barth argues, the being of Jesus is best described as the *creaturely correspondence* to the transcendence and singularity of God. Barth writes:

> In fellowship with Jesus, therefore, to be a man is to be with this correspondence, reflection and representation of the uniqueness and transcendence of God, to be with the One who is *unlike* us. To be [human] is to be in the true, unique counterpart. (III.2, p. 135)

> Therefore, to be human is to be *with God*. For Jesus it is to be *directly with God*. For us, it is to be *with God through our relationship with Jesus Christ*. This is the basic and comprehensive determination of human being. We can never get behind this determination of our being and we can never abstract from it. (III.2, p. 135)
Given all these explanations, we might still be prompted to ask: if Barth argues that ontology is relationality, yet concedes that Jesus’ relationality to God and to us is unique, then is it not reasonable to conclude that Jesus’ ontology is thus essentially different from ours? Here again we see how difficult it is to bring all of Barth’s innovations to logical consistency. While Barth’s explanations resolve certain problems, they frequently give rise to still further questions.

4.5.4 The being of humanity consists in hearing the Word of God

Perhaps sensing his own difficulties, Barth is not content to inscribe our relationship to Jesus Christ as being-in-encounter in only one way. In this section we will see that he also seeks to inscribe and support this relationship in terms of the concept of “hearing.” Already in our opening section, we saw how Christ is the Word that sustains our being against our own impossible choices by revealing our being to us. It is worth underscoring how Barth makes use of this idea by highlighting the significance of his suggestion regarding “real man” that the being of humanity as being with Jesus consists in listening to the Word of God. (III.2, p. 147)

As we have seen, for Barth Jesus is the Word of God to the created cosmos. Barth reasons that if the eternal Logos is the Word in which God speaks with Himself, thinks Himself, and is conscious to Himself, then in its identity with the man Jesus, Jesus is the Word in which God thinks the cosmos, speaks with the cosmos, and imparts to the cosmos the consciousness of God. (III.2, p. 147) Thus, the Creator makes himself heard, understood, and recognized by becoming this creature, i.e. the man Jesus, and by acting as the Savior of all creatures in this one particular human being. (III.2, p. 147)
action of Jesus, God declares himself, the purpose of creation, and what is needed in order to deliver the creature from the threat of non-being. Thus, Barth concludes, “To be [human] is to be in the particular sphere of the created world in which the Word of God is spoken and sounded…[the human being] is the creaturely being which is addressed, called, and summoned by God.” (III.2, p. 149) Or again, human beings are the “beings among all others of whom we know that God has directly made Himself known to him, revealing Himself and his will, and therefore the meaning and destiny of one’s own being.” (III.2, p. 149) Hence, Barth concludes, the human being is the being addressed in this way by God, and this address imparts to that being the telos toward which all its existence shall aim. The entire shape of each individual human’s being is given and is thus gratuitous gift.

Thus, Barth can argue that the human being does not become a being capable of such address, as if it existed as a human being without this capability at some “previous stage.” Barth insists that the human being “does not have something different and earlier and more intrinsic, a deeper stratum or more original substance of being, in which he is without or prior to the Word of God.” (III.2, p. 149) In the same way that there is no primal material out of which God fashioned creation, so, too, there is no primal “essence” of the human being that precedes her being with God. (III.2, p. 150) And yet, due to the elective grace of God, the integrity of this essence is truly given in the Word as eternally unchanging.

Barth continues to develop the significance of this gifting by claiming that to the question, “Who am I,” the answer is not: what belongs to me, what I would like to be, what I pretend to be, or what have I made of myself. Rather, “if I understand myself in
the light of the Word of God or His Word, I must answer that I am summoned by this Word, and to that extent I am in this Word.” (III.2, p. 150) [emphasis mine] A human being is one summoned by God’s Word.

With all of the above elements in place, Barth finally offers his full definition of the being of humanity:

The being of man is a being summoned which is not preceded by anything apart from God in His Word, but owes its character as being solely to God in His Word. It is not preceded by anything else: by any potentiality which would pre-dispose it for being in this way, or underlies its actuality or historicity; by any pre-existing material which would be had according to this pattern. There is nothing prior to it to constitute what it is, to underlie, condition, or prepare what it is, engaging it to gratitude, or subjecting it to its law. For its equipment or endowment rests upon its being and not vice versa. (III.2, p. 152) [Emphasis mine.]

Again, the implications of this definition are profound, for it signifies that from a theological point of view, to describe the being of humanity as essentially rational, spiritual, having a capacity for God, or as having the ability to hear and respond simply misses the mark. While it is true that all of these things may describe features of humanity, they do not capture its essence. Rather, our very being is defined as our being with Christ. The human being who is summoned is the human being-with-Christ. For Barth, no other statement can properly precede this statement.

4.5.5 Our being with Christ is a history [Geschichte], not a state [Zustand]

Having established that human being for Barth is nothing else than “being-in-encounter-with-Christ,” we may now see the strong correlations Barth draws between Jesus’ humanity and ours. (Recall that earlier we saw the weak correlations whereby Jesus’ being set the limits for ours.) First, we will show that for Barth, our fundamental
ontology as human beings means participation as histories within God’s history of grace in Christ. Next, we will show that this participation is further the determination of our beings as radically free within Christ’s own freedom but also that this determination means that freedom is also responsibility in obedience to God. These two components are most notably what it means for humans to be “divinely determined” as creaturely covenantal partners of God.

Turning to the first point, we find that Barth argues that the being of humanity with Christ is necessarily a history [Geschichte], since Christ himself is fundamentally a history—specifically that of God’s gracious action toward Creation. We may therefore arrive at a clearer conception of what Barth means by human being as history by looking more closely at his conception of grace as history.

Barth defines grace as 1) the goodness in which God remembers his creature; 2) God’s will, which is determined by this goodness, to keep it from evil by being its deliverer; 3) the freedom and omnipotence in which God decides to be God for creation and not otherwise; 4) the mercy and justice which is operative and revealed in God’s divine decision; 5) the compassion in which God refuses to withdraw from His creature; and 6) the zeal with which God refuses to surrender His right over the creature. In short: Grace sums up the mind and attitude and work of God towards the creature which confronts God in its own nature. (III.2, p. 164)

As we saw above, God conveys this grace to the creature through the Word of God. Better, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, simply is grace. Using the form of propositional logic we can now state Barth’s ontology of the creature as it is related to Jesus in this way: Jesus is the Word of God. The Word of God is grace. Therefore Jesus
is grace. Jesus is history. Therefore, since Jesus is also grace, history is grace.

Humanity participates in Jesus. Jesus is both history and grace, therefore humanity’s participation in grace is its history and therefore its being.

This ontology implies that the creature cannot exist without being in movement towards the source of its existence in the Word of God who makes the declaration that God is gracious to humanity. For Barth, as we have seen, it is in hearing the Word of God that the creature lives. The creature is as it is called, continues to be called, and allows itself to be called. Thus, the human being is called to exist historically and not statically. (III.2, p. 165) Barth writes: “[the human being] is not enclosed within a circle of intrinsic possibilities, but opened toward that other and new reality of God its Creator which has broken through to it in His Word, and in that Word as His promise has come to dwell with it. Man is as he hears the Word…To be summoned is to be called out of oneself and beyond oneself.” (III.2, pp. 165-166)

As the foregoing quote shows, the gracious summons of God “opens” the human being and this opening signifies the gift of freedom. In the next section, we will spell out in detail the significance for Barth of this liberative quality of the history given as our very human being. At this point however, we need to highlight that Barth also opposes his conception of humanity as history to a contrary concept, that of human being as ‘state’ [Zustand].

To say that something as in a ‘state’ is not to say that it exists “statically” and without movement. On the contrary, Barth understands the term ‘state’ [Zustand] as indicating something which is in movement. However, what is true about something in a state is that it is limited to a certain set of possibilities, changes and modes of behavior.
Something in a ‘state’ is never capable of more than the particular movements implied in its natural being. (III.2, p. 158) For example, Barth argues that plants and animals appear to be in states because what we know of them can appear to us only as a fixed circle of changes and modes of behavior. It does not make sense to think of these things as having a history. While human beings also have modes of behavior proper to it, i.e. our nature, which can be said to exist in a state, the human being is not determined to exist in this limited state. Rather, the creature is capable of having a history.

History then, in contrast to the idea of a ‘state’ of being, is properly defined for Barth as something that occurs when the creature encounters something other than herself which transcends her. Barth writes:

The history of a being begins, continues, and is completed when something other than itself and transcending its own nature encounters it, approaches it and determines its being in the nature proper to it, so that it is compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor.¹³¹ (III.2, p. 158) [emphasis mine]

However, it must be pointed out that the creature does not transcend her nature and then “float above it.” Rather, what Barth is trying to say is that when the creature encounters something outside of her own existence which enables her to transcend the boundaries of her original nature, she also at the same time retains her being [Sein] in the mode and nature [Natur] proper to her. Her encounter with the transcendent other allows her to realize her creaturely nature more fully as a history. History thus proves to be the

¹³¹ In parallel to this ontological move, Barth opposes a “real, Christological knowledge” to the phenomenal knowledge that we can have of ourselves through our own efforts. Barth includes in this phenomenal knowledge what we know about ourselves through the natural sciences or through ‘ethical’ or ‘existential’ self-understandings. Barth devotes §44.2 to the discussion of such knowledge of the “phenomenon of man.” Barth will say that this knowledge too is real knowledge, but that it is only helpful if christological knowledge of ourselves as “real men” comes first.
pivotal category for Barth, in contrast to ‘state,’ because there simply is no other way to convey his central commitment that human being is something constantly sustained and summoned by God toward its genuine possibility.

4.5.6 Human being is freedom for responsibility before God

Barth goes on to identify this genuine being and possibility of the human being as gratitude. The grace of God approaches the human being as a history, i.e. Christ’s history, that opens and therefore liberates her. Correlatively, insofar as this history becomes, as we have seen, the active response proper to the individual herself, it will be for Barth a history marked by gratitude. Gratitude is thus the creaturely counterpart to the grace of God. (III.2, p. 166)

To be grateful, furthermore, is to recognize a benefit. True gratitude arises only, as we indicated above in the definition of sin only with respect to grace, when the gift is both accepted and understood for what it is. (III.2, pp. 167-168) Thus to be grateful implies an obligation to the benefactor for this genuine gift. Barth accordingly concludes that human being is thus best characterized as responsibility, an active response to God’s grace which, again, is the proper history of the creature itself. Thus she is always a being in actuality, not potentiality.132 (III.2, p. 174)

The foregoing exploration clearly establishes the link Barth draws between freedom and responsibility. For Barth, “freedom” most fully comprehends what it means for humanity to “be” in response to God. However, he also believes that to fully grasp

132 Cf. III.2, p.175: “The being of man is an answer, or more precisely, a being lived in the act of answering the Word of God, a being which in the creaturely sphere and, as itself creaturely, makes that address and return to God, to the God from whom it flows and in whose Word it is rooted.”
the meaning of this free responsibility, we must understand how it involves: 1) knowledge of God; 2) obedience to God; and 3) invocation of God. We will now consider each of these in turn.

Barth suggests first that the being of man in responsibility before God has the characteristic of the knowledge of God. As noted above, gratitude proceeds only where the gift of God is rightly understood. A being in responsibility can only respond to something it knows, accepts and confirms. The creature must know what God has done for humanity, accept God’s self-disclosure as true, and confirm this knowledge with a reply proper to its own being as an object of God’s grace, which takes the form of gratitude, as we know. (III.2, p. 179) Thus, Barth, argues that the statement “God is” must always precede the creature’s statement, “I am.”

To have the knowledge of God thus returns to hearing, receiving, and responding to God’s Word. In God’s Word, God reveals God’s self as Creator and transcendent Other. Furthermore, the content of God’s speech reveals God as a God of grace. God says to humanity, “I am God who is gracious to you.” God’s address opens humanity (objectively) to God as it receives this speech. Effectively, the content of the speech communicates to the human being that she is not alone and does not exist in isolation, i.e. God as transcendent Other always precedes the human being. Upon hearing this Word of grace, the human being is thus in a position to decide to open herself to God (subjectively) and understand herself in relationship to God. Barth calls this being “doubly opened” to God. We are first opened to God by being addressed (objectively) and then we must decide to open ourselves to respond to God’s self-communication (subjectively).
Second, if human being is being in responsibility before God, it must have the character of \textit{obedience to God}. Barth argues that if the proper ontological order is, “God is, therefore I am” then an “I will” must follow after the statement “I am”. (III.2, p. 179)

For Barth, God’s Word of grace is an \textit{action} of God. So, too, the knowledge of God is also an \textit{act of the human person}. To have the knowledge of God is to actively participate in the process of receiving God’s Word and responding to it. It is in the ongoing hearing and response to God’s Word that the human being \textit{receives both the knowledge of God and of herself as well}. Thus, the knowledge of God is not theoretical or factual knowledge that can be learned once and for all or kept self-contained apart from God. Rather, just as the Word of God is an ongoing action of God, so, too, is the process of hearing and responding to God’s Word of grace with thanksgiving. Only in such ongoing historical obedience, \textit{which is proper to a creature as creature}, does the human being posit herself as a \textit{subject} with a history that participates in the history of God’s grace and thus opens her in freedom beyond the confines of existing merely in a “state.” Thus, not only is it the case that “God is, therefore I am and I will” but also, “God is, therefore I am, I will, and I \textit{do}.”

Third, Barth argues that, if the human being is a being in responsibility before God, then it has the character of an \textit{invocation of God}. (III.2, p. 186) Simply stated, this means that the creature who offers her life and action in response to God’s Word must invoke God to be merciful and accept her life as she offers it. While we have seen that the Word of God is that of grace and the word of the creature is that of gratitude, Barth points out that God’s initial communication and the creature’s reply are not equal in dignity. God is the objective basis of human being, therefore human being would not
exist without God. God does not need humanity, but humanity needs God. God is glorious in God’s self, but humanity’s glory consists in glorifying God. God gives grace, but humanity needs grace. God’s act of Creation is an act of majesty, but the creature’s response of thanksgiving is not an act of majesty but of humility. God is always the primary subject of history, but humanity is always the secondary subject of history. In short, there is a disparity between God’s going out to humanity (objectively) and humanity’s response and return (subjectively) to God as creature.

It is because God and humanity are unequal in dignity that the human creature must continue in prayer to recognize her life as one of dependence on the mercy of God. Likewise, she must also prayerfully submit her life and action to God’s judgment. In offering herself to God in obedience, the creature seeks God’s opinion of her and prays that God’s opinion will be merciful. The creature cannot effect her final arrival back to God. While the creature trusts and hopes in God’s mercy, and since she has been given God’s promise of grace at the beginning, she can venture forth to God with “sure and certain hope.” However, God is still free to accept and reject the creature. Here too we see why responsibility as the knowledge of God and obedience to God must invoke the mercy of God to accept the creature’s offer of her life back to God.

We have now arrived at a point where we can properly understand Barth’s concept of freedom, which most centrally demonstrates the integrity of the human subject as distinct from Christ. While God alone is originally and truly free, we are free since God created us to realize our own being in relation to God. That is, God created us to be free subjects. This freedom, given by a history in distinction from existence as a state, is what we have seen to be particular to being human for Barth, over against the non-human
creation. From a different vantage point, we might also say that the free Creator desires to be in covenant relations with a free creature, whose very nature allows her to be free for God in return. The eternal nature of this covenantal determination implies then for Barth that such free personhood is *not* a latent possibility or a capacity that resides “within” the creature only to be “activated” at a later time at the discretion of the creature. Rather, freedom is *active responsibility* before God, always already imparted. Humanity *is* as it *lives.* (III.2, p. 194)

Obversely, since our freedom exists in no other way than within God’s determination, Barth will also underscore that it is not an *arbitrary* freedom. Rather, it is freedom *to be for God in action.* Thus freedom for action can be understood as *creaturely freedom* in its proper sense when the creature’s actions are governed by its: 1) knowledge of God; 2) obedience to God; and 3) invocation of God. Only when human action is governed by these characteristics may it be properly described as *creaturely freedom.* That is, we are subjects only as we posit ourselves to be who God created us to be. This implies both obedience to God and the rejection of sinful rebellion against God. Again, we must govern our action by the knowledge of God, obedience to God, and the invocation of the mercy of God. If any of these components is missing, we fail to respond to God with the gratitude that forms the true history of a human creature and we become lost to ourselves, although we are never lost from God.

The anchoring of our being in God’s election thus makes it important to put the truth about our responsibility in the primarily *positive* formulation Barth gives it. Freedom is delimited and obedient, but this freedom simply means being free to be who we already and truly are. To underscore the creaturely nature of this freedom, Barth
importantly insists that the truly free human subject chooses to be the subject that God has posited her to be in her creation. Her subjectivity lies in affirming her subjectivity before God. This subjectivity is God’s gift, and our obedient recognition of this gift frees us for genuine life and possibility. We saw these same points in our examination of Barth’s interpretation of the two trees in the Garden of Eden.

4.6 Jesus, Man for His Fellows: The Distinctiveness of Christ’s Humanity (2)

The previous section highlighted how, in §44, Barth described the nature of the creature “from above.” It was essential for him to begin from the vantage point of God’s view of us through his election of us in Christ to show precisely why God created humanity and what kinds of weak limits and strong correlations this entails for our being in and with Christ. We saw that God singled out humanity in distinction from the rest of creation in order to be God’s covenant partner, a being who can posit herself as a history in relation to God’s history. For Barth, the human being is a “real” human being as the “being determined by God for life with God and existing in the history of the covenant which God established” (III.2, p. 204). Our divine determination as a human being for God is the primary content of human being.

In section §45 “Man in his Determination as the Covenant-Partner of God,” Barth turns to examine the creaturely form of human being. That is, how does humanity exist as God’s covenant partner “here below”? How does the human being as a creature, i.e. as distinct from God, fulfill her being as God’s covenant partner? As Barth develops his thoughts about the creaturely form of human being in §45 he will do so with an eye to the question: What is the inner relationship between understanding the divine determination
of human being as covenant partner and the form in which she realizes this
determination, since the human being we are talking about is one and the same subject?
(III.2, p. 204) Barth will eventually answer that the key to understanding this relationship
is the concept of “co-humanity,” i.e. to be a human being is to be constituted by one’s
relationship to one’s fellow human beings.

We will explore this theme in two parts. First, we will examine in broad strokes
the relationship between Christ’s divinity and his humanity through Barth’s discussion of
Jesus as the *creaturely* image of God and humanity as the copy of that image. In the
process we will see how Barth demonstrates that the humanity of Christ is a genuine
humanity and a humanity which we share. We will then turn to how Barth understands
Jesus as uniquely “man for his fellows” and how Jesus himself is constituted by his
relationship with sinful humanity. Thus, these next subsections taken together will
establish in the greatest detail so far, but still on the general level of ontological structure,
that Christ’s unique ontology, this time as “man for his fellows,” again neither
overwhelms his own human nature “here below” nor ours. After we have established this
general structure, we will move in the following major chapter section (4.7) to show how
Jesus’ co-humanity with us reaches its greatest particular correspondence in the integrity
of our co-humanity with one another.

4.6.1 Jesus as the *creaturely* image of God *ad extra*

As we saw above (4.5) when we discussed §44, Barth argues that Jesus’ *divinity*
uniquely determines how he realizes humanity as God’s covenant partner. But as “true
God”, God exists *immediately and directly in and with Jesus*, this creature. We recall
that it was because of this uniqueness and distinctiveness that Barth argues that we cannot equate Christology and anthropology. (III.2, p. 207)

However, in §45 Barth undertakes a more careful analysis of Jesus’ humanity, i.e. the creaturely form of Jesus’ human existence. Barth argues that the existence of Jesus “here below” is sufficient as the basis of theological anthropology because even though Jesus is one with God in a unique way that no other human being can be, this does not mean that the Godhead has taken the place of, swallowed up, or extinguished the human being of Jesus. In other words, Jesus’ being as a creaturely “cosmic being” is not just mere “appearance.” He is not some “heavenly double.” As we will see in what follows, Barth assigns to Jesus’ humanity a definitive content that validates this claim further and thus makes Barth’s account of Jesus humanity a sufficient (as well as necessary – recall 4.2) basis of theological anthropology, even as it remains fully linked to his divine being in the intra-Trinitarian fellowship.

To explore the way in which Barth understands Jesus’ humanity in its distinctiveness from our own, we must follow once more the central path Barth traces from God’s election and self-determination ad intra in the Son, across parallel determinations in the same Son ad extra, to our own being as human creatures. Barth himself indicates this approach to us by repeating in §45 the basic starting point he established previously. For him, God posits himself (objectively), is posited by himself (subjectively), and then confirms himself in both respects as both his own origin and goal. For him, this means that God is 1) the one who loves eternally (subjective), is

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133 This comment could relieve Barth of the charge of the common Gnostic heresy of Docetism.
eternally loved (objective), and is eternal love itself (the mediation of these). Since God is love in this way, Barth argues, God is the original source of every I and Thou—eternally from and to a Thou, and therefore supremely “I”. (III.2, p. 217) This intra-Trinitarian relationship God repeats in time through God’s eternal covenant with humanity in the person of Jesus. (III.2, pp. 218-219)

Again, as noted, this temporal repetition means that who Jesus is “for God” and “for his fellows” partakes of the same relationality as intra-Trinitarian divine ontology but is at the same time not simply that ontology nor even some weightless “enunciation” (my term) of God’s will. It is rather a real, corresponding, creaturely being as man for God and man for his fellows. As man, Jesus is the image of God as a creaturely copy [Nachbild].

By showing that Jesus images God in a concrete creaturely fashion, Barth is then in a position to say of Jesus’ humanity that it is only indirectly identical with God. Thus, Jesus’ integrity as man means that he does not directly represent the intra-Trinitarian relations of God’s divine essence. Instead, what he does directly disclose is God’s relationship to creation, the work of God ad extra. (III.2, p. 219) For Barth, this difference means that there exists a total dissimilarity in both the sphere and object of relations between the intra-Trinitarian divine life and God’s relationship with the creation. (III.2, p. 219) This distinction is then the basis for Barth’s further claims that it can only be through Jesus’ life and work in the creaturely sphere that God reveals God’s relationship with humanity, and that the being of God in God’s inner-Trinitarian essence

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134 Again, translating Nachbild as “afterimage” perhaps conveys Barth’s meaning more precisely. NB, also that Jesus is the Nachbild while we are only Abbilden of Jesus.
cannot be compared with that of humanity. (III.2, p. 220) In God’s relationship with humanity, God has made a creaturely copy of himself. And, this copy is the human person of Jesus.

From this starting point, Barth draws two additional conclusions in §45 about what human being is based on what it cannot be since it is not divine. First, Barth argues that in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son in God the Spirit, there is a unity of essence. In other words, there is the perfect satisfaction of self-grounded reality, a blessedness which is eternally self-originated and self-renewed. This type of relationship is not possible between God and humanity and cannot even find identical expression in the creaturely reality of Jesus. As we will see in more detail below, the humanity of Jesus is his being as constituted by his relations with the cosmos and fellow-humanity. In other words, since the rest of creation, i.e. humanity and the cosmos, is not a self-grounded reality, the relationship between God and the creaturely world cannot be the same as it in the inner essence of the Trinitarian relations.

This lack of self-groundedness of human being leads Barth to a second conclusion. The relationship between God the Father and God the Son in God the Spirit in the mystery of God’s divine inner-essence is total sovereignty and grace. However, in the relationship between God and humanity, humanity is not sovereign but exists in total dependence and need of God. Particularly, the human being depends on God for grace and cannot have it as a property of her own being. Here Barth proves in strong fashion

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135 Here too we see further support for the contention above that the cosmos does not “lose out” to humanity. The cosmos in fact positions humanity in its most perfect form in Christ!
that there is an essence to the human creature that is distinct from the grace that constantly beckons it.

However, even though there is a disparity and dissimilarity between the sphere and object of relations in describing the intra-Trinitarian divine life and God’s relationship with creation, Barth argues that there are two aspects of the being of God and the being of humanity which do correspond more directly. These two aspects of being are freedom and love.

For Barth, the freedom in which a) God posits God’s self as Father, b) God is posited by God’s self as the Son, and c) God confirms God’s self in the Holy Spirit, corresponds to the freedom in which God a) creates humanity (objective), b) the creature posits itself as creature in relationship to God (subjective) and c) God confirms the Creator-creature relationship. Stated differently, the freedom in which God posits God’s self as Father corresponds to the freedom in which God creates humanity. The freedom in which God posits God’s self as Son corresponds to the freedom in which the human being posits herself in relationship to God. And, the freedom in which God confirms God’s self in the Holy Spirit corresponds to the freedom in which God confirms the Creator-Creature relationship. (III.2, p. 220)

This corresponding freedom between the being of God in God’s self and the relationship of God ad extra with humanity can itself also be understood as love. The eternal love in which God the Father loves God the Son, and the love with which the Son loves the Father, and vice versa, is also the same love addressed to humanity. This is how Jesus’ humanity, i.e. his being for his fellows, is the direct correlative of his being for God. It is the inner relational being of God that takes the form ad extra in the humanity
of Jesus. It is in this creaturely form (for all of the disparity of sphere and disparity of object which was discussed above) that God remains true to God’s self and reflects God’s self.

Therefore, it is the mystery of God that God can maintain his inner essence in his outer work. It is the mystery of God that the divine original can create a creaturely copy. (III.2, p. 220) And yet, in looking at the person and work of Jesus Christ, Barth believes we can see that God does in fact create a human covenant partner who determines his creaturely being-in-act with the same free and loving purposes expressed by God in God’s self.

4.6.2 Jesus’ humanity: Jesus as human being for other human beings

Barth thus argues that Jesus’ humanity can be defined as “Man for other men.” That is, Jesus’ existence refers to other human beings originally, exclusively and totally. (III.2, p. 208) This truth about the being of Jesus is based on an eternal order which determines that Jesus is to show himself to be the Savior and Neighbor to all human beings in time. Barth writes: “There is not in Him a kind of deep, inner secret recess in which He is alone in Himself or with God, existing in a stoical calm or mystical rapture apart from his fellows, untouched by their state or fate.” (III.2, p. 210) The divine determination of humanity means that Jesus’ humanity is already relational, all the way down. He is immediately and directly affected by the existence of his fellows. His relationship to other human beings and his sympathy with them are original and proper to His innermost being. There is never a “time” when Jesus is not a man for his fellows. (III.2, p. 211) Hence, Barth stresses that Jesus’ relationship with his fellows is not a new
duty or a virtue which can begin and end but rather an ontological property of his humanity.

Barth argues that Jesus is man for his fellows in a “radical and comprehensive sense.” (III.2, p. 212) What Barth means by this phrase is that Jesus does not just stand alongside us and help us, like a guide who leads us to a point and then withdraws, or as someone who stands apart until beckoned. Rather, Jesus interposes himself for us. That is, he puts himself in our place and makes our state and fate his own cause, so that our state and fate as sinners fallen victim to death by the menacing state of chaos is no longer our fate alone, but becomes Jesus’ fate and responsibility. (III.2, p. 212) Why is this?

Barth argues that, if Jesus did not take up our fate as his responsibility, he would not accomplish God’s saving work which is the very purpose written into his created being (as well as expressed originally by his divine being). To merely stand alongside humanity would not, Barth writes, “alter the state and fate [of] sinners fallen victim to death” because “[t]he menacing of the cosmos by chaos and the assault on man by the devil are far too serious and basic to be met by external aid, however, powerful.” (III.2, p. 212) Without Jesus’ interposition, the cause of humanity would be lost, and it would fall under God’s just judgment and suffer destruction. Therefore, Jesus cannot simply offer us mere external aid. Rather, for Jesus to be man for us, he must give his life and sacrifice himself for our cause:

[Jesus] could not merely relieve His fellows of their sin and bear for them its punishment, as though it were enough to set them in this neutral state and wipe the slate clean. He had also to give them the freedom not to sin any more but to be obedient where they had previously been disobedient. To be their Deliverer He had thus to rise again for them to a new life. (III.2, p. 212)
Thus, the ontology of Jesus’ being for his fellows, his “co-humanity,” demands the most radical actualization of service to his fellows imaginable.\(^{136}\)

Barth underscores how this ontology of being-for-others relates Jesus’ humanity to ours in the deepest imaginable way, even in Jesus’ distinction from us, by suggesting it signifies that this sinless One nevertheless relates always and directly to *sinful* humanity. Barth captures the tenor of this relationship in his description of Christ as both being “from” and “toward” sinful Adam.\(^{137}\)

By stating that Jesus’ being is *from* his fellow humanity, Barth is arguing that even though Jesus shines in the original luster of true, sinless humanity, he does not *live* in that original humanity so as to be more glorious than his fellows in virtue of his unimpaired divine determination. Rather, Barth suggests, the “glory” of Jesus’ humanity is precisely that Jesus is fully claimed by his fellows in their lowliness and misery. His glory lies in relating only and always to sinful Adam as what Barth calls ‘alien’ human being—human being that denies its own original reality. *Sinful Adam is the “Thou” to which Jesus is the “I”*.\(^{138}\) (III.2, pp. 214-215)

\(^{136}\) Here, we should recall once again that this sacrifice as the meaning of a human ontology “for others” took on its radical form only under his *unique* divine determination. This kind of sacrifice as indicated by the ontology described here is his unique vocation.

\(^{137}\) This double direction of Jesus’ humanity (his being from and towards sinful humanity) also helps to clarify again the correspondence that takes place between Jesus’ divinity and Jesus’ humanity. As mentioned previously, Jesus’ divinity consists in the fact that Jesus is both *from* God, as well as *to* God, which means that he lives in/from Triune relation and toward the purposes of the Godhead. Likewise, we have just seen that Jesus is *from* Adam [co-humanity and the cosmos] as well as *toward* Adam [co-humanity and the cosmos], which means that he shares in the reality of human life and moves toward the fulfillment of its true purpose (which in this case entails the overcoming of particular obstacles).

\(^{138}\) This statement might prompt one to argue that because Jesus is constituted by his *relationship* with sinful humanity that Jesus becomes sinful himself, ontologically. This is not possible in Barth’s theology, because for Barth sin is *ontologically* “nothing” and it is not constitutive of the nature of humanity *in se*, as we have seen.
Secondly, Barth argues that Jesus is active only in his movement *toward* sinful Adam. In choosing to live “from” the reality of his fellows, Jesus disposes himself utterly to the *task* of movement *toward* sinful humanity. That is, Jesus takes it as his singular goal to maintain the cause of his fellow human beings in death and in the conquest of death. Jesus undertakes this task in order that Jesus’ fellow human beings might live in freedom. (III.2, p. 215)

We have seen before that Jesus’ ontological identity both gives and reveals our own. Accordingly, Barth moves directly from these depictions of the “ad extra” shape of Christ’s being to a depiction of our own. For him, the person and work of Jesus *disclose* to us that “humanity” is unequivocally “fellow-humanity.” To be human is to be a being who exists for her fellows. (III.2, p. 208) We will now explore the full dimensions of this statement in our final section.

### 4.7 Humanity with her fellows: From Jesus’ Humanity to Our Own

In the foregoing sections, we have seen how Barth makes pass after pass from his doctrine of God and God’s elective choice of Christ to a distinct definition of our human nature as it is thus given through Christ. In this section, we will see how this path has now led Barth to the point that he can give a decisive and substantial definition of human being as a “being-with” [*Mitmenschlichkeit*]. We will demonstrate, first, that Barth uses this definition to secure what is presupposed in the human person for the possibility of her relation to Christ and in him, the Triune God. Second, we will see how Barth is able to give this definition an important three-fold specificity that sketches clear dimensions for a positive anthropology. Third, we will see how it also enables him negatively to rule
out several possible alternative definitions for humanity, chief among which is the
Nietzschean Übermensch. Our examination of Barth’s response to Nietzsche will also
uncover an important affirmation of eros that, we shall argue, points constructively
toward the best way to understand how the characteristics of humanity Barth describes as
belonging in some way to our “state” [Zustand] do in fact find expression in our
historical life with God and others. Finally, we will see how Barth specifies that history
still further, so as to show in yet greater detail what is both positively entailed and
negatively ruled out in his anthropology.

4.7.1 Jesus’ being for corresponds to humanity’s being with

In most of the previous material, Barth’s constant tendency to reach back to
divine election means that even his specifications ‘from below’ have much the feel of a
‘from above,’ methodologically speaking. Thus we think it especially important to flag
here a moment of inquiry in Barth where the form of the inquiry itself marks his
commitment to the integrity of the human creature in relation to Christ. Indeed, it is
precisely this moment of inquiry that allows him to formulate in the concept of “being-
with” what is perhaps the clearest explication of the integrity of the human nature “here
below” that is proper to both ourselves and Christ. Barth approaches this inquiry by
noting:

If we are to avoid this conclusion [that Christ’s humanity overwhelms ours] there
has to be a common factor, and therefore a correspondence and similarity,
between the determination of man for this covenant partnership and his
creatureliness, between the humanity of Jesus and that of man generally. (III.2, p.
224-225)
Put differently, if the humanity of Jesus consists in the fact that he is man for his fellow human beings, then this means that for all the disparity which exists between Jesus and us, there must be some likeness between him and us that establishes a genuine co-humaneity. In other words, if it is the case that Jesus is man for his fellows, then there is necessarily a common sphere or form of existence in which the “for” can be possible and effective. Thus, Barth suggests that we have to ask what is presupposed about the form of human being in order that the relationship between Jesus and other human beings may be established. In other words, what is the basic form of humanity which allows Jesus to be for humanity as its Representative before God?

Here, again, Barth requires that the humanity of Jesus be the criterion for answering the question: to what extent does human essence correspond to the determination of the human being to be the covenant partner of God? (III.2, p. 226) Barth argues that as Jesus is man for his fellows, humanity must be understood as man with his fellows. Or put negatively, “A man without his fellows, or radically neutral or opposed to his fellows, or under the impression that the co-existence of his fellows has only secondary significance, is a being which ipso facto is fundamentally alien to the man Jesus and cannot have Him as Deliverer and Savior.” (III.2, p. 227) Implicitly operative here, we would suggest, is the distinction marked before between the unique vocational aspect attached to the relationality of Jesus’ co-humanity and that of our own. That is, we can only be human beings with one another, while Jesus is not only with but also for us as Savior. This understanding of a being for us in the most radical and comprehensive sense consisted in Jesus interposing himself for us. That is, only Jesus was called to be
radically “for” us in that he had to suffer and give his life in order to deliver the human race from the threat of chaos.

Nevertheless, in the present line of inquiry, what Barth is attempting to draw out is precisely that it is “being-with” that allows a covenant relation with Jesus’ humanity that is truly mutual and parallel in shape—from the side of the human individual; from the side of Jesus, his being-with also takes on a further, stronger determination in the being-for.

4.7.2 “Being-with”: The covenantal shape of our divine determination

Barth’s starting point is that, correlative of the relationship of the divine and human natures in Christ, the human being’s divine determination as covenant partner and her creaturely form are distinct and different but cannot contradict each other. Their non-contradiction rests on the truth that God created human being for covenant relations. It would make no sense, Barth argues, for God to determine the human being for covenant relations but then provide her with a form that would make it impossible for her to realize such a relationship. Thus, Barth reasons, the form (i.e. co-humanity) of the human being cannot be alien or strange to her divine determination as covenant partner.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ However, Barth acknowledges that sin may render these two aspects of human being antithetical to each other. Indeed, Barth argues that, when the human being sins, she denies and obscures both her reality as the divinely determined covenant partner and her creaturely form as human being. Thus, sin affects the human being in both her determinations as covenant partner and creaturely being. (III.2, p. 204) However, we must remember that for Barth, since sin is not creative, sin cannot destroy the basic correspondence that exists between her divine determination and creaturely existence. (III.2, p. 206) “Antithesis,” in distinction from “contradiction,” marks terminologically this difference between the “impossible” possibility of our self-contradiction and the deeper non-possibility of undoing our ontology.
Of particular importance for our concerns, Barth also argues that since the form of the human being genuinely corresponds to her divine determination as covenant partner, then this means that the mystery of the being and nature of the human being “does not hover indefinitely over human creatureliness.” (III.2, p. 207) Rather the divine determination of the human being as covenant partner embraces her “here below” and dwells in her in the form of this correspondence:

Even in his distinction from God, i.e. in his pure humanity, or as we might say, in his human nature, man cannot be man without being directed and prepared for the fulfillment of his determination, i.e. for his being in the grace of God, by his correspondence and similarity to this determination for the covenant of God. (III.2, p. 207) [Emphasis mine]

For Barth, the fundamental “nature” of the human creature is to be directed and prepared for the fulfillment of her determination as the covenant partner of God. Thus, even “here below” the human being does not exist as a “neutral” or “undetermined” human being in which she could just as easily be determined to be “without God” or “against” God. To say such a thing is to miss what “being human” actually is.140

The quote above helpfully points out some of Barth’s central commitments regarding “nature and grace.” On the one hand, the “basic form of humanity” is not already grace, because it is still waiting its fulfillment with God. However, Barth does

140 Interestingly but perhaps confusingly, Barth also describes the human being in this section of CD as a sign [Zeichen] “here below” of what she “really is” as seen from “above.” Such does not imply that the human being is not “real” or that creaturely life is “less real” than the so-called “ideal” or “true” human being in her divine determination as covenant partner. Rather, by calling the human being “below” a “sign” of what she is as seen “from above,” Barth is making more of an epistemological point than an ontological one. He wants to indicate that God sees and knows us directly in our true reality, i.e. in our true nature, in our basic human form that is indestructible, constant, and impervious to sin which God bestowed on us with our very creation. That is, he once again is guarding against the epistemological problem we noted in the opening section regarding our inability to rightly see past our sin to our true, constant nature. By pointing us always back to God’s view “from above,” dogmatics allows itself to be the site of the Word’s ongoing disclosure of our true identity.
suggest that in positing human beings in the form that God does, the very nature of humanity is always already being directed to and prepared for God. In other words, when our nature “encounters” grace, it will not find grace foreign to it, but will find grace the very thing it needs to realize itself most fully.

4.7.3 The basic definition of humanity as “co-humany”

As we stated at the beginning of this section, Barth defines the human being as the one who is determined in his being as a being with the other. (III.2, p. 243) Let us now look at how Barth specifies the integrity of the human individual through the three basic features of this definition. We may then see how this allows Barth also to rule out certain basic definitions of humanity, particularly those of Nietzsche, against whom he continues to press the attack.

First, Barth suggests that human being is a determination [Bestimmheit]. Being so determined means for him that the human being corresponds in the particularity of her own proper being to the meaning and goal of her creation. Or again, the manner of her being is a likeness of her purpose and therefore she suited for this determination as the covenant partner created by God for God. (III.2, p. 243, ss. 290-291)

Second, Barth defines human being as a being with other human beings [ein Zusammensein des Menschen mit dem anderen Menschen]. (III.2, p. 243, s. 291) As we saw above, Jesus’ determination as man for his fellows cannot be the divine determination of any other human being due to Christ’s unique vocation. Thus once again, Barth argues that it is more proper to describe the being of all other human beings as a being with the other.
Third, Barth further specifies this second element by emphasizing that human being is the being of *one particular* human being with *another particular human being.* In the description of the humanity of human being, Barth is thinking primarily and clearly in terms of single individuals related to one another, again showing his commitment to creaturely integrity. However, he maintains that he does not here speak in individualistic terms, at one might suppose. Rather, he argues that his definition suggests that in light of the humanity of Jesus it is more correct to speak of the *basic form* of humanity as one human being with another. Does this then mean that Barth erases the possibility of a genuine common good of the wider community with this dyadic formulation?

To the contrary, Barth insists that a genuine commonality or plurality is only possible when construed in terms of these real encounters: “Humanity *is* not in isolation, and it is in pluralities only when these are constituted by genuine duality, by the singular on both sides.” (III.2, pp. 223-224) [emphasis mine]. And again, “it is the singular, not alone but in duality, which is the presupposition without which there can never be humanity in the plural.” (III.2, p. 244)

From this last specification, Barth draws the further important conclusion that when a human creature says “I,” she defines and accepts her self as constituted by her relations *with* another, a “Thou”:

[When] addressing this object as I, I distinguish him not only from myself but from all other objects, from every It, placing myself on the same level or in the same sphere with him, acknowledging that I am not without him in my sphere, that this sphere is not just mine but also his.” (III.2, p. 244)

This passage highlights two key implications for Barth of the I-Thou constitution of human being as a being-with. First, it implies that if there is no “Thou,” there is no
“I.” To declare oneself as “I” acknowledges the Thou and also invites a response from the Thou that proclaims herself as an “I” as well. Only receiving this response from the “Thou” confirms me in the determination of my being. (III.2, p. 245) This means in turn that in saying I, one places herself on the same level and in the same sphere as the “Thou.” She is another “like me,” uniquely a human being and subject.

Barth concludes moreover that the “Thou” thus posits herself as an “I” in a way that cannot be evaded. When I encounter the “Thou,” I therefore cannot be indifferent to her, nor can I master her. As I am myself and posit myself, and as I thus engage in my own proper work, I am necessarily claimed by and occupied with the Thou. This claim means the Thou sets limits on how I posit myself. “I am” as well or as badly as I fulfill the conditions imposed by this encounter. If I fulfill the conditions badly, I am measured by these conditions. Thus, Barth concludes, to say “I am” means to say more precisely, “I am in encounter.” (III.2, p. 247)

4.7.4 Defining Inhumanity: Barth against Nietzsche as the strongest Barth for Creation

Through this definition of being-with, Barth may also now clearly say what humanity is not, in its existence “here below.” Humanity is not, most decisively, the isolated individual. In fact, the isolated individual has made herself, per impossibile, inhuman: “Every supposed humanity which is not radically and from the very first fellow-humanity is inhumanity.” (III.2, p. 228) For Barth, this signifies further that any form of the statement “I am” which is not formed in reference to fellow humanity, but either denies her fellows or uses them as mere instruments to achieve her own projects, must be rejected. (III.2, pp. 229-230)
From this negative definition, Barth may especially rule out what he calls the “ever expanding notion of the ‘I am.’” He believes this notion has dominated humanity’s (false) understandings of itself across time but (relatively recently) has reached its zenith in Nietzsche’s concept of the Übermensch. Nietzsche suggests with the Übermensch that human being properly and “naturally” exists as the assertion of the will-to-power; thus, as he writes in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Christianity as a religion of self-denial adds an ontically “later” constraint that suppresses and oppresses this, humanity’s intrinsic form.\textsuperscript{141} Barth holds by contrast that Christ is the perfect example of how “being-with” one’s fellows is the true constitution of the will in its very freedom.\textsuperscript{142} Based on the case as we have seen Barth present it, we may clearly confirm that such does not prove, in him, to be simple stipulation. Rather, through Christ, Barth draws our attention to the simple reality that we exist always already in relation, and thus any definition which begins with a different starting point already has missed what is most true about us, in our own integral “nature.”

We also believe that Barth’s long excursus on the difference between *agape* and *eros* at the end of §45.2 and how he understands humanity to be the “middle term” between these two concepts also reveals Barth’s strong affirmation of “the real natural man” as the one who is with her fellows. In an attempt to clarify the nature of this

\textsuperscript{141} Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008), see especially the second essay and pp. 63f. Nietzsche at the same time admits that this constraint is in some ways one of the most masterful assertions in human history of the will.

\textsuperscript{142} Barth offers a very long excursus on Nietzsche as the one who exemplifies the “non-human” human. For Nietzsche, the truly human is the proud, noble, strong “superman”, but the model Christianity gives is one the crucified man, i.e. the very opposite of what Nietzsche claims. (pp. 231-242)
relationship, Barth is insistent that neither *eros* nor *agape* are determinative or expressive of human nature as such. For Barth, *agape* and *eros* are both *forms* of life that human nature takes in history. Agape is a particular form of love exercised in the Christian life as a result of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Eros, on the other hand, is a turning toward the other, either human or divine, not for the sake of that other, but only to satisfy the desire and hunger of the one who seeks them. For Barth, the most perverted expression of *eros* is Nietzsche’s understanding of it as the individual’s desire to transcend herself and her fellows in order to realize herself as the Übermensch. Much better, he thinks, though still not perfect, is the earlier Greek view of *eros* as a desire that opens toward the other and which has the ability to create friendship and solidarity among its citizens. The point, however, is that neither *eros* nor *agape* are attributes of human nature as such. However, what Barth is insisting upon is that even in these historical expressions of human life, no matter how perverted, the underlying form and goodness of humanity as co-humanity can still be recognized. (CD III.2, pp. 274-285)

Even with this very limited affirmation of *eros*, we see perhaps particularly well that Barth believed that the “actualist” nature of the human creature still always gives expression to the basic realities of what she is as a “state.” Though Barth himself does not explicitly say so, we believe this view also yields an affirmation of all that is basic to humanity as such in the way many typically think of human nature—including but not limited to: reason, instincts, motivation and desires. Barth simply wants to include these elements with a certain double understanding. First, he believes that these elements only take on real human significance within the basic relations of being with God and one’s fellows. All creation is ordered for covenant. Thus second, these features thus become
corrupt and sinful when they attempt to take on a life of their own outside of the covenental context. Or, to state this more precisely, these features become corrupt when they entail the rejection of the covenant in their “No” to grace. But as with all of God’s creation, in their fundamental determination, they retain their goodness.

4.7.5 Human being as being-in-encounter: A history of I and Thou in relation

As we have seen, for Barth, human being is always a history—not an esse but an existere. (III.2, p. 248) Therefore, human “being-in-encounter-with” is not a static concept but admits of a general description of what the history, the enactment, of such beings will look like. We now examine the four elements Barth assigns to this description, showing how each further allows him to rule certain elements in and out of the meaning of every concrete “human being.”

Barth first describes “being-in-encounter” as an I and a Thou looking one another in the eye. Positively, this means that human being exists in a face-to-face history. Negatively, it means that we cannot view the other without concern:

The isolation in which we try to persist, the lack of participation which we show in relation to others and thus thrust upon others in relation to ourselves is inhumanity. The expression: “That is no concern of mine,” or “that is no concern of yours,” is almost always wrong, because it almost always means that the being of this or that man is nothing to me and my being nothing to him; that I will neither see him nor let myself be seen by him; that my eyes are too good for him and I am too god for his eyes; that my openness reaches its limit in him. (III.2, p. 251)

Barth goes on to say that this formulation implies a further social critique of impersonal techniques of systemization, bureaucracy, and any form of educational or political structures that seek to systematize and classify human beings in such a way that
evades the commitment of encountering one’s fellows face to face. Thus, Barth shows us how the dyadic encounter does in fact lead to and purify a genuine approach to the common good, as indicated above.

Second, Barth suggests that being-in-encounter requires mutual speech and hearing. While seeing and being seen is indispensable, Barth argues that this does not necessarily allow one human being to disclose herself to the other from her own standpoint. Only through mutual speech and hearing can a person declare who and what she is according to her own self-understanding. If I only see a person, I can do nothing but judge her by my own standards and resources. However, once she begins speaking about herself, she crosses over a frontier and helps me to understand her. Thus, positively, being-in-encounter suggests that human being consists in listening to one another. Negatively, it also rules out speech that is deceptive. Speaking about myself disingenuously or misleadingly, according to Barth, also moves me toward the denial of humanity. (III.2, p. 252)

The stakes are truly as high for Barth as the last statement implies. For when we disclose ourselves to one another, we are not merely helping to clarify any misunderstandings. Rather, our disclosure belongs centrally to the way the I-Thou relationship works to constitute each individual as a unique person. The other is for me “the sum total of something objective,” something new and strange. In light of this strangeness, I posit myself as someone different and distinct. Yet for Barth, this distinctiveness of the other lies hidden until she speaks. (III.2, p. 257) The word of
address by the other, paralleling the word of address by God,\textsuperscript{143} is necessary and is a kind of penetration from the sphere of the one being into the sphere of another being. (III.2, p. 258) Only in the \textit{mutuality} of open and honest speech and hearing does the encounter correspond fully to its ontological determination. Otherwise, it lapses toward the mere “endurance of sounds.” (III.2, p. 259)

Third, Barth argues that being-in-encounter must be concerned with “rendering mutual assistance in the act of being.” (III.2, p. 260) For Barth, to see and be seen, to speak and hear, means that we mutually summon one another to action. (III.2, p. 261) In keeping with the intersubjective nature of the summons, the aim of that action is always to \textit{assist} each other. To assist someone is actively to stand by her. Unlike Jesus, who is man \textit{for} us and represents us before God, we cannot properly represent someone in this way. Additionally, Barth argues that we cannot \textit{replace} one another either. That is, we cannot make someone else’s life task our own. Barth writes, “In the very fact that he lives, man calls for this help that only his fellow-man can give—the being in which he is in the same position, which can know him, which can enter into his situation and prescribe and offer the help required.” (III.2, p. 263) The support expected of me is not beyond my powers, but part of my humanity. (III.2, p. 264) Here again we see clearly Barth’s distinct anthropology. We are genuine human creatures and \textit{not} the Son of God.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Barth argues that the three foregoing elements of being-in-encounter \textit{must be done with gladness}. This gladness is the inward, subjective aspect of being-in-encounter. Negatively, Barth suggests that the opposite of

\textsuperscript{143} “The externality of the different fellow-man who encounters me has this in common with the very different externality of the God distinct from me—that it is always inward to me; inward in the sense that this external thing, the other man, is inward and intrinsic to me even in his otherness.” (III.2, p. 268)

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gladness is not reluctance, but neutrality. (III.2, p. 266) Neutrality implies that we are in some way originally indifferent to the possibility of being-in-encounter, as if it were something we could choose from an uncommitted, Archimedean point. However, as we have seen, Barth insists that we are already ordered to and with the other. Any other “choice” is merely the strange choice of our own impossibility.

For Barth, realizing the originary nature of our ordering to others is essential to not contradicting who we are in counterproductive ways:

As two men look one another in the eye and speak with one another and listen to one another, and render mutual assistance, they are together. But everything depends on whether they are not merely together under a law imposed from without, or merely accepting an unavoidable situation. To be sure there is a law here—the law of the Creator imposed as such on the creature. And there is a situation in which man finds himself—created by the fact that he is not alone, but the fellow-man is present with him. But that law of God is given to him as his own law, the law which he himself has set up, the law of his own freedom. Only as such is its validity genuine according to the intention of its Giver. Valid in any other way, it would be obeyed by man, but only as an alien law imposed from without and not as his own law. It would not, therefore be obeyed gladly. Man would know the other possibility of either not obeying it at all or doing so reluctantly because he himself wills or can will something very different. It would not, then, be valid or known at all. But if he does not really know it, this means that he does not know himself. He is not himself but is lost outside himself. For he is himself as he stands under this law as the law of his own freedom. When he is obedient to it in this way, as to the law of his own freedom, he realizes that “with”—with the fellow-man, with the Thou—by inner as well as outer necessity, and therefore gladly and spontaneously. (III2, pp. 268-269)

“Everything depends” on whether the primordial law of our being is grasped as an internal rather than an external law. If we find this law to be external, we perhaps might

144 Cf. III.2, p.267: “The secret of his humanity, however, is that in his being in the encounter of I and Thou we do not have to do with a determination which is accidental and later imposed from without, but with a self-determination which is free and intrinsic to his essence. He is not a man first, and then has his fellow-man alongside him, and is gladly or reluctantly human, i.e. in encounter with him. He is a man as he is human and gladly in the sense that there can be no question of a ‘reluctantly.’”
accept it mentally but it will remain a burden to us. Thus, says Barth, will we fail to enter into our own being as genuine freedom and gladness.

For Barth, “Humanity is the realization of this togetherness of man and man grounded in human freedom and necessary in this freedom.” (III.2, p. 269) Yet, there are two misunderstandings of this togetherness which must be avoided. First, though the reciprocal relationship between the I and the Thou is intrinsic to our very essence as human beings, this does not mean that the two become one essence. (III.2, p. 268) The I does not lose herself in the other, or vice versa, on any level. Barth’s relational ontology is not an ontological merger. And ontically, the I cannot neglect or forget her life, nor surrender it simplistically to the Thou. To do so would be to place oneself in the position of a slave to the Thou and to become their property. Barth argues that we cannot “belong” to another in this way because if I understand myself as someone’s property, I cannot be with her gladly and mutually. Being-in-encounter occurs only in the freedom and mutuality of likeness and difference. To obliterate the difference and to become a mere copy of the Thou is to deny the “otherness” of both Thou and I. (III.2, p. 270)

The second misunderstanding occurs in the opposite direction. That is, we distort the I-Thou being-in-encounter relationship if the “I” only intends to seek herself in the other, thus using the encounter to extend and enrich her own being. Barth calls this distortion that of the “tyrant.” The I attempts to dominate another who is in fact her equal and uniquely irreplaceable. She thus violates the other’s freedom and, as we have seen, actually makes it impossible to realize her own. (III.2, p. 270) In sum then, to seek either absolute unity or absolute separation, to take the place of either slave or tyrant, is to
destroy human freedom and to deny the unique being and vocation of both oneself and the other.

Barth then crystallizes human freedom as understanding the other as a counterpart, comrade, and helpmate. For Barth this is the secret and paradox of humanity. He writes: “We can say of what takes place between men only something to the following effect—that there is a discovery, the mutual recognition that each is essential to the other. There is thus enacted the paradox that the one is unique and irreplaceably for the other.” (III.2, p. 271) Barth suggests in this mutual recognition that there is a mutual “electing” and “election” of the I and the Thou. (III.2, p. 272) Each affirms the other as the being with whom she wants to be and cannot be without. In this mutual electing, the I and the Thou are led to mutual joy, knowing that they both do and can co-exist with each other. Barth writes:

The fact remains that common existence is still something posited and given, but this givenness is now clear and vital in an active willing of this fellowship, a willing which derives quite simply from the fact that each has received a gift which he necessarily desires to reciprocate to the best of his ability. And if it is asked in what this gift consists, the answer must be that the one has quite simply been given the other, and that what he for his part has to give again is himself. (III.2, p. 272) [emphasis mine]

In electing to live into one’s relationship with one’s fellows, one affirms the basic ontology God has already given. In a sense, one confirms God’s own self-movement in electing God’s self to be with another, meaning especially God’s movement ad extra to be with (and for) humanity, since one’s own “election” appropriately corresponds on the human level to God’s originary one. Yet the exact why and wherefore of this “discovery” of co-humanity is never understood. It is simply effected without disclosing itself. For Barth, such is the “riddle” of human existence that can only be understood
through faith in God the Creator. (III.2, p. 272) Barth concludes by saying that this freedom to be oneself with the other is the *conditio sine qua non* of humanity. It is not just a final crown on the rest of the whole, but is essentially what it means to be human. This freedom is not the crown of humanity but its root. (III.2, p. 273)

Despite the general coherence of the foregoing, a critic might still press Barth a final time by asking whether it does not seem that the kind of freedom of indifference (i.e. neutrality) that he wants to criticize appears to be one of the enduring and defining marks of humanity as we commonly experience it. Barth certainly does not deny this phenomenal reality. And yet he still insists on ruling it out of the positive definition of a genuine anthropology:

[I]f we have to maintain that [a human] has this choice in fact, it does *not derive from his nature*. For we cannot make God his Creator responsible for this fatal possibility. And it is even worse if we praise the Creator for obviously giving man the possibility of a different choice. For this is to praise Him for allowing and enabling man to choose in his heart inhumanity as well as humanity, and therefore to be in his heart inhuman as well as human, or both perhaps alternately. And we then ascribe to human nature the strange distinction of a freedom for its own denial and destruction. *We should not call this freedom nature, but sin.* (III.2, p. 273)

Thus Barth refuses to admit even traditional or seemingly obvious elements of human existence into his definition of humanity. Yet he clearly does so from the conviction that these elements *undermine* the very clear and distinct anthropology he wants to present. Far from being a mark against him, this refusal thus bespeaks his faithfulness to his commitment to articulate a coherent anthropology that is secured rather than overwhelmed by his Christology.
4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how Barth moves from his understanding of the doctrine of creation as being primarily concerned with articulating theological anthropology to his specific formulation of what this theological anthropology is. We have endeavored to show that Barth’s efforts to properly relate creation, Christology, and anthropology without obliterating the distinctions of each has produced a radical affirmation of the goodness of creation in general and of human nature in particular.

First, we saw precisely why theological anthropology needs a Christological framework. For Barth, the reality of sin leads to a threefold epistemological problem to which Christ alone, as the revelatory Word of God, provides the answer. We saw in turn that what Christ reveals is God’s creation through him of an indestructibly good human nature. Humans can choose their own impossibility, but their choice cannot undo the fundamental anthropological ontology established by God.

Next we saw that Barth believes that the doctrine of creation must concern itself principally with elaborating a theological anthropology rather than an ontology of non-human creation. We showed that such is proper for Barth because the Word of God became incarnate as a human being. Thus, we simply cannot know what the relations of other beings to God in Christ are, though we can be sure they exist. We then concluded that this is evidence of Barth’s deep respect for creation, even if lingering concerns can be raised about whether Barth has specified everything necessary for a fully theological ethics of ecology.

In subsequent chapters, we walked with Barth as he passed in multiple ways along the incarnational shape of God’s elective action to show us the determinative content and
form of the human being. The fundamental question in pursuing these trajectories was whether Barth could succeed both in developing his anthropology from his Christology and in clearly distinguishing between the determination of Jesus’ humanity by his divinity and of our humanity by Jesus’ humanity.

In negotiating this path, we first saw Barth’s strong insistence that we cannot move directly from Christology to anthropology. He staked this argument on the primary claim that while it is true that Christ is fully human just as we are, the way in which Jesus was human as the Son of God precludes us from directly equating Christology with anthropology. Only Christ in his divine determination could take up the unique vocation and work of the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king. Only Christ could take the being-with-his-fellows of his human nature to the point of being for his fellows as the savior and deliverer of humanity. In this unique work, Christ has his unique humanity that is in fact a genuine creaturely expression of his divine person. Thus, we found that Barth demonstrates that Jesus’ unique way of being in relationship with God both 1) ascribes to Christ a definably human nature, and 2) defines that nature such that it cannot be repeated by any other creature, clearly distinguishing Christ’s being and ours even in their interrelation.

We also found that Barth is able to articulate substantive parameters, both positive and negative, for his definition of humanity. In the first place, Jesus as “man for God” discloses that the human being is determined to be God’s covenant partner. In his determination as “man for fellow-men, Jesus discloses to us that the basic form of humanity that Jesus shares with all others is his being as “co-humanity.” [Mitmenschlichkeit]. For Barth the definition of humanity as “co-humanity” describes
the basic form of humanity which is the presupposition from which God carries out God’s covenant relations with humanity. There is nothing “behind” this basic form of humanity as co-humanity. Being created as co-humanity is the presupposition for the work of grace. Co-humanity is the “nature” which is capable in itself of fellowship with God. Thus, the basic form of humanity as co-humanity represents Barth’s ontology of the creature. By creating and sustaining humanity in this form God makes it capable of participating in a history with God as God’s covenant-partner.

We have also seen that Barth further specified his understanding of “co-humanity” as “being-in-encounter.” Being-in-encounter can be understood as the I-Thou in encounter which takes the form of seeing each other face to face with mutual speech and hearing for the benefit of the other undertaken with gladness. The opposite of being-in-encounter is the inhumanity of solitude and individualism, which reaches its peak for Barth in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Barth has clearly defined both what belongs to theological anthropology and what undoes it.

As we saw in the final excursus of §45.2 with regard to Barth’s comments on *eros* against Nietzsche, Barth affirms without qualification the basic form of humanity and all that belongs with it. There is no part of humanity’s original determination as the covenant-partner of God and the basic form of humanity in which those covenant relations take shape that must be devalued or denied. On the contrary, Barth affirms everything that is proper to a human being, i.e. its being as a body-soul that has particularly instincts, emotions, and desires. Barth affirms these elements with the single qualification that they remain integrated with our history with God and our fellows, rather than seeming to become significant in themselves.
Thus, we can see that Barth’s Christology provides the foundation from which one can radically affirm created nature. For him, there is no need to devalue or denigrate human nature in order to affirm the uniqueness of Christ or the glory by God. Rather, precisely by affirming the enduring goodness of the basic form of humanity one affirms and ratifies God’s faithfulness as Creator.

In sum, the foregoing elements all lead to the conclusion that Barth does develop a distinct and coherent creaturely ontology, and particularly, a theological anthropology. For Barth, humanity is created for fellowship with God from the very outset and the basic form of humanity, which is humanity’s original determination as co-humanity, cannot be destroyed by sin. In fact, Barth’s commitment to the doctrine of creation seems to suggest that for him, our natural and supernatural ends are one and the same: fellowship with God and fellowship with one another. Or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that there is no such thing as a separate “supernatural end” at all, nothing that we or even God need(s) to “add” to our basic determination. We are called simply to “be who we are” as creatures in this life, here and now. It is as these creatures, created in this way, living in this creation, created by this God for this purpose that we live as human beings, for God and with our fellows. With such a thorough grounding of theological anthropology in the doctrine of Creation, Barth’s theology can hardly be said to be gnostic.
CONCLUSION

Can Karl Barth be rightly accused of being an “opponent of the doctrine of creation?” If one insists that creation must be self-grounding and independent from God, then yes, Karl Barth is an opponent of this concept of a doctrine of creation. If one wants to understand creation as related to God, but not related to the God of the covenant, then yes, Barth is an opponent of this rendering of the doctrine of creation as well. However, if one can admit that creation must be understood with respect to its relationship with God, who is also the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the God who is gracious to humanity, then no, Karl Barth is not an opponent of the doctrine of creation.

With respect to the doctrine of creation, Barth simply insists that we can only know what creation is after we first know who God is, and we can only know who God is when we let God disclose himself to us in revelation. The God who discloses himself to us in revelation, specifically in the life and work of Jesus Christ, is a God of grace. Thus, for Barth the meaning and purpose of creation and creaturely life can only be understood with respect to grace.

This dissertation examined why Barth believed that the theology of his day had divorced creation from revelation and how this separation had consequently produced an understanding of God without the world and an understanding of the world, and an understanding of humanity in particular, without God. We saw how Barth’s solution to
the problem was to reestablish the proper relationship between creation and revelation without collapsing the two into each other and that the key to understanding the relationship between creation and revelation was Barth’s doctrine of election as comprehended in his Christology.

Specifically, in Chapter One we examined the concept of “orders of creation,” which Barth believed reflected the problematic division between creation and revelation. We pointed out that Barth’s fundamental problem with the theology of the orders of creation was his belief that this theology identified the orders of creation with the will of God apart from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and thus apart from grace. The ethical implication of the theology of orders of creation is that it establishes a moral order in which one is required to render obedience to a God who is not known as gracious to humanity. This rendering of obedience to a God who is not known as the God of grace is idolatry. In other words, the root of this problematic understanding of the “orders of creation” occurs when God is portrayed as a God speaks two separate words and thus has two separate wills, i.e. a will/word of harsh law and a will/word of grace. This division of the Word of God into “law” and “gospel” reflects a problematic view of both the doctrine of revelation (Word of God) and the doctrine of God itself.

In order to address the theological problem of the orders of creation, which Barth believed occurred as a result of separating God’s Word into two distinct and unrelated forms of “law” and “gospel,” we explained why Barth believed that creation must be grounded in the doctrine of revelation (Word of God). That is, the created order must be comprehended by the one Word of God—the Word of God as grace, which is nothing other than the Word and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, we showed how Barth reconfigured
the traditional rendering of “law” and “gospel” into a more unified “gospel-law” thesis.

Barth’s gospel-law thesis insists that there is only one Word of God, the content of which is grace, which is rendered in the ‘form’ of the law. Barth secures this thesis by articulating a doctrine of God that includes God’s election of humanity in the form of the covenant. By locating the election of humanity within the doctrine of God, where God’s election of humanity in Christ eternally precedes creation, Barth establishes that grace is always prior to law. Secondly, because the fulfillment of God’s election of humanity will take place ad extra, i.e. in creation, Barth argues that the creation itself is ordered so that God’s covenant with humanity can be fulfilled. Even more specifically, Barth argues that, since there is only one Word of God, and that one Word of God is the Word and work of Jesus Christ, Barth makes the controversial ontological claim that the form and structure of the created order is itself covenantal. Barth expresses his doctrine of creation in the two-fold formulation: “Creation is the external basis of the covenant and the covenant is the internal basis of creation.”

In Chapter Two we discussed the first half of this two-fold formulation through Barth’s exegesis of the first creation saga. In this chapter we noticed how creation itself, as the specific place in which God’s covenant history will take place, corresponds to God’s divine “Yes” and “No” of election. As the creaturely sphere which corresponds and witnesses to God’s eternal decision of election, God has made creation a specific place, with a specific order and limits, as the gift of life whose goal is covenant relations with God.

In this chapter our discussion of Barth’s interpretation of God’s decision to rest on the seventh day served to illustrate how God himself establishes what it means to be free
and to love. For Barth, freedom and love are actions that can only be undertaken with respect to an object of love, i.e. in an encounter with the other. This is why God determined himself, and thus limits himself, for a specific relationship with creation. God is neither a world-principle nor a disinterested Creator who leaves creation to its own devices to discover or establish its meaning and purpose for itself. In his work of creation, God loves it in such a way that he equips it specifically for covenant relations.

In Chapter Three we examined Barth’s exegesis of the second Genesis saga, which he interprets as attesting to the fact that the covenant is the origin and goal of creation. In this section we focused our attention on Barth’s exegesis of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, which we believe is instructive for explaining how Barth understands the nature of God’s command as well as Barth’s articulation of creaturely freedom and obedience. The key emphasis in this chapter was to explain how Barth’s interpretation of the two trees corresponds with the divine “Yes” and “No” of election and why creaturely freedom is construed as freedom for obedience. For Barth, human freedom is not some capacity that the creature exercises from some neutral point between obedience and disobedience. In Barth’s view, such a freedom would be tantamount to the creature having the freedom to determine whether she is elect or reprobate, to decide between good and evil. Such a decision is not within the purview of the creature, but only properly ascribed to God, and why creaturely obedience to God’s “Yes” can only be rendered with gratitude.

In the last part of Chapter 3 we showed how Barth’s interpretation of the creation of humanity as male and female was to emphasize his point that God interacts with humanity as a single species in the duality of the sexes and that it is in this duality of the
sexes that humanity is responsible before God. It is in this specific form of male and female which is the presupposition from which God’s covenant relations with humanity proceeds. Further, Barth’s emphasis on the I-Thou relationality of humanity further illustrates Barth’s insistence that the human being cannot be properly understood as solitary and self-sufficient individual, but that to be a human being is to be constituted by one’s relationship of encounter with the “Thou” who is both alike and unlike the “I”.

In Chapter Four we examined Barth’s ontology of the creature, which finds its most authentic expression in Jesus Christ. Through his understanding of ontology as history, i.e. “being-in-encounter,” Barth argued that Jesus Christ, who is both fully human and fully divine, establishes the authentically human through the ongoing I-Thou, divine-human movement that takes place between Jesus and God the Father. This divine-human movement, i.e. God’s summoning Word and Christ’s obedient response, is instantiated in Jesus’ history as Savior, the one who fulfills the covenant between God and humanity. It is in this way that Christ has accomplished “the good” and is therefore uniquely “man for God.” However, as “man for God,” Jesus is also simultaneously “man for his fellows” and as such exists in an I-Thou relationship with fellow humanity.

In his I-Thou relationship with humanity, Christ summons his fellow humanity to realize its authentic humanity in obedience to God’s Word as well. In her response to God’s Word, i.e. in her encounter with Christ who is the transcendent other, the creature participates in Christ’s history [Urgeschichte]. In so doing, she transcending her own static state of being [Zustand], realizing her creaturely nature more fully in her own unique history [Geschichte]. In her corresponding obedience to the Word of God, the creature’s history becomes one of witness to the “good” which was accomplished in
Christ. It is in this way that Christology serves to delimit human action and establish the domains in which human beings encounter God in the ethical event. Thus, it is not the case that Christology overwhelms human “nature.” Rather it is in her participation in Christ’s humanity, i.e. in his history, through her encounter with him, that the creature fully realizes her creaturely existence, as her own history, more fully. Furthermore, that the creature is simply called to witness to the good that was accomplished in Christ does not render human action morally insignificant. The creature’s responsibility to witness to the good which has been accomplished in Christ frees her to live as a creature within the terms that God has set for her. As explained in his exegesis of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, the creature would collapse under the weight of deciding what the good is, i.e. she does not have the freedom to determine whether she herself is elect or reprobate. It is in this way that we see why creaturely freedom is a freedom for obedience and why the creature is called to live her life in a specific direction for God, i.e. to realize her determination God’s covenant partner.

This Christological/covenantal delimitation of human action can be seen by the fact that there will be certain things that God will not command. While it is true that Barth states that we cannot know ahead of time what God will command, it does appear that we can say with some certainty what God would not command. For example, God will not give a command that alienates the person from God, e.g. God will not command idolatry. God will not command anything that summons the person to a state of being which is not that of encounter with the other, and thus as a solitary and self-sufficient individual. God will not command one to act in such a way that life is to be treated as a either an absolute value or without worth. God will not command the creature to live in a
way that frustrates her temporal nature. Thus it is in these domains where the creature is free for God and her fellows as one with a body and soul in time where the creature realizes herself as God’s covenant partner. In a future project we hope to show more explicitly how this covenantal ontology informs Barth’s special ethics of creation and how his understanding of the command of God in these domains informs his treatment of specific ethical issues in more detail. However, for now, we hope that we have demonstrated that Barth’s covenantal ontology does provide the normative basis understanding Barth’s theological ethics more generally.

We would like to conclude by offering a few brief remarks on what we believe to be the merits of Barth’s vision of the creaturely life. One of the things that we believe Barth succeeds in doing brilliantly is pointing out that the definition and meaning of human being has already been given to us. It is not for us to decide what it means to be human. It is only for us to recognize our humanity as that which is established for us in Christ. Our human life is a gift from God, who desires to be in relationship with us. The only thing that remains for us to do is to be grateful for the gift of such a life and respond to God’s summons to live with him as his covenant partner accordingly. We are called to recognize that we always live radically in grace. We don’t have to prove ourselves, we just have to “be” ourselves.

Another aspect of Barth’s moral vision of the creaturely life that we believe is important is how he understands the human being as history, through his relational ontology. We agree with Barth that one of the problems of our day is an understanding of the human being as an unbounded and indeterminate moral subject, which mistakenly believes that in order to be “like God,” she must endeavor to transcend her creaturely
nature in an infinite direction. In our society we see all around us the unbounded desire to be “smarter, stronger, faster,” believing that we can become more fully human, which is almost the equivalent of saying, since we have fashioned God after our own image, that we can become more “like God.” Such commitments seem to motivate the “transhumanist” and “posthumanist movements.” We think that Barth’s understanding of humanity as being-in-encounter, which is the creaturely correspondence to the encounter that takes place within God’s own intra-Trinitarian divine life, is a helpful way to mitigate against such strivings.

Barth’s interpretation of God’s decision to rest on the seventh day is very helpful in this regard. Recall that Barth understands God’s decision to rest on the seventh day as corresponding to God’s decision to elect humanity. In this decision to elect humanity, God determines himself to be gracious to humanity. God could have determined himself to be a different God, but choose instead to be this God in this specific relationship with humanity. It is only with respect to an object of love, i.e. to be in a relationship with a someone, that one can be free and can know what it means to love. For Barth, the concepts of freedom and love are not abstract concepts but inextricably bound up with God’s determination of himself to be for humanity. Creaturely freedom and love corresponds to this divine activity in that the creature realizes herself as creature when she lives in a particular direction towards a someone, i.e. God and her fellows. Any attempt to realize freedom and love in an infinite and abstract way apart from an object of love, and specifically without the “other” is neither freedom nor love. God is not a world-principle, but is the God who chose to be in relationship with humanity and thus limit his activities for these relations. God rejected the infinite other possibilities for his
action to chose this specific actuality, to be in relationship with humanity. Likewise, humanity is not an infinite and unbounded moral subject, but a moral subject who realizes herself in relationship with others.

Thus, humanity may do well to take its cue from this paradigmatic action of God. In an effort to try to maximize our capacities in order to either become “more human” or to “transcend” or humanity, we actually fail to realize our humanity. The impulse behind these transhumanist desires is to become more self-sufficient and less dependent on the world and others around us. This is precisely the opposite of the moral vision of the creaturely life that Barth is trying to convey. It is with respect to the trans- and post-humanist movements that Barth’s richly theological but also very human understanding of humanity may have some constructive potential.

We also think Barth presents a nicely balanced view of humanity. Barth seems to have neither too elevated a view of humanity nor too low a view of humanity and he seems to be able to achieve this middle range through his understanding of humanity as “history”. For example, recall that for Barth, human beings have a number of attributes, e.g. reason, intelligence, will, emotion, etc. Without an encounter with the “other” the creature remains in a “static” state of creaturely existence [Zustand]. It is in her encounter with the transcendent “other” in which the creature “transcends” her “static” creaturely state and thus exists as a history [Geschichte]. However, just because the creature “transcends” her nature [Natur] (which exists in a state) in her encounter with the other, this does not mean she transcends her creaturely existence. Rather, in his understanding of being-in-encounter, Barth argues that the creature realizes her creaturely existence more fully because the encounter with the other will necessarily be an
encounter with another who also has limits. Thus, the creature herself becomes constituted by these new limits in her encounter with the other. The creature can never transcend her creaturely existence in her encounter, but only realizes it more fully. Thus there is always a mutuality and conditioning that takes place in the I-Thou encounter that cannot be overcome. It is in her relationship with God and with fellow humanity that the creature comes to understand how to properly exercise her reason, intellect, will, emotion, etc., so that these attributes are ordered for relationship with God and the other. Thus, we think Barth is attempting to both affirm the goodness of our creaturely nature that has been given to us, while at the same time recognizing that the human being is also one who transcends this nature to some extent as well. It is a difficult balance to maintain, but such a balance may prove critical to addressing issues of sexual ethics in our own time.

One final aspect of Barth’s moral vision of the creaturely life that we find attractive is that his affirmation of creaturely life is witness and not one of achievement. This stands in stark contrast to the desire of an unbounded and indeterminate moral subject who seeks to “perfect” her creaturely capacities and who wants to do so in order to become more self-sufficient and less dependent on the world and others. With such a desire, there seems to be a corresponding ethical imperative to achieve this state of perfected human being. Correlatively, there is also a belief that if we could only transcend our limitations and be “smarter, faster, stronger,” then our human condition would itself improve. That is, one might think that the more we perfect ourselves as human beings, especially through strength and reason by way of technology, then we would be capable of eliminating poverty, disease, famine, and social injustices, etc. In
other words, that we think we have the capacity to usher in the “kingdom of God,” or some utopic (we would argue dystopic!) version creaturely life on earth. But this quest for perfection and constant striving to transcend our limits is precisely the desire to be this neutral, solitary, and self-sufficient human being. It is a desire to be something that needs neither God nor the neighbor. It is the desire, in Barth’s terms, to be inhuman; it is the quest for idolatry.

We would like to close with one final comment. The concept of “sin” has seen very little treatment in recent theological ethics. Sin seems to be a bad word these days as we seem to be more willing to accept physical, psychological, and social scientific methods to “explain” why we fail to love God and the neighbor properly. (Here again is evidence of Barth’s thesis that we will accept other sources of revelation about ourselves more readily than the Word of God on such matters.) We do not accuse ourselves, but make excuses for ourselves. There is, of course, a correlation between modernity’s decision to divorce God from the world with our unwillingness to grapple with the seriousness of sin. As Barth has shown us, sin can only be understood in reference to grace, and grace can only be known through God’s self-disclosure to us. One may be happy to wave good bye to what some believe is the unhelpful notion of sin. But with the vanishing of the concept of sin, so also goes the concept of grace. Is a world without the knowledge of grace a world in which we want to live? As Barth is at pains to show us, a world without grace is not world in which we can live.

At the end of the day, we believe Barth has one simple and evangelical message: The God who is the Creator of heaven and earth is the same God who is gracious to humanity. This God of grace manifests himself to us in the person and work of Jesus
Christ, who is the concrete form of the command of God and the fulfillment of the covenant between God and humanity. As those who partake of Christ’s humanity, we are simply called to live in obedience to this Word of grace, responding in gratitude that we have been given this gift of life, determined to be God’s covenant partners. As covenant partners of God, we exist with our fellows. In the course of our encounter with God in Christ and with our fellows, our lives are the creaturely manifestation of God’s internal glory ad extra. This is what we were created for. Why would we want to be anything else? Is there anything “better” that we could possibly be? This is why God simply calls us to “be who we are.”
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