

God's Simple Multiplicity

An inquiry into Karl Barth's account
of God's one being and his many perfections

Student number: 10011570

Master of Theology

August 2022

Moore Theological College

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

STUDENT DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and to the best of my knowledge contains no materials previously published or written by another person. It contains no material extracted in whole or part by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. I also declare that any assistance received from others in terms of design, style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deull", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

I consider that this thesis is in a form suitable for examination and conforms to the requirements of Moore College for the degree of Master of Theology.

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses and evaluates Karl Barth's endeavour to reformulate the traditional account of the relation of the essence and attributes of God in line with his principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation. We inquire whether his diagnosis of problems in the tradition represented in Protestant Orthodoxy is accurate and to what extent Barth's account amounts to a substantial and consistent reformulation of the tradition. To answer this we examine the doctrine of Amandus Polanus, who is a central representative of Protestant Orthodoxy in Barth's work. We also examine Isaac Dorner's doctrine of God, for Barth approves his approach to the attributes. We then examine Barth's treatment of God's being and perfections in §§28-30, analysing his approach, his criticism of the tradition and his development of his reformulated account, and comparing and contrasting it with what we find in Polanus and Dorner.

Regarding Barth's criticism of the tradition, we argue that Barth misreads certain statements in the Protestant Orthodox upon which his critique relies, and overlooks the role divine perfection plays in the tradition. We conclude that this greatly weakens his case for the necessity of reform. Regarding the role played by Dorner in the development of Barth's account, we argue that Barth takes up many of Dorner's arguments against the tradition, and especially shares Dorner's conviction that revelation discloses objective divine attributes. Yet we argue that Barth develops this line of thought in his own way, not departing from the tradition as far as Dorner does. Regarding the role played by Polanus and the tradition he represents, we argue that they are both friend and foe for Barth, although his criticism is more prominent than his appreciation. In §29 Barth criticises Protestant Orthodoxy for an overemphasis on divine unity, but in §30 he criticises it for an insufficiently integrated exposition of the attributes. We argue that Barth's basic discontent with Protestant Orthodoxy lies in his conviction that revelation conveys a positive knowledge of God, not merely what God is not.

We argue that Barth's principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation provides a source of coherent development for his account. It reformulates and reorganises the traditional doctrine of the divine essence and attributes. The interaction between the Protestant Orthodox tradition and Barth's revelation principle provides Barth's account of the being and attributes of God with an underlying logic that gives it substance and consistency and distinguishes it from both the conceptualism of Protestant Orthodoxy and the realism of Dorner.

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

I hereby grant Moore College the right to archive and make available my thesis in whole or part in the College Library in all forms of media subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I retain all proprietary rights and the right to use in future works all or part of my thesis.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	7
Citation conventions and abbreviations	8
A note on translations and italics	8
Introduction.....	9
The argument of this thesis	9
Recent scholarship touching upon the interests of this thesis	16
PART ONE — CONCEPTUALISM AND REALISM	
1. ‘The old problem of the doctrine of the attributes of God’	21
Amandus Polanus	22
Barth’s conceptualism in the Gottingen Dogmatics	28
2. ‘The line of thought we must develop’	29
Isaac Dorner’s realist critique of conceptualism	31
Dorner’s quest for the bond of unity of the divine attributes	38
Observations and prospect	41
PART TWO — AGAINST ‘SEMI-NOMINALISM’	
3. ‘God lives his perfect life’	43
God is the One who loves in freedom	43
God lives in both unity and multiplicity	49
Criticising nominalism and especially ‘semi-nominalism’.	52
4. Testing Barth’s critique of Protestant Orthodox conceptualism	58
Did the Protestant Orthodox fail to explain the <i>fundamentum in re</i> ?	58
Does the idol simplicity really devour everything concrete?	61
Conclusion and prospect	68

PART THREE — BARTH’S DEVELOPED ACCOUNT OF THE PERFECTIONS

5. The multiplicity of divine perfections.....	70
Divine multiplicity: three explanatory propositions	70
Speaking properly of the perfections of God	79
Conclusion and prospect	83
6. Mapping the contours of God’s being	85
Barth’s general account of the order of the divine perfections	86
A conceptualist account of the formal unity of the perfections	91
Discussion and conclusion	98
7. Neutralising a nominalist element	101
A nominalist account of grace and holiness in God himself	102
Banishing nominalism in the discussion of mercy and righteousness	107
Conclusion.....	115
Bibliography.....	119

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr David Höhne, for all his help and counsel given over the course of the production of this thesis. He let me roam long and freely in the forests of Barth, Polanus and Dorner, and then patiently called me home and pressed me to mill and dress the assortment of logs I dragged back, and at last from the timber to construct an argument for the thesis that follows. I appreciate his efforts greatly.

I would also like to thank Dr George Athas and Tina Murray for their support of a student from a far country who appeared occasionally to enjoy the collegiality of the research seminars and postgraduate workspace. They helped make it such that I wish I could have spent more time at the college.

Post-pandemic, there arose a regular video-conference morning tea, convened by Martin Robinson. This allowed regular conversation on many topics for me and some other isolated postgraduate students, and I very much enjoyed and valued this connection to my fellow researchers. Thanks to Martin for setting it up and to all who turned up.

My very dear mother and my esteemed new step-father gladly put me up and fed me on my various visits to Sydney, which was very welcome and a lovely bonus feature of my Masters experience. I'm super-grateful to them for their support and hospitality.

Many brothers and sisters from the Anglican Parish of St Edmund's, Wembley, WA have made regular friendly enquiries about the progress of my work, and have given me every encouragement to give this study my best. That has been a wonderful gift, and I thank them for it. The Anglican Diocese of Perth awarded me a grant to support my study, which was generous and a real help, and the Diocese has my warm gratitude.

Lastly, I thank my magnificent wife, Michelle, and my stellar children, Chas and Coco, for their delightful company and the loving household they helped create over the several years it took this thesis to get done. Michelle was very pro what I was doing, which was an absolutely essential part of making the experience of this research so do-able, and so rewarding.

Of course, this thesis is dedicated to her.

*Quamvis non simus simplices sicut Deus,
adhuc invicem diligamus.*

31 August 2022

CITATION CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviated citations of Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics*¹ use the formats *GD* volume number : page number, e.g., *GD* I:368 or § paragraph number . section number, e.g., §17.III. Citations of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*² generally use the format volume number . part number : page number(s) e.g., II.1:235. Citations of Polanus's *Syntagma theologiae christianae, juxta leges ordinis methodici conformatum, atque in libros decem tribitum* of 1610 appear generally use the format *Syntag. Theol.* followed by the column number, e.g., *Syntag. Theol.* 868, or *Syntag. Theol.* book number . chapter number, e.g., *Syntag. Theol.* II.5. Citations of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* use part number, question number . article, e.g., *ST* 1a 3.1. The text quoted herein is Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae: Questions on God*. Edited by Brian Leftow and Brian Davies. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<i>GD</i>	Barth, Karl, and Hannelotte Reiffen. <i>The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion</i> . 1st English ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991.
<i>CD</i>	Barth, Karl, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance. <i>Church Dogmatics</i> . 1st pbk. ed. London ; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004.
<i>Syntag. Theol.</i>	Polansdorf, Amandus Polanus Von. <i>Syntagma theologiae christianae, juxta leges ordinis methodici conformatum, atque in libros decem tribitum</i> . Hanoviae: Johannes Aubrii, 1610.
<i>ST</i>	Aquinas, Thomas. <i>Summa Theologiae</i> .

A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND ITALICS

Translations of Latin or Greek quotations found in *Church Dogmatics* are usually those provided in footnotes in *Church Dogmatics* Study Edition, and these are acknowledged citing note number, volume number and page number, e.g., EN23 *CD* Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 74. Translations of Polanus or Quenstedt are my own unless otherwise indicated, and I have included the Latin texts along with these translations. In a small number of instances Cave's translation of Dörner has been adjusted, and when this happens, it is indicated in the footnotes. In quotations, italics are original unless indicated otherwise. Square brackets within quotations enclose my editorial insertions.

¹ Karl Barth and Hannelotte Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, 1st English ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991).

² Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics*, 1st pbk. ed. (London ; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004).

INTRODUCTION

Karl Barth's discontent

Karl Barth's discontent with the typical manner in which the late Western scholastic theological tradition related the one being of God to his many essential attributes is vividly expressed in *Church Dogmatics* Chapter VI. Among the more quotable passages in this vein is the following complaint against the tradition:

Starting from the generalised notion of God, the idea of the divine simplicity was necessarily exalted to the all-controlling principle, the idol. [...] As a result it was impossible to make proper use of what Augustine had so happily indicated with his phrase *multiplex simplicitas* or *simplex multiplicitas*: the triumphant unity in God of the Lord with glory and of glory with the Lord. From this startingpoint we can speak only hesitantly about the reality of the divine perfections. (II.1:329)

Did the tradition make an idol out of divine simplicity? Did it fail to honour the unity of the Lord and his glory? Does Barth have a different and better way of understanding the unity of God's one being and the reality of his many perfections? What principles undergird Barth's alternative approach, and what results does it produce? These are the questions that we will pursue in what follows.

1. The argument of this thesis

It is a task in theology to relate God's essence in its oneness to God's many attributes in their individuality. The attributes, properties or perfections of God refer to the various qualities and characteristics attributed to God, whether in Scripture or in the theological tradition. Because the theological tradition expounds God's essence as one—that is, as unique and simple, as incomposite, undivided and indivisible—the question then arises as to how the many, distinguishable divine attributes are a unity inasmuch as they belong to and characterise the one and simple essence of God.

It is well known that the theological tradition contains a range of resolutions to this problem which fall into three broad types. The extreme of this range that prioritises the oneness and simplicity of God's essence by regarding the attributes merely as our names for the God

beyond all naming is generally called *nominalism*. The extreme that prioritises the belonging of the many attributes to the essence of God by regarding the attributes as somehow inhering distinctly in God prior to and independently of our cognition is called *realism*. The middle ground is occupied by views we will refer to as *conceptualist*, which are widely held in the tradition that follows Aquinas. Such views generally regard the multiplicity of distinct divine attributes as an artefact of and accommodation to our process of conceptualising what we can know of the divine essence. Yet there is something intrinsic to the divine essence which grounds in God's being the pre-existence of the various diverse attributes we are taught to conceive, so that they are not merely subjective, but have an objective claim to characterise God's essence, and to convey a knowledge of God.

Our main interest in this thesis is in Karl Barth's attempted reformulation of the Western scholastic tradition regarding the relation of essence and attribute, especially its conceptualist mainstream as found in Protestant Orthodoxy. Barth's mature account of this is in his *Church Dogmatics* Chapter VI, especially §29, where he applauds the alternative account of certain nineteenth century German theologians. In brief, Barth criticises conceptualism, especially as he finds it in Protestant Orthodoxy, calling it 'semi-nominalism'. He argues for a realist account of the essence-attribute relation, which he develops in accordance with two important principles of his. The primary one is that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, and a second that Barth consequently develops is that God is the One who loves in freedom. However, these principles are used to renovate the tradition in a distinctive manner, rather than to raze it and build according to a wholly novel plan.

1.1 Our inquiries into Barth will proceed with comparison and contrast with Amandus Polanus and Isaac Dorner

This thesis will take up the following inquiries. We will enquire whether Barth's diagnosis of problems in the conceptualist tradition is accurate, and hence whether the tradition stands in need of reform for the reasons Barth advances. We will also enquire into the nature and coherence of Barth's own reformulated, realist account as expressed in §§29-30 and ask to what extent Barth's account amounts to a substantial and consistent reformulation of the tradition. To answer these inquiries we will attend particularly to two theologians significant to Barth's exposition of the essence and attribute relationship. The first of these is Amandus Polanus, who frequently appears in Barth as a Reformed representative of the Western scholastic tradition as found in Protestant Orthodoxy. The second of these is Isaac Dorner, who is among the theologians whose approach to the objectivity of the attributes Barth indicates he approves and wishes to develop. By engaging first hand with the doctrine of the essence and attributes in Polanus and Dorner, and attending to the roles their work plays in

the development of Barth's account, we can assess whether Barth's diagnosis of problems in the conceptualist tradition is accurate and understand something of the influences on the development of Barth's critique. We can also compare and contrast Barth's account of the essence and attributes relation with the conceptualism he wishes to reform and the realism that Dorner develops. In this way we are helped to assess the extent to which Barth has produced a substantial and consistent reformulation of the relationship of essence and attributes.

There are certain limitations involved in this proposal regarding how to proceed. The first is that we will not treat §31, Barth's exposition of the perfections of the divine freedom, and hence this thesis cannot claim to be a complete treatment of Barth's account of the divine perfections. However, since we do attend to the beginnings and principles of Barth's account of the being and perfections of God in §§28-29, and since we test the initial application of those principles in §30, we argue that it is reasonable to expect that this is an adequate manner of understanding the most important features of Barth's approach. That said, to examine the perfections of the divine freedom would be an obvious and desirable extension of what we begin here, and our conclusions might need review and adjustment after such a study. However, we have chosen to engage in more depth and detail with a smaller, foundational part of Barth's account, expecting that what we discover will not be invalidated by §31.

Related to this is the acknowledgment that Barth's doctrine of God continues to be developed in *CD* II.2, and *CD* IV, in ways, important scholars argue, that contrast with II.1 and what precedes it.³ Scholarship debates how Barth's Trinitarian theology is reshaped by his doctrines of election and Christology, and what Barth's understanding of the relations of these was, or should have been, in the end. We will not discuss these matters, as our focus is on Barth's critique and reformulation of the Protestant Orthodox manner of relating God's essence and attributes in II.1. We note, however, that Matthew J. Aragon Bruce argues that the doctrine of God's being and perfections II.1 is consistent with Barth's mature doctrine of election in II.2.⁴ To the extent that he is correct, the work we do here will not be annulled by developments in the doctrine of God in II.2.

³ See, for example, Benjamin Myers, "Election, Trinity, and the History of Jesus: Reading Barth with Rowan Williams.," in *Trinitarian Theology after Barth*, 1st ed., vol. 148 of *A Princeton Theological Monograph Series* (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 121–37; D. Stephen Long, "From the Hidden God to the God of Glory: Barth, Balthasar, and Nominalism," *Eccles. J. Cathol. Evang. Theol.* 20.2 (2011): 167–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121102000203>.

⁴ Matthew J. Aragon Bruce, "Election," in *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 309–24.

It may be objected that to confine our attention to Polanus and Dorner is too narrow a field for comparison and contrast regarding Barth's general engagement with the conceptualist treatment of the essence and attribute, and the realist alternative Barth admires. It may seem at first that Polanus features little in CD Chapter VI, but in fact Polanus is a significant interlocutor for Barth in this section, as well as in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and elsewhere in the *Church Dogmatics*.⁵ Barth's encounter with the Reformed Orthodox tradition has Polanus among its foremost representatives. The movements of thought at the beginning of §28 and §29 engage consistently with Polanus and his formulations, and Polanus also features in §30. To be sure, Barth does quote many other pre-modern theologians and other Protestant Scholastics, although none of the Protestant Orthodox more than Polanus. We will consult Richard Muller's survey of Protestant Orthodoxy for a wider sense of the post-Reformation theology Barth is criticising and the salience of his criticism, and at key points of the argument we will also attend to Johann Andreas Quenstedt, Barth's leading Lutheran interlocutor in *Church Dogmatics* chapter VI, to set our conclusions upon a wider base. But for a firsthand, deeper engagement with a representative of the Protestant Orthodox on the issues under investigation here, we submit that the *Syntagma* of Polanus is a sound choice.⁶

Dorner is mentioned far less than Polanus in CD Chapter VI, but the place where his influence is acknowledged is a key moment in Barth's account of the treatment of the essence-attribute relation, and, even though Barth does not mention it, his criticisms of conceptualism are largely shared with Dorner, as are his reasons for embracing a realist account of the attributes. A more thorough approach to the theologians whom Barth credits with pioneering a realist direction would perhaps include attention to F. H. R. Frank and G. Thomasius as well as Dorner. However, even if the picture of the influences upon Barth would be enriched by such inclusions, there is still value in comparing and contrasting Barth and Dorner, whose work is conveniently available and whom Barth admires, not only as to the objectivity of the attributes, but also in connection with divine immutability (II.1:493).

An objector may continue to press that we are not considering the influence of the wider post-Enlightenment tradition in theology upon Barth's account of the perfections, especially that of German Idealism, and we must again acknowledge this limitation. In §§29-30 Barth does interact more widely with post-Enlightenment theology, and the effect of this on Barth's

⁵ See the account of the scope of Barth's references to Polanus in Rinse Herman Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, Barth Studies (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 35–36.

⁶ Reeling Brouwer says, 'Barth had studied the *Syntagma* intensely; he consulted it many times when he was at a crossroads in his dogmatic investigations. He let himself be inspired by it. He sparred with it, and I presume he was in some way in love with it.' Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 70.

doctrine of essence and attribute would be worth investigation. But we limit the scope of our engagement to Barth's critique and reformulation of the traditional account of the essential divine attributes as found in Protestant Orthodoxy, and we judge that Polanus and Dorner are important and sufficiently illuminating foils for Barth on these issues.

1.2 Barth's critique is flawed, but his convictions about revelation diverge from the tradition represented by Protestant Orthodoxy, and this drives his attempt at reformulation

Regarding Barth's diagnosis of a problem in the conceptualist tradition, this thesis argues that Barth misreads certain statements in the Protestant Orthodox upon which his critique of semi-nominalism relies. Further, Barth overlooks the role divine perfection plays in the tradition. We conclude that this greatly weakens his particular case for the necessity of reform.

Regarding the extent to which Barth's account amounts to a substantial and consistent reformulation of the tradition, this thesis argues that Barth's founding revelation principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation represents a distinctive source of coherent development for his account of the being and perfections of God. Yet Barth does not use this principle to develop his account to a radically original plan. Rather, he uses it to reformulate the traditional concepts and reorganise the traditional structure of the doctrine of the divine essence and attributes. We conclude that this interaction between the Protestant Orthodox tradition and Barth's founding principle provides Barth's reformulated account of the being and attributes of God with an underlying logic that gives it substance and consistency and distinguishes it from both the conceptualism of Protestant Orthodoxy and the realism of Dorner.

Regarding the role played by Dorner in the development of Barth's account, we argue that Barth takes up many of Dorner's arguments against the tradition, and explicitly and especially shares Dorner's affirmation that 'in God's self-revelations we see revelations of what and how He is (not simply what and how He is not) and therefore the revelation of objective attributes.'⁷ Yet Barth will develop this line of thought in his own way, quite differently to Dorner. Dorner departs further from the tradition in both method and conclusions than Barth does.

Regarding the role played by Polanus and the tradition he represents, we argue that this is as both friend and foe for Barth, although Barth's criticism is more prominent than his appreciation. In §29 this criticism is chiefly expressed by Barth's affirmation of the

⁷ Isaak A Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Alfred Cave (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 1:186.

multiplicity of God's perfections against the conceptualist conviction that any plurality in God's essence is precluded. In §30 this criticism shifts to a complaint that in Polanus and the Protestant Orthodox the unity of God is not honoured because they have not integrated their concepts of the attributes with one another, and they threaten to be separate factors in God. However there are many ways that Barth takes cues from and aligns with the Protestant Orthodox tradition, such as when he affirms that the essential properties of God are identified with God in God, or takes up a twofold classification of the perfections. We argue that the root of the real divergence between Barth and that tradition lies in Barth's principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, which leads Barth to frame our knowledge of God in the perfections in a fundamentally positive manner. Polanus frames our knowledge of God more negatively than this, and this leaves Barth ongoingly discontent with him and the Protestant Orthodox.

1.3 An overview of the thesis.

The first task we undertake is to understand the tradition Barth critiques and the alternative he applauds. Thus in Chapter 1 we examine the Reformed Orthodoxy of Polanus, who represents the traditional, conceptualist treatment of the being and attributes that reaches back through the Reformers to Aquinas and earlier, for Barth quotes Polanus frequently, both approvingly and disapprovingly. In chapter 1 we also examine Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics*, which represents an earlier stage of his thinking. There Barth largely approved of the Protestant Orthodox and their conceptualism, with some reservations. Already Barth grounded the correspondence between the attributes in our knowledge and the attributes in God's being in revelation, not in an analogy between creator as cause and creature as effect. Already Barth disapproved a latent 'Platonism' he finds in Polanus.

In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth repudiated conceptualism, joining, among others, Isaac Dorner, in advocating a realist view of the attributes. Thus in chapter 2 we examine Isaac Dorner's critique of the tradition, and his alternative development of the relations of God's essence and attributes. In *A System of Christian Doctrine*, Dorner criticises the classical formulation of divine simplicity and seeks to present the unity of God's essence in a realist manner so that it includes an objective multiplicity of distinct attributes and makes the interdependent harmony of their relations intelligible. Dorner, having rejected the identity of the attributes with one another and the being of God, finds the bond of unity for the divine attributes in God's living, triune love.

Having examined Polanus and Dorner, in chapter 3 we turn to *Church Dogmatics* §§28-29, where Barth treats the being of God, and then the perfections of God in general. We trace the

development of Barth's account, comparing and contrasting it with Polanus and Dorner at relevant points. Barth builds on his foundational principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, and upon his consequent characterisation of God as the living One who loves in freedom. In treating God's perfections, Barth insists—in contrast to the tradition—that God is both one and many. Barth defends his position in part by attacking the conceptualist tradition, describing it as 'semi-nominalist', corrupted by a nominalism which relativises the objectivity of God's perfections under the influence of an overmastering, devouring idea of divine simplicity.

In chapter 4 we pause and assess Barth's charges against the Protestant Orthodox. We listen first to Barth's critic Richard Muller who takes issue with Barth's charge that the Protestant Orthodox failed to explain the way the many attributes were objectively grounded in the divine essence. However Muller does not engage Barth on all the points that Barth raises, and so we attempt our own engagement with Barth's criticism of the Protestant Orthodox. We argue that Barth overlooks the role divine perfection plays in the tradition as a guarantor of divine plenitude. Further, Barth misreads the Protestant Orthodox. Key quotations Barth relies on are addressing the status of our predications when it come to the attributes of God, not, as Barth believes, the real presence in God's essence of the divine qualities being attributed to God. We conclude that Barth's critique of conceptualism is weakened to the point of failure by these flaws, and his case for the necessity for reformulation likewise.

In chapter 5 we first examine the three explanatory propositions by which, in §29, Barth develops his realist account of the multiplicity of divine perfections. Here Barth defends his realist view as orthodox, and in doing this he embraces the *identity thesis*, that in God the perfections are each identical to one another and to the whole being of God. In this Barth departs from Dorner, who, in extending the divine *perichoresis* to include the essence-attribute relationship, moved outside the orthodox tradition. Barth still asserts God's *multiplex simplicitas*, his multiple simplicity, which Barth feels was once known, but was then forgotten and which he wishes to reinstate. Also in chapter 5 we compare Barth's account of the predication of divine perfections with that of Polanus. We find that part of what Barth sees in revelation is a divine exaltation of our concepts of divine perfections, so that they give us knowledge of God as he is in himself. This is a significant divergence of Barth's thought from Polanus and the tradition he represents. Polanus, by contrast, speaks of a divine self-lowering in communicating the concepts of the attributes, in an accommodation to our incapacity. We locate a fundamental difference with Polanus here, in Barth's insistence that our speaking about God is realistic, faithfully corresponding to God's inner being.

In chapter 6 we examine the remainder of §29 and also §30, where Barth organises his account of the individual perfections and expounds the perfections of the divine loving. We find that Barth's use of his love-in-freedom duality to structure his account makes it a distinctive development of the traditional two-class classification of the attributes. In §30, we find that Barth falls into a conceptualist mode of speaking of the unity and distinction of the perfections, emphasising that our knowledge of God in his plenitude must develop through an integrated series of mutually-augmenting concepts of the perfections. This accompanies a new complaint about Polanus and the Protestant Orthodox, that they do not integrate God's perfections so as to make God's unity clear, but risk having the attributes appear to be multiple separate factors in God. Thus a different reaction to the Protestant Orthodox flips Barth from his earlier push for the multiplicity of the perfections, to a push for the unity of the perfections.

In chapter 7 we examine the remarkable fact that Barth's account of the grace and holiness of God is itself infected by the nominalism he so vigorously opposes, for Barth speaks of the form of God's grace in God only apophatically, and says it is hidden and incomprehensible. Barth, however, approaches his exposition of mercy and righteousness in a different manner that avoids this stumble into nominalism. Katherine Sonderegger calls Barth's adjusted approach 'the christological derivation of the divine attributes'.⁸ This move brings Barth's exposition in line with the principle he has defended from the beginning of §28, that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, and demonstrates the way in which this principle brings coherence and consistency to Barth's account of the perfections.

2. Recent scholarship touching upon the interests of this thesis

By investigating Barth's account of the unity and diversity of the perfections with special attention to Barth's handling of Amandus Polanus and Isaac Dorner, this thesis touches upon several areas of scholarship. It connects to Barth scholarship through attention to the development of Barth's thinking about the divine attributes from the *Göttingen Dogmatics* to the *Church Dogmatics*, and to his treatment of God's being and perfections in their simplicity and multiplicity in *Church Dogmatics* chapter VI. It also connects to the scholarship of Barth and Reformed Orthodoxy, especially through investigation of Polanus and Barth's reading of his theology. It also connects to the scholarship on Barth and Isaac Dorner, through explication of their affinities and differences on the essence-attribute relations, with special

⁸ Katherine Sonderegger, "Barth and the Divine Perfections," *Scott. J. Theol.* 67.04 (2014): 462, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930614000210>.

reference to Dorner's *A System of Christian Doctrine*,⁹ and some reference to his *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*.¹⁰

Hence, several strands of scholarship are relevant to this thesis, but not a great deal touches squarely or at length upon its particular concerns. We note some of the more recent works in English that are important either for background and perspective, or for particular discussion of pertinent issues. First, there are the works on Barth's doctrine of God and his account of God's perfections as a whole. Robert B. Price has written what he calls a commentary on *Church Dogmatics* chapter VI, in which he offers a close reading and analysis of the text without trying to argue a specific thesis.¹¹ Price covers a lot of ground in a summary fashion, with brief discussion of Barth's influences and engagement with Barth scholarship *en route*. Christopher R. J. Holmes has treated Barth's doctrine of the attributes in an article and in a book that includes accounts of the treatments of the divine attributes by Eberhard Jüngel and Wolf Krötke.¹² Holmes writes appreciatively of Barth as one influenced by his framing of the issues. Roelf T. te Velde has written an account of Barth's doctrine of God alongside accounts of the doctrine of God in the earlier Reformed Orthodoxy and the later Utrecht School.¹³ Velde's work thus engages with theologians in common with this thesis, and is thus an important resource for this thesis, although this thesis treats a narrow issue in more detail, and Velde's work is broader in its scope and concerns.

There are also works that treat Barth's doctrine of God or his account of the perfections more narrowly, with a particular focus. Todd Pokrifka's monograph is a study of Barth's method in *Church Dogmatics* chapter VI and the roles and interrelationships of Scripture, tradition and reason in Barth's doctrine of God and the treatment of the perfections of unity, constancy and eternity.¹⁴ Brian Asbill has written a considered monograph on Barth's doctrine of divine aseity as it appears in *Church Dogmatics* Chapter VI and especially §28.¹⁵ Asbill's work is

⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 1.

¹⁰ I. A. Dorner and Robert R. Williams, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*, 1st Fortress Press ed., Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

¹¹ Robert Price, *Letters of the Divine Word: The Perfections of God in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 1.

¹² Christopher R. J. Holmes, *Revisiting the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes: In Dialogue with Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel and Wolf Krötke*, Issues in Systematic Theology v. 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Christopher R. J. Holmes, "The Theological Function of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes and the Divine Glory, with Special Reference to Karl Barth and His Reading of the Protestant Orthodox," *Scott. J. Theol.* 61.02 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930608003967>, http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0036930608003967.

¹³ Roelf T. te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School: A Study in Method and Content*, Studies in Reformed Theology volume 25 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2013).

¹⁴ Todd B. Pokrifka, *Redescribing God: The Roles of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason in Karl Barth's Doctrines of Divine Unity, Constancy, and Eternity*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 121 (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

¹⁵ Brian D. Asbill, *The Freedom of God for Us: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Divine Aseity*, First edition., T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology v. 25 (London ; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

thus focused more on the being of God *per se* than on that being as it lives in the divine perfections. Tyler Wittman treats Barth's doctrine of God and interacts with Barth's critique of nominalism and his use and formulation of divine simplicity.¹⁶ Wittmann is studying Barth's understanding of the correspondence between God's being and external acts and ultimately his relation to creation and history through Christ and so he treats §29 more briefly, abstractly and descriptively than we aim to here. Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology* engages in a critique of Barth's handling of divine predication.¹⁷ More relevant to this thesis, she has an article examining whether Barth's doctrine of the perfections involves univocity of predication, which contains important observations and shrewd judgements which we will make use of.¹⁸ D. Stephen Long has a good discussion of Barth's opposition to nominalism (i.e. a theology admitting the possibility of a *deus absconditus* behind the *deus revelatus*) in the context of modern theology and Balthasar's reading of Barth.¹⁹ Ian A. McFarland critiques Barth's choice of freedom as one of the two poles in his characterisation of the act of God's being. He argues Barth would achieve his aim of ruling out the *deus absconditus* if he used presence instead of freedom, and named God as the one who is present in love.²⁰ Eric J. Titus has a useful overview of the formal structure of *Church Dogmatics* chapter VI.²¹ Although these works connect in one way or another with Barth's doctrine of God and the perfections, and with issues related to the inquiries of this thesis, they are usually pursuing different concerns to the ones in focus here, and so are generally only of tangential relevance and occasional usefulness to this thesis.

There are several works treating divine simplicity that engage with Barth's doctrine of simplicity, given his charge that the tradition makes an idol of simplicity (II.1:329). Stephen J. Duby outlines Barth's concerns²² and, in defence of the tradition, seeks to turn aside Barth's critique of simplicity as received entailing 'subjectivism' (i.e., nominalism).²³ This is highly relevant, and provides a point of comparison and corroboration of some of our observations and conclusions. Jordan P. Barrett gives a fine account of Barth's doctrine of

¹⁶ Tyler R. Wittman, "Facticity and Faithfulness: Divine Simplicity in Barth's Christology," *Eccles. J. Cathol. Evang. Theol.* 26.4 (2017): 415–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121702600404>; Tyler Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁷ Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 97–127.

¹⁸ Sonderegger, "Barth and the Divine Perfections." 'Barth and the Divine Perfections'

¹⁹ Long, "From the Hidden God to the God of Glory."

²⁰ Ian A. McFarland, "Present in Love: Rethinking Barth on the Divine Perfections," *Mod. Theol.* 33.2 (2017): 243–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12313>.

²¹ Eric J. Titus, "The Perfections of God in the Theology of Karl Barth: A Consideration of the Formal Structure," *Kairos Evang. J. Theol. Nov 2010* (2010).

²² Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology volume 30 (London; New York: Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 31–34.

²³ Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 179–86.

simplicity.²⁴ Like Barth, he seeks to affirm divine multiplicity, but, unlike Barth, Barrett declines the identity thesis, proposing that ‘idiomatic distinctions’, partially analogous to the distinctions between the trinitarian persons, preserve the non-identity of the attributes in God.²⁵ Paul R. Hinlicky’s critique of the doctrine of divine simplicity found in Aquinas and the Reformed Orthodox takes in Barth’s theology as well.²⁶ Hinlicky’s work is preoccupied with simplicity and trinity, rather than simplicity and divine essence and so his interest in Barth diverges somewhat from the interest of this thesis. Hinlicky’s critique of Barth has to do with the analogy of faith, Christology and the persons of the Trinity. He appreciates as an accomplishment Barth’s embrace of the objective multiplicity of God’s perfections, and the critique of the received doctrine of simplicity.²⁷ Keith L. Johnson describes Barth’s treatment of simplicity, characterising it as a purification of the doctrine in which logical and metaphysical developments of simplicity are rejected and simplicity is redeveloped along scriptural and Christological lines.²⁸ Christopher A. Franks compares Barth’s doctrine of simplicity to Aquinas, and finds concurrence.²⁹ Although divine simplicity is very relevant to relating the divine essence to the divine attributes, it is not the main subject of our interest, and we will not have reason to analyse all that Barth has to say about it or engage closely with those relating Barth’s treatment of simplicity to issues other than Barth’s critique of the tradition and his advocacy for the real multiplicity of divine perfections.

Amongst recent scholars of Protestant Orthodoxy there is some engagement with Barth, given his own influence on the reception of Protestant Orthodox theologians. This work is important for our purposes. Richard A. Muller is a critic of Barth, and of some of Barth’s understandings of the Protestant Orthodox as indicated above and as we shall see below.³⁰ Rinse H. Reeling Brouwer has a volume dedicated to Barth and the Protestant Orthodox, with a very relevant chapter on Barth and Polanus in which he considers Barth’s differences with Polanus over multiplicity and simplicity.³¹ We have mentioned the work of Velde above,

²⁴ Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 114–29.

²⁵ Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, 179–86.

²⁶ Paul R. Hinlicky, *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 173–90.

²⁷ Hinlicky, *Divine Simplicity*, 178.

²⁸ Keith L. Johnson, “Karl Barth and the Purification of Divine Simplicity,” *Mod. Theol.* 35.3 (2019): 531–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12518>.

²⁹ Christopher A. Franks, “The Simplicity of the Living God: Aquinas, Barth and Some Philosophers,” *Mod. Theol.* 21.2 (2005): 275–300, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2005.00286.x>.

³⁰ Richard A. Muller, “What I Haven’t Learned from Barth,” *Reform. J.* 37.3 (1987): 16–18; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academics, 2003).

³¹ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 35–74.

which also contains comparative and critical discussion of Barth's reading of the Protestant Orthodox and its influence on subsequent scholarship.³²

The medieval scholastic background of the problem of the divine attributes can be discovered in Muller's *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, and also in Garrett Smith's doctoral dissertation on Aquinas and Scotus.³³ Richard Cross also provides an excellent resource for understanding Scotus's approach.³⁴

There is some recent scholarship in English on Dorner, and Dorner in relation to Barth. Jonathan Norgate has a monograph on Dorner's doctrines of God and salvation, and, while Barth appears in Norgate's work, there is no direct discussion of Dorner's rejection of conceptualism and his influence on Barth at this point.³⁵ The more focussed examinations of Dorner's influence on Barth are concerned with the doctrine of divine immutability and Barth's acknowledgement of the influence of Dorner's essay on that attribute upon his own thinking. Articles by Matthias Gockel³⁶ and Robert Sherman³⁷, an article,³⁸ and the introduction to the translation of Dorner's essay on immutability by Robert R. Williams³⁹ and the excursus by Pokrifka⁴⁰ are valuable, but not aimed at Dorner's influence on Barth's shift from the conceptualism of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* to the realism of the *Church Dogmatics*.

Finally, there are important theologians influenced by Barth whose work touches on and is influenced by Barth's treatment of God's being and perfections. Colin Gunton is one example.⁴¹ There are others. However, as this thesis is seeking at heart to give an account of Barth's handling of the Protestant Orthodox under the influence of Dorner's realism regarding the attributes (and that of other nineteenth century Germans), we do not include consideration of later theologians developing this area of the doctrine of God under Barth's influence.

³² Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 27–42.

³³ Garrett R. Smith, "The Problem of Divine Attributes from Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus" (University of Notre Dame, 2013), <https://curate.nd.edu/show/fj23611117n>.
https://www.academia.edu/23969967/The_Problem_of_Divine_Attributes_from_Thomas_Aquinas_to_Duns_Scotus accessed 5 July 2022.

³⁴ Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub, 2005).

³⁵ Jonathan Norgate, *Isaak A. Dorner: The Triune God and the Gospel of Salvation*, T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

³⁶ Matthias Gockel, "On the Way from Schleiermacher to Barth: A Critical Reappraisal of Isaak August Dorner's Essay on Divine Immutability," *Scott. J. Theol.* 53.4 (2000): 490–510, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600056994>.

³⁷ Robert Sherman, "Isaak August Dorner on Divine Immutability: A Missing Link between Schleiermacher and Barth," *J. Relig.* 77.3 (1997): 380–401, <https://doi.org/10.1086/490021>.

³⁸ Robert R. Williams, "I. A. Dorner: The Ethical Immutability of God," *J. Am. Acad. Relig.* 54.4 (1986): 721–38.

³⁹ Dorner and Williams, *Divine Immutability*, 1–38.

⁴⁰ Pokrifka, *Redescribing God*, 242–47.

⁴¹ See, e.g. Colin E Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes*. (London: SCM Press, 2002).

CHAPTER 1

‘The Old Problem of the Doctrine of the Attributes of God’ in Polanus and in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*

Our interest in this thesis is in Karl Barth’s reformulation of the way the one essence of God is related to the many attributes of God in Western scholasticism. The Protestant Orthodox are the main bearers of Western scholasticism to Barth. Alleging in them a prejudicial preference for a certain philosophical concept of unity, Barth says,

they falsely defined the being of God, which they were supposed to be defining *proprie* [properly], in such a way that it did not transcend but was subject to this notion of unity. On the other hand, they made the multiplicity of the divine attributes, which they wanted to ascribe to God only *improprie* [improperly], dependent on the discursiveness of the human intellect and the manifoldness of the created world. (II.1:335)

Amandus Polanus is one of those whom Barth has just quoted and whom he has in mind. In preparation for grasping Barth’s critique and comparing his alternative, in this chapter we give an account of the way Polanus expressed the relation of God’s essence and his attributes, and the kind of knowledge of God we receive in the attributes. We will also note how earlier, in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth stood with the Protestant Orthodox in their conceptualist view, albeit in a modified way, before he took up his different stance in the *Church Dogmatics*.

1. Amandus Polanus

Amandus Polanus is an important Reformed representative of a theological tradition (Protestant Orthodoxy or Protestant Scholasticism) that Barth is receiving, appreciating, criticising and modifying in his own work. Polanus (1561-1610) was, like Barth, a professor in Basel.⁴² He was one of the ‘Old orthodox’ who began to guide Barth when in 1924 he was ‘faced with the task of giving lectures on dogmatics for the first time’.⁴³ Barth encountered

⁴² Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 35–37.

⁴³ Karl Barth’s Foreword in Heinrich Hepp, Ernst Bizer, and G. T Thomson, *Reformed Dogmatics Set out and Illustrated from the Sources: Heinrich Hepp ; Foreword by Karl Barth ; Revised and Edited by Ernst Bizer ; English Translation by G.T. Thomson*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978). p. v.

Polanus through Henrich Heppé's source book of Reformed theology. He found in Heppé 'a dogmatics which had form and substance, oriented upon the central indications of the Biblical evidences for revelation, which it also managed to follow out in detail with astonishing richness'.⁴⁴ Barth acquired Polanus's *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*,⁴⁵ along with other old Protestant systematic works.⁴⁶ The mark they make on the structure and content of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is deep and evident, not least in §29. In his *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*, Polanus organises his exposition according to a comprehensive set of dichotomies, enumerated in a long synopsis at the beginning of the work.⁴⁷ This Ramist way of organising theology was to aid its didactic, spiritual and polemical use, according to the demands of Polanus's day.⁴⁸

1.1 The oneness of God's essence precludes all plurality in or of that essence

In *Syntag. Theol.* II.5, Polanus treats the essence of God. The divine essence is constituted by divine aseity—absolute and independent divine existence. Polanus is especially concerned with the oneness of the essence. His initial statement about divine oneness emphasises oneness as uniqueness and as being without composition or plurality. God's essence,

is one only, or rather unique and singular, and so is one, not by aggregation, nor by common action, nor by genus or species, [...] but enumeratively, or rather prior to enumeration: as essence is never spoken of about God in the plural numerically and by no reasoning can it be allowed that there are three relative essences in God.⁴⁹

This oneness includes indivisibility as well as uniqueness and numerical unity. God is a 'spiritual essence not divided materially by the persons, but conceptually by distinctions that are really in an essential unity.'⁵⁰ Polanus calls God *absolutely, enumeratively one*. He says that,

whatever is absolutely, enumeratively one comprises a simple negation or removal and exclusion of every division and signifies nothing else than an indivisible being [...] And the

⁴⁴ Heppé, Bizer, and Thomson, *Reformed Dogmatics Set out and Illustrated from the Sources*. p. v.

⁴⁵ Amandus Polanus Von Polansdorf, *Syntagma theologiae christianae, juxta leges ordinis methodici conformatum, atque in libros decem tribitum* (Hanoviae: Johannes Aubrii, 1610).

⁴⁶ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 1–14.

⁴⁷ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 39–49.

⁴⁸ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 37.

⁴⁹ *quòd tantummodo una aut potius unica & singularis sit, ac proinde una non aggregatione, non consensu, non genere vel specie, [...] sed numero, aut potius ante numerum: sic ut essentia nunquam de Deo dicatur in plurali numero, nullaue ratione possit concedi, in Deo esse tres essentias relativas.* (*Syntag. Theol.* 868)

⁵⁰ *Deus unica spiritualis essentia est non divis materialiter personis, sed ratione distinctis realiter in unitate essentiae.* (*Syntag. Theol.* 870-1)

‘one’ that is [...] meant absolutely, is as opposed to multiplicity by way of privation and removal, as the indivisible is to the divided.⁵¹

For Polanus the one, unique, indivisible essence of God is never divided or multiplied, but is always the one and only God. Any distinctions made in the essence are conceptual distinctions made by human reason in an indivisible unity of essence.

1.2 Human incapacity produces the multiplicity of distinct attributes in our talk of God

The task of relating the essence and attributes of God is involved with the task of explaining how our human speech can predicate attributes of God. Polanus introduces the status of theological attribution as he turns to the attributes of God in *Syntag. Theol.* II.6. He says,

The attributes of God are ascribed to God in Holy Scripture, not so much for an explanation of God’s essence and nature, as for a declaration to us in another manner for our benefit capturing that which can be learned about him by us. Nevertheless, from this it is more what and how he is not that may be learned by us, than what and how and what kind he is.⁵²

Polanus expects to learn what is to be attributed to God from Scripture. But creaturely limitations on knowledge of God mean we cannot speak of who and what God is in himself in a way equal to that reality. The opening axioms concerning divine predication introduce God’s ineffability and infinity as they affect such predication:

I. Whatever is said about God is not God, because he is ineffable.

II. No divine attributes sufficiently explain the essence and nature of God: because that essence is infinite: and Infinity cannot be explained fittingly and fully enough by that which is finite.⁵³

Despite these qualifications, axiom III assures us that what Scripture teaches us to attribute to God ‘helps and perfects our knowledge of God’.⁵⁴ Polanus then introduces divine incomprehensibility, and the notion that God responds to the incapacity in human intellection for the comprehension and explanation of the divine nature *by lowering himself to our*

⁵¹ *Quicquid [...] numero unum absolutè est, simplicem negationem seu remotionem & exclusionem omnis divisionis statuit, & nihil aliud significat, quam ens indivisum, [...] Itaque unum [...] absolutè dictum, multitudini opponitur per modum privationis seu remotionis, ut indivisum diviso. (Syntag. Theol. 871)*

⁵² *Attributa Dei, sunt qui Deo adscribuntur in Scripturis Sanctis, non tam ad essentiam naturamque Dei explicandam, quàm ad declarandum nobis aliquo modo pro nostro captu illud quod de Ipso à nobis cognosci potest. Quanquam ex illis potiùs quis & quomodo non sit, quam quis & quomodo qualisque sit à nobis cognoscatur. (Syntag. Theol. 879)*

⁵³ *I. Quicquid de Deo dicitur, non est Deus, quia est ineffabilis. II. Nulla attributa divina essentiâ naturamque; Dei sufficienter explicant: quia illa est infinita: Infinitum autem per id quod finitum est dignè sàtis, pleneque explicari non potest. (Syntag. Theol. 879)*

⁵⁴ *nostram notitiam de Deo juvant & perficiunt. (Syntag. Theol. 879.)*

capacity in his self-description. He says, ‘It is impossible for what, and of what kind, the essence of God might be in itself to be comprehended by a created intellect and conveyed by human words: therefore the Holy Spirit lowers himself to our capacity, and, with the attributes, describes his essence in certain ways.’⁵⁵ This means that when we speak even of proper divine attributes, we speak both properly and improperly. All our utterances about God are improper in their manner of signification, because, ‘any expression is finite and accommodated to human comprehensive power: but any essential property of God is infinite and wholly exceeds the comprehensive power of all creatures.’⁵⁶ And yet they are proper in that they do signify the divine essence: ‘but in fact if you consider the thing which is signified by the expression, that does properly conform to God.’⁵⁷ What Scripture teaches us to attribute to God does produce knowledge of God.

One artefact of this divine self-lowering in his self-presentation is the multiplicity of distinct divine attributes in our conception of God. The multiplicity arises because we have no other way to conceive of God’s being in all its excellence, but this multiplicity is not thereby a misleading illusion. One might conclude that if the various divine attributes all signify the one and simple essence of God, they must ultimately be synonymous names for the one utterly simple essence, leading to nominalism. But Polanus says that the simplicity of the essence should not lead to that conclusion. The proper divine attributes, ‘are not synonyms although they signify the very simplest thing [i.e., the divine essence].’⁵⁸

But the reason is not because they may be distinguished formally in accordance with the nature of that object as Scotus erroneously taught, but because we portray many excellences and activities of that unique object with various concepts when we cannot [do this] in one [concept].⁵⁹

Polanus distances himself from nominalism, and also from Scotus’s realism, which Scotus developed with subtlety and vigour.⁶⁰ Scotus did not seek to find the many attributes of God in his essence conceptually, but formally. This formal distinction between attributes exists in the essence of God prior to and independent of any process of conceptualisation by a human

⁵⁵ *essentia Dei quid & qualis in se sit, comprehendi à creato intellectu, & humano sermone efferrì non potest: ideo Spiritus Sanctus demisit se ad nostrum captum, & attributis, quibusdam essentiam suam descripsit.* (Syntag. Theol. 879-80.)

⁵⁶ *Vox quaelibet finita est & humano captui accommodata: quaelibet autem proprietas Dei essentialis est infinita & omnium creaturarum captum prorsus excedit.* (Syntag. Theol. 880)

⁵⁷ *Sin verò rem spectes, quae voce significatur, illa Deo propriè convenit.* (Syntag. Theol. 880)

⁵⁸ *non sunt συνωνυμα, quamvis rem simplicissimam signent.* (Syntag. Theol. 880)

⁵⁹ *Ratio autem nōn est, quia distinguantur formaliter secundum naturam rei quod falsò docuit Scotus: sed quia unicae rei multiplices virtutes & operationes, nos variis conceptibus effigiamus, quum uno non possimus.* (Syntag. Theol. 880)

⁶⁰ See Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, especially chapters 6 and 17 and Smith, ‘The Problem of Divine Attributes from Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus’ pp. 195-217. See also Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 70–73.

mind. This makes the essential attributes of God into things *ex natura rei*—i.e., belonging to the nature of God—distinguished *formaliter secundum naturam rei*—i.e., formally in accordance with the nature of the essence. The essential attributes are formally non-identical in the essence of God. However, Scotus’ position is not called realist because there are real or essential distinctions between the attributes, which is to say distinctions that make the attributes really different things with distinct essences. The divine essence remains one, and the attributes are *really* identical with one another and the divine essence, even while *formally* distinct. Rather the position is realist because the formal individuality of the attributes belongs really to the essence of God, and not merely to our conceiving. Garrett Smith says,

Scotus denies that something formally in something else is there potentially, virtually, or confusedly; rather, it is something that is present actually, determinately and distinctly, according to its quidditative definition (*ratio*), apart from every act of a comparative power [i.e., any exercise of will or intellect].⁶¹

Polanus sees the distinction of attributes as conceptual and not formal. The multiplicity is in our portrayal of God’s singular excellence. The individuality of the attributes and the multiplicity arising from their distinctions do not belong to God’s essence. They are artefacts of our incapacity to conceive or speak of that essence in a single concept or expression.

1.3 The essential properties of God are identified with God in God

A further feature of Polanus’s account is that the essential properties of God are identified with God and one another in God. This is due to the simplicity of the divine essence. The essential properties of God are ‘divine attributes in which also the true divine essence in itself becomes apparent and is differentiated from all other essences’.⁶² For Polanus the oneness of God means that the essential properties of God are not different to the essence of God, and nor are they different to one another:

I. The essential properties of God are really the divine essence itself, and in fact they differ neither from the essence of God nor among themselves; *not from the essence*, because as they are in the essence, so they are the essence itself: *not among themselves*, because whatever is in God, is One; and from that principal Unity every difference and every magnitude must be entirely absent. In God is nothing that is not either essence or person.⁶³

⁶¹ Garrett R. Smith, ‘The Problem of Divine Attributes from Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis; Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2013), 200–201.

⁶² *Proprietates Dei essentielles, sunt attributa divina, quibus & essentiae divinae veritas in se innotescit & ab omnibus aliis essentiis discernitur.* (Syntag. Theol. 901)

⁶³ *I. Proprietates Dei essentielles sunt realiter ipsamet Dei essentia, & nec ab essentia Dei, nec inter se reipsa differunt; non ab essentia, quia sic sunt in essentia, ut sint ipsa essentia: non inter se, quia quicquid in Deo est, UNUM est; à prima autem*

Axiom II rules out essential distinctions—which would divide essential divine properties into things with distinct essences—on the basis of divine simplicity: ‘II. Nothing in God is distinguished essentially: because all things which are in God are the one and indivisible and most simple essence.’⁶⁴

Despite this strong affirmation of divine unity absent all internal difference, Polanus regards it proper to make conceptual distinctions between God’s essential properties, although these do not amount to real distinctions in God’s essence. He says, ‘III. The essential properties of God, are not distinguished really—thus not from the nature of the object—but are distinguished by reason or rather, [put] in a better way, that is, by our conception and comprehension, or by way of our understanding.’⁶⁵ Polanus further clarifies that he does not regard this conceptual distinction of the attributes as merely subjective, i.e., without any objective basis in the essence of God. He distinguishes between the nominalism of Ockham and Biel and the Thomistic conceptualism he professes:

Distinguishing or differing by reason is meant in two ways. For William Ockham, Gabriel Biel and others, those things are said to be distinguished or to differ by reason which have being only so far objective as to be imaginary or fictive, but not real being. Whence in their opinion in the divine nature there is no distinction by reason; for all things which are therein are both the thing and the whole.⁶⁶

Polanus then brings in the sense of distinction-by-reason (conceptual distinction) that he prefers: ‘Yet for Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and others, to distinguish by reason means to distinguish by a definition and in the mode of conception in our understanding; for our understanding conceives a different thing from the name mercy than from the name righteousness.’⁶⁷ This Thomistic view holds that the differing and complex concepts we derive from creatures and use to speak of and know God by reason correspond—imperfectly, yet truly, with an objective basis in God who is the source and cause of his creatures—to a simple, undivided reality in God. Aquinas says,

Unitate omnis prorsus differentia, omnisque numerus abesse debet. In Deo nihil est, quod non sit aut essentia aut persona. (Syntag. Theol. 901)

⁶⁴ II. *Nulla in Deo distinguuntur essentialiter: quia omnia quæ sunt in Deo sunt una & indivisibilis & simplicissima essentia.* (Syntag. Theol. 901)

⁶⁵ III. *Proprietates Dei essentielles ut non realiter, ita nec ex natura rei sed ratione distinguuntur aut modo potiùs, id est, nostra conceptione & comprehensione, seu nostro intelligendi modo.* (Syntag. Theol. 902)

⁶⁶ *Ratione distingui seu differre dicitur ambigüe. Nam Guilielmo Occamo. Gabrieli Bieli & aliis ratione distingui seu differre dicuntur ea, quæ habent esse tantùm objectivum seu imaginarium & fictum, non autem esse reale. Unde ex illorum sententia in divinis non est distinctio rationis; omnia enim quæ ibi sunt, res & summa res sunt.* (Syntag. Theol. 902)

⁶⁷ *Aristoteli verò, Thomae Aquinati & aliis ratione distingui, idem est quod definitione & modo concipiendi in intellectu nostro distingui: diversam enim rem concipit intellectus noster ex nomine misericordæ, quàm ex nomine justitiæ.* (Syntag. Theol. 902)

What pre-exists in God in a simple and unified way is divided among creatures as many and varied perfections. The many perfections of creatures correspond to one single source which they represent in varied and complex ways. Thus the different and complex concepts that we have in mind correspond to something altogether simple which they enable us imperfectly to understand. (*ST* 1a 3.4)⁶⁸

Polanus goes on to specify that these essential properties our understanding conceives by means of distinct concepts are not parts of God, nor separable from God or his essence, nor the result of distinct divine acts, nor ever absent from God's essence, nor subsequent to his essence, nor accidental to his being, but are in God 'ideas and essential forms'.⁶⁹

Polanus lastly reminds us that because our predication of properties to God is always in one sense improper, the plurality of divine predications exists for us, but this plurality is not in God:

There are not (properly speaking) many properties in God, but one only; nothing of which is other than the divine essence itself, which is one, whatsoever it is; but in respect to us it is as if many properties are meant because for us they are many. In God, however, they are in fact one, differing only by reason, and, by reason, they are many⁷⁰

The plurality that arises in our understanding of God is an adaptive accommodation to our conceptual incapacity. The essential properties,

may be distinguished among themselves more as they are adapted to our understanding, than as they truly are, (for which creature understands them as they are?); since we cannot by reason explain or understand such a super-essential and super-heavenly nature except with our words and according to our power. Our intellect cannot know in one simple act, but necessarily has many distinctions and acts so as to know everything else and thus also to know God.⁷¹

In sum, for Polanus the unity of the attributes arises because the attributes are all the one and simple essence of God understood by us according to differing conceptions. These

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Questions on God*, ed. Brian Leftow and Brian Davies, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146.

⁶⁹ *ideæ & formæ essentiales* (*Syntag. Theol.* 903).

⁷⁰ *Non sunt (proprie loquendo) multae proprietates in Deo, sed una tantum, quæ nihil aliud est, quàm ipsa divina essentia, quæ una est, quicquid est: sed respectu nostri quasi multae proprietates dicuntur, quia in nobis sunt multae: in Deo autem sunt una reipsa; ratione tantum differunt, rationeque multae sunt.* (*Syntag. Theol.* 904)

⁷¹ *Et quidem non ipsius Dei, sed nostri ratione, nimirum magis ut intelligentiæ nostræ accommodantur, quàm ut revera sunt, (quæ enim creatura eas ut sunt, intelligeret) inter se distinguuntur; quoniam tam υπερθεσιν και υπερθερανιον φυσιν explicare aut intelligere non nisi nostris verbis & pro nostri captus ratione possumus. Intellectus noster non potest uno simplici actu, sed necesse habet multis distinctisque actibus, ut alia omnia; ita & Deum cognoscere.* (*Syntag. Theol.* 904)

conceptions do correspond to God's essence and convey a knowledge of it, but the distinction of the attributes exists only in the distinction between the multiple rational acts required for us to conceive of God's essence in its unparalleled excellence, as far as we are able.

2. Barth's Conceptualism in the Göttingen Dogmatics

In *Göttingen Dogmatics* Barth addresses the relationship between God's essence and his attributes, and is appreciative of the conceptualism of Protestant Orthodoxy, identifying his own position with their rejection of both nominalism and realism. Yet Barth's intention to centre theological knowledge upon the fact of revelation already leads him to suspect latent 'Platonism' in Polanus, and to seek a different grounding for a conceptualist account of the relation of essence and attribute than the causal relationship between creator and creature.

In *Göttingen Dogmatics* Barth exhibits the conviction that in the attributes we have the revelation of a fullness of perfections in the divine nature. The thesis of *GD* §17 says: 'God's attributes are the conditions under which his nature makes itself known to us by the Word. It does not reveal itself to us as an undifferentiated unit, but as the fulness of its communicable and incommunicable perfections.'⁷² Although the divine nature is not an 'undifferentiated unit', still Barth sees the multiplicity of the attributes as signifying human incapacity to understand God. Of the attributes he says, 'their manifoldness reminds us of the limitation of our concepts and of their relation to the fact that our conceiving can only be an attempt at understanding.'⁷³ This linking of the multiplicity of attributes to the limitations inherent in our conceiving is a touchstone of the conceptualist manner of relating unity of essence to plurality of attributes.

In *GD* §17.II Barth enters 'The Debate about Objectivity and Subjectivity', regarding it as 'a vital matter'.⁷⁴ He rejects nominalism, the assertion of 'the undifferentiated character of the divine nature, which does violence to revelation, and indeed denies it, leading ultimately to the unknowability of God'.⁷⁵ If God's nature 'cannot give itself to be known by us', and our knowing 'cannot press on to the nature of God', then revelation is impossible and our conceptions cannot be rooted in the true nature of God.⁷⁶ Although he rejects nominalism, Barth does not want to tip from nominalism into a realism that divides the nature of God in distinguishing various attributes: 'we must take care not to oppose to the unequivocal

⁷² Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 375.

⁷³ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 375.

⁷⁴ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 378.

⁷⁵ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 378.

⁷⁶ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 379.

nominalistic thesis a no less unequivocal realistic one to the effect that in God's nature there is in fact a quantitative or qualitative division and distinction of attributes,⁷⁷ He signals his appreciation of the Protestant Orthodox as he embarks on his discussion:

For this reason our older Protestant fathers (with a sureness of instinct that always surprises us in the theologoumena of earlier centuries, no matter how baroque their garb) refused to be drawn into this apparently inescapable alternative of "in God or in us", and stated that the divine attributes are distinguished from God's nature and from one another, not nominally or really but formally, namely, according to our mode of conceiving, but not without a sure basis of distinction.⁷⁸

Barth affirms the touchstones of conceptualism: the rejection of a realism which makes 'a quantitative or qualitative division and distinction of attributes' in God's nature, and the assertion that the distinctions between the essence and attributes, and between the attributes are made 'according to our mode of conceiving, but not without a sure basis of distinction'—a *fundamentum in re* or foundation in the thing.⁷⁹ The attributes in their distinction and juxtaposition are 'an objective description of the nature of God entering into relation to the world and us, and known in this relation'.⁸⁰

However, Barth's understanding of God's knowability differs from the generally Thomistic scheme of the Protestant Scholastics, and this will distinguish Barth's account from theirs. The Thomist scheme grounds the knowability of God by reason in the likeness between God and creatures arising from the fact that God is the efficient cause of creatures and so creaturely perfections imperfectly resemble their source, which is the perfection of God's essence. But Barth grounds the knowability of God to us in his act of revelation, which makes him knowable to us by his action upon our faculties of conception and comprehension. He says, 'The presupposition with which the antinomialist or supranomialist view that we adopt here either stands or falls is that there is a kind of divine ratiocination of our reason, an objective knowability of God determined by the divine act.'⁸¹ The relation of origination between creature and creator is not the presupposition for the objective grounding of the various attributes in the divine essence. Rather, '[e]ngendered by the act of divine revelation,

⁷⁷ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 379.

⁷⁸ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 379.

⁷⁹ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 379.

⁸⁰ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 380.

⁸¹ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 380–81.

and grounded in it, [our concepts of the attributes] arise and are formed in the act of the knowledge of revelation.’⁸²

This leads Barth to take Polanus to task for basing the positive predication of communicable attributes on the analogy derived from the fact that ‘[t]here is no perfection of creaturely things that does not have its most perfect idea or reason in God.’⁸³ Barth says of this method for finding ‘a basis in principle for us to speak about positive predicates in God’, that, ‘it is Platonism’, and that, ‘it impermissibly fills out a concept related to revelation, which that of communicability was originally meant to be, with contents that are unmistakably philosophical and rationalistic, perhaps even trying to support it with the help of these’.⁸⁴ He does consider whether here ‘theological and philosophical interests come together’, but he is dubious.⁸⁵

So in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* Barth embraces a distinctive conceptualism, and dismisses D. F. Strauss’s claim that this conceptualism inhabited an “‘unhappy middle” between the reality and the nonreality of its concepts of the attributes’.⁸⁶ However, it is important to note the distinctiveness of Barth’s conceptualism. In Barth’s view, our knowledge of God’s being conveyed in the attributes arises neither because God is the efficient cause of created perfections, nor because the perfections of creatures are a participation in an archetype existing in God, but rather because these attributes are given to us in God’s act of self-revelation by which he is knowable and known to us. Yet it is a conceptualist view, for he affirms of the attributes that, ‘their manifoldness reminds us of the limitation of our concepts and of their relation to the fact that our conceiving can only be an attempt at understanding.’⁸⁷ The association of the manifoldness of the attributes with the limitation of our conceiving is a hallmark of conceptualism regarding the attributes.

In the years between his *Göttingen Dogmatics* and his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth left the conceptualist fold. In *Church Dogmatics* §29, Barth defends a realist view of the divine attributes, and will accept Strauss’s claim that conceptualism is an ‘unhappy middle’ that collapses in the end into nominalism. Before we come to that we consider Isaac Dorner’s account of the essence and attributes of God, because Barth himself credited Dorner (amongst others) with pioneering realist approaches such as the one he adopted in *Church Dogmatics*.

⁸² Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 381.

⁸³ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 397. See Polanus, *Syntag. Theol.* 983.

⁸⁴ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 397–98.

⁸⁵ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 398.

⁸⁶ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 381.

⁸⁷ Barth and Reiffen, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 375.

CHAPTER 2

‘The line of thought we must develop’ Isaac Dorner’s realist critique of conceptualism and his quest for the bond of divine unity

Barth says, ‘It is to the credit of certain German theologians of the 19th century that [...] they broke utterly, not only with the total, but also with the partial nominalism of the Thomistic and orthodox Protestant tradition.’ (II.1:330) He includes F. H. R. Frank, G. Thomasius and Isaac A. Dorner in this meritorious company, and signals his intention to develop their line of thought. Hence in this chapter we examine the way that Isaac Dorner criticised and recast the doctrine of God’s one essence and his many attributes in *A System of Christian Doctrine*.

Dorner judged that the tradition was, wittingly or not, infected by a *de facto* nominalism in its view of the attributes. He regarded the identification of the attributes and the essence in God as robbing God of his fullness. He sought something other than divine simplicity to serve as the bond of unity of the many distinct divine attributes in God. He found the accord joining the attributes in the unity of God’s essence in the trinitarian divine loving. The attributes are determinations of God’s being willed in accordance with God’s realisation of his being as holy love.

1. Dorner’s critique of conceptualism

Dorner’s doctrine of God opens with the doctrine of the Godhead, which treats the being, essence and attributes of God generally. In §15 he outlines the questions and issues involved in understanding and relating being, essence and attributes, and indicates his approach. He opens his introductory thesis paragraph by saying, ‘[t]he Doctrine of God is to be so treated that the doctrine of the divine attributes may be placed in an internal relation to the doctrine of the Being and Essence.’⁸⁸ The language of ‘internal relation’ indicates his concern that the attributes properly belong to God’s essence. Dorner wishes to integrate the unique divine essence and the multiplicity of diverse divine attributes in a living divine unity. He says,

⁸⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:187.

The true idea of God will bestow on us the possibility, when his existence is recognised, of treating his divine attributes in their multiplicity and abiding diversity, and also in their internal interdependence or unity, inasmuch as the doctrine of divine attributes, which is structured in accordance with God's essence, is recognised as simply the living realisation of the divine essence.⁸⁹

This contrasts with conceptualism, which holds that the simplicity of God's being there is no multiplicity or abiding diversity of attributes. Dorner's talk of 'attributes in their multiplicity and abiding diversity, and also in their internal interdependence' diverges from the traditional insistence that imagining diverse and interdependent attributes in God's being contradicts God's simplicity.

Dorner exhibits a renovating, modern spirit that frowns upon the 'customary treatment' of the doctrine of God. Dorner takes a new approach, moving through an unfolding proof of God's existence in ontological, cosmological, teleological, juridical, and moral dimensions, and concurrently moving through treatments of the essence and various attributes of God related to these different 'moments' of his proof. In this section we note important features of Dorner's critique of the tradition, and his alternative approach.

1.1 The unity of the essence and the multiplicity of the attributes should each be respected

When he touches on 'the difficult question of the distinction between the essence and the attributes', Dorner points out there is no unanimity in the tradition.⁹⁰ As he sees it, on one hand, the essence may be *contrasted* with the attributes as the 'absolute divine substance', the 'absolutely indivisible being'.⁹¹ Then, 'the attributes come into no internal relation with the essence', and have 'no objective, but simply a subjective importance', and God becomes, 'a mere empty *Ov*, or the *Ovτως Ov*'.⁹² Dorner regards this view, which we might identify as nominalist, as problematic, for it is unthinkable that the divine essence does not truly and by nature include 'for example, wisdom, love and righteousness'.⁹³ On the other hand the essence may be characterised by certain 'fundamental attributes or root ideas'.⁹⁴ That prompts 'the question how the unity of the idea of God and the multiplicity of attributes are related to

⁸⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:187. I have altered the last sentence of the translation, which in German reads: 'indem die Gottes Wesen gemäß sich gliedernde Eigenschaftenlehre nur als des göttlichen Wesens lebendige Wirklichkeit ersannt wird.'

⁹⁰ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:191.

⁹¹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:191.

⁹² Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:191.

⁹³ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:191.

⁹⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:191.

that conception.⁹⁵ Dorner wishes to see the unique essence and the multiplicity of attributes as integrated in a living divine unity. He says,

With the Essence of God we think His unique idea, as it is re-absorbed into itself out of the multiplicity of elements which constitute that idea, and thus becomes a living unique totality; but in the attributes we think the Essence of God unfolding itself into a multiplicity of determinations. There, the essential unity, aim and result are given; here, the multiplicity of attributes springs forth from the eternal in living unity.⁹⁶

While Polanus refers everything in God back to the principal unity of God absent every difference, Dorner, by contrast, moves evenly between unity and multiplicity, without prioritising unity. Dorner sees a reciprocal duality to the task of relating the essence and attributes of God:

In order to bring both elements to view and compass the whole problem, we shall have first, from the multiplicity of divine attributes which is to be gained, to find their unity, and thus to find the central divine Essence. We must then endeavour from the rightly defined divine unity to describe constructively the multiplicity of the attributes existent in the divine Essence as the eternal radiance issuing from Him.⁹⁷

1.2 Conceptualism is untenable

Dorner argues that conceptualism collapses either into realism or nominalism. He identifies first the nominalist view that ‘there are no attributes in the divine Essence’, and that ‘at most the different divine activities or relations to the world can be pointed out as his attributes’.⁹⁸ He next identifies the realist view that ‘attributes exist in God which are objectively distinct from each other’ prior to and independent of our thinking.⁹⁹ He then identifies a third view that,

sees, indeed, no distinction in the divine essence, but which does not ascribe a mere subjective character to the attributes that we ascribe to God. A divine Essence, according to this view, rather presents itself under many aspects; God, though one, displays Himself variously to us.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:191.

⁹⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:192.

⁹⁷ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:192.

⁹⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:194.

⁹⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:194.

¹⁰⁰ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:195.

This is the conceptualist view, but Dorner does not think it is stable or tenable. He reasons that,

if it is verily *God* who manifests Himself diversely, and not merely our organization which reflects Him in different ways, that fact refers us back to objective distinctions in God; for otherwise He would display, not Himself, but something else different to Himself, and substituted for Himself. But if God does not show *Himself* in his attributes, the distinction between them is simply subjective.¹⁰¹

For Dorner, either the diversity of objectively distinct attributes in our conceptualisation of God really belongs to God (realism) or it is entirely grounded in us (nominalism), but it cannot be what conceptualists claim, namely grounded in God without being in God. Hence Dorner thinks the choice is really only between nominalism and realism, and he thinks the tradition has opted for *de facto* nominalism.

1.3 A nominalism that destroys the knowledge of God infects the tradition

Dorner sees nominalism as entailing the denial of the knowledge of God. He says, ‘The opinion that the divine attributes are mere subjective conceptions must end in plunging them all into a unity without diversity, and [...] that would be an absolute denial of any knowledge of God’.¹⁰² He also regards such nominalism as ‘widely received in the ancient Church’.¹⁰³ Dorner says it was favoured by Augustine and finds expression in the thesis that in God all the attributes are identical to one another and to the whole divine essence. Dorner regards this as forcing us to the view that, ‘the divine essence proper is merely indefinite and infinite being, [...] equivalent to infinite emptiness, and scarcely distinguishable from nothing.’¹⁰⁴ Dorner acknowledges that the tradition nonetheless asserts that ‘this infinite being cherishes within himself an infinite fulness’, but he doubts that this can be coherently maintained.¹⁰⁵

Dorner identifies what is, as he sees it, a *de facto* nominalism as the doctrine of Aquinas, and the Protestant Scholastics. He regards John Gerhard and Johannes Quenstedt as teaching it when Gerhard says that, ‘the attributes are simply the divine essence itself, conceived by means of our inadequate ideas, that the divine attributes *nec ab essentia nec inter se realiter seu ex natura rei distinguur*’, and when Quenstedt says that ‘*Si proprie et accurate loqui*

¹⁰¹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:195.

¹⁰² Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:195.

¹⁰³ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:195.

¹⁰⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:195.

¹⁰⁵ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:196.

velimus Deus nullas habet proprietates'.¹⁰⁶ Dorner acknowledges that Quenstedt denies that the attributes are 'merely subjective or arbitrary', believing that '*we are compelled* so to think them', that the attributes are 'an apprehension of God, as he wishes to be for our sakes' and that 'the divine simplicity does not abolish the *veritas*, but only the combination of the essential attributes'.¹⁰⁷ Yet Dorner points to the qualification Quenstedt makes when he says, '[t]he representation made by the attributes cannot be of something diverse in God'.¹⁰⁸ Dorner sees this as the denial that undermines Quenstedt's opinion that 'God *possesses* all the excellences which we desire to express by the word *attribute*'.¹⁰⁹ Without diversity in God there cannot be many divine excellences.

1.4 Dorner rejects conceptualism's claim to a fundamentum in re for divine attributes.

Dorner says that conceptualism cannot have it both ways. It cannot assert that the diversity of our conceptions of God's attributes corresponds to something about his being and also assert that God's essence has no sort of internal diversity or distinction. He regards the proposal that the fullness entailed by the diversity and multiplicity of attributes can be united without diversity in a higher perfection in God as a mirage:

although the unity, in which all difference becomes swallowed up, may also be conceived of as something higher,—indeed, as that in which the whole reality of the divine attributes becomes preserved as in a fulness and unity unattainable by us,—still this preservation is only seemingly possible.¹¹⁰

For, says Dorner, what is utterly without distinction cannot give rise to what may be distinguished:

If, indeed, something in God actually corresponds with our diverse conceptions of God, then God actually has diverse attributes. But if that by which one attribute is distinguished from another is abolished in God, the essence of that attribute is abolished, and what remains is, regarded as an idea, not something higher, but something lower—wholly indefinite existence.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:196. The Latin may be translated, 'are not distinguished really or substantially either from the essence or among themselves', and 'If we wish to speak properly and accurately, God has no properties' The latter quotation is in fn. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:196.

¹⁰⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:196.

¹⁰⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:196–97.

¹¹⁰ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:197.

¹¹¹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:197.

Dorner argues that the undifferentiated *fundamentum in re* that conceptualists claim gives rise to the distinct attributes, cannot do so. Without a differentiated native basis in God's essence for the distinct attributes characterising God's external works, God's essence loses all definiteness and becomes formless and unknowable.

1.5 God's self-revelation is not subject to creaturely distortion

Against the view that God cannot overcome human incapacity and reveal himself to us as he is, Dorner asserts God's freedom to reveal himself to human beings as he is, uncompromised by our creatureliness. When Philippi says, 'We only know God as he exists relatively to us in revelation, not as he is in himself, in a form answering our thought, in relation to which he would reveal himself',¹¹² Dorner comments:

That sounds as if God desires to reveal nothing of what he is in himself (and to his essential nature his love belongs), as if God could and would reveal himself otherwise than he is, or as if the creature were, so to speak, a material which *must* distort the pure divine ray, and were able to thwart the divine desire of revelation, and that, as has been well observed, not because of sin, but because of its creaturely nature,—an opinion which must lead to Dualism.¹¹³

Dorner's next lines are those which Barth quotes:

Since God cannot on the one hand desire to appear otherwise than he is, and nor does a dualistic power hinder his will to reveal himself, there only remains to see in the divine revelations of himself, revelations of what he is and how he is (not revelations of what and how he is not), and thus to see the revelation of objective attributes.¹¹⁴

Dorner argues that if the diversity of attributes arises *unavoidably* in our creaturely conception of God's essence, then God *is not able* to reveal himself to us as he is, which undermines God's omnipotent willing in a way Dorner is unwilling to accept. Nor can it be true that the God who loves would be content to appear other than he really is. So God must be in himself as he appears to us, possessing a multiplicity of essential attributes.

¹¹² Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:200.

¹¹³ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:200.

¹¹⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:200. *alt.* The German reads, 'Da Gott weder anders tann scheinen wollen, als sein, noch eine dualistische Macht seinen Offenbarungswillen hindert, so wird nur übrig bleiben, in Gottes Offenbarungen seiner selbst Offenbarungen davon, was und wie er ist (nicht was und wie er nicht ist), also die Offenbarung objectiver Eigenschaften zu sehen.' (*System der Christlichen Glaubenslehre*, Berlin Verlag von Wilhelm Herk (Besserche Buchhandlung) 1879. p. 200.

1.6 Dorner's objective view of the attributes

Dorner treats briefly and in general his view 'that the differences between the divine attributes have an objective significance'. We note three features of his treatment: the mutual non-identity of the attributes, the supposition of a governing principle for the internal relations of the attributes, and the rejection of any dichotomous classification of the attributes.

Dorner argues that the objective view of the attributes denies the mutual identity of divine attributes, and thus protects truths about God that the gospel affirms.

Evangelical faith does not allow an identification of righteousness with love or grace, but a distinction between them without separation. So undoubtedly volition and knowledge are united in God, but to identify the two would be equivalent to saying that what God knows he also wills, an inference which is not permissible as regards evil. The divine knowledge has a wider reach than the divine will, without imperilling the divine unity.¹¹⁵

Dorner argues that identifying God's knowing and his willing entails that God wills all things (including evil) because he knows all things. The affirmation of objectively non-identical attributes in God is essential to avoid the conclusion that God is equally the author of good and evil. This denial of the mutual identity of the attributes in God is a significant departure from the tradition, and not required by realism (cf. Scotus, a realist who endorsed the identity thesis).

An objective view of the attributes might regard the attributes as 'merely co-ordinate' so that their 'mutual relations' are a 'matter of indifference', but Dorner says we should rather seek a governing principle in God by which we may apprehend the internal relations of the attributes, as sense of that which is 'innermost and highest' in God.¹¹⁶ This principle governing the objective combination of the attributes would be fittingly understood to be the divine essence. Dorner's quest for this principle which will express the innermost and highest in God and be the bond of unity of the many divine attributes will stretch throughout his treatment of the Godhead and into his treatment of the Trinity.

Regarding the division of the divine attributes, Dorner expresses dissatisfaction with various dichotomous schemes. Dorner's realist view of the objective and internal distinction of

¹¹⁵ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:201.

¹¹⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:202.

attributes united in the essence of God, means he cannot admit a separation that he sees presupposed in the dichotomies:

What lies at the basis of most of these well-known distinctions, is the distinction between attributes which belong to God in himself, and which belong to him relatively to the world. But the divine relation to the world has its ceaseless base in internal divine attributes, and adds nothing to what must be grounded in God.¹¹⁷

Dorner's own original method of division discusses the attributes as consequences of various 'moments'—ontological, cosmological etc—in an unfolding and layered proof of God's existence. At each stage of the exposition he treats a related subset of divine attributes.

2. Dorner's quest for the bond of unity of the attributes

Dorner's rejection of the mutual identity of the divine attributes with God's essence and with one another accompanies suspicion of divine simplicity as he understands it to operate in the tradition. Dorner does not turn to a doctrine of divine simplicity to explain the unity of the attributes in God's essence. Rather, he wants to understand the unity of God's essence as including a multiplicity of distinct attributes in an interdependent harmony of intelligible relations. Ultimately, for Dorner, God's living love will be the bond of unity of the attributes, and the role of simplicity will be to deny composition to God, but not to explain the unity of the attributes in the essence.

2.1 Divine simplicity must be formulated so that divine unity carries plurality within itself

In §19 Dorner rejects a view of simplicity that implies that 'all opposites are eternally reconciled' in God.¹¹⁸ Rather, God is a definite being and his simplicity is the definite self-identity upon which his unchangeableness is built. Dorner judges the main way the tradition presents divine simplicity is as a negative attribute, excluding from God contradiction, composition, dissolubility, etc¹¹⁹ as well as 'all objective difference in the divine essence', and 'objectively distinct attributes'.¹²⁰ Dorner is unhappy with this. Given his realist view the questions arise, 'How does the truth or plurality of the divine attributes square with the divine simplicity?'¹²¹ What is the bond of unity of the attributes? Dorner is not ready to answer these questions, but says, 'if such a bond is to be found, it is to be hoped that simplicity may be

¹¹⁷ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:205.

¹¹⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:235.

¹¹⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:236.

¹²⁰ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:236.

¹²¹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:236.

lifted above a merely negative meaning.¹²² Dorner believes a revised doctrine of divine simplicity ‘must be compatible with the fulness of the divine attributes’, and in this revision, the plurality of divine attributes are to be seen as ‘eternally brought back [...] to internal harmony’ by the divine unity.¹²³ Dorner says this much here:

The correct idea of the simplicity of God will rather be of such a form that the supreme unity must suffice to be the principle of a plurality, and is therefore not to be thought of as a mere opposite to plurality; [...] The divine unity must rather be that unity which carries plurality within itself and controls it, which eternally interposes itself by the agency of differences, and in itself indissolubly combines them.¹²⁴

The *plural unity* or *united plurality* that Dorner calls for here resembles the *multiple simplicity* or *simple multiplicity* that, as we shall see, Barth finds in Augustine and wishes to revive.

2.2 God’s being is harmonious life which is self-conscious, self-determined Spirit

In developing a description of God’s being compatible with this unity of simplicity and multiplicity, Dorner makes fundamental use of the claim that God’s being is life. In §20 Dorner regards God as both ‘the absolute reality of his being and the absolute originating power of his reality’,¹²⁵ conceiving in God ‘a circular motion of originating that is at the same time originated, or being originated that is the same time activity, to be expressed in the proposition that *God is absolute Life*.’¹²⁶ In §21 Dorner expounds God’s life thus:

God may not allowably be thought as mere being in repose, or merely as ideal and thinking. As absolute life, he has a *πληρωμα*, a world of real forces in himself. He bears within him an inexhaustible spring, by virtue of which he is life eternally streaming forth, but also eternally streaming back into himself.¹²⁷

In §22b, Dorner proposes that ‘The Deity is the absolutely harmonious Life’.¹²⁸

The absolute life, we therefore say, is absolutely and essentially full of purpose in the fulness of its potentialities. It is not simply free from contradiction; the divine potencies of life are in

¹²² Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:236.

¹²³ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:237.

¹²⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:237.

¹²⁵ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:257.

¹²⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:257–58.

¹²⁷ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:259.

¹²⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:269.

harmonious equilibrium, the divine life is essentially retrogressive purpose, self-purpose. The divine life, further, is essentially glorious, essentially forms a beautiful, eternal and harmonious rhythm, and this primary beauty typically presents measure, the eternal order of the world (εὐταξία), the perfect organism.¹²⁹

Further, this harmonious life is Spirit, ‘a peculiar being transcending nature and its categories, which is not merely in degree of higher worth than all finite good things, but which is also the absolute final end.’¹³⁰ Indeed, God is ‘absolute ethical Spirit’ and ‘absolute Intelligence and Wisdom’,¹³¹ and this can be so only ‘if self-consciousness and self-determination, that is to say if personality belong to God’.¹³² Dorner concludes his doctrine of the Godhead with problems outstanding that will be resolved only in the doctrine of the Trinity. One of those problems is how the divine essence provides the bond of unity for the multiplicity of objectively distinct divine attributes.

2.3 God’s trinitarian essence is the realisation of holy love, which is the bond of the attributes

Dorner brings his doctrine of God to a crowning point by a rational exposition of God’s trinitarian essence as the realisation of holy love in the eternally absolute personality. His account may be condensed thus: the divine mode of being which is the Father is ethical necessity, that is, the knowledge and instantiation of the good as a necessity, which is holiness.¹³³ The divine mode of being which is the Son is ethical freedom, that is, the free and willing choice of the necessarily good.¹³⁴ The mode of being which is the Spirit is the union of these former modes of being. By the Spirit the Son finds ‘in the depths of the ethically necessary of the Father, the volition of the being of the free, i.e. himself’, for freedom is necessary to the true realisation of the good.¹³⁵ By the Spirit, ‘God as the Father in the free finds and beholds the ethically necessary as freely willed contents, that is, finds and beholds himself.’¹³⁶ Thus there is, in God’s triunity, a union of the knowledge necessary to the ethical and the free choice necessary to the ethical in which ‘absolute, self-conscious, free love is effected.’¹³⁷ ‘Love is the truth of the Spirit [...] because the absolutely worthy, goodness, is brought therein to eternally living realisation’.¹³⁸

¹²⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:271.

¹³⁰ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:284.

¹³¹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:323.

¹³² Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 319, 337.

¹³³ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:432–33.

¹³⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:434–36.

¹³⁵ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:437.

¹³⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:437.

¹³⁷ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:437.

¹³⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:437.

Dorner closes his exposition of God's essential triunity by testing whether the divine unity proposed in his trinitarian doctrine 'will approve itself the bond of the plurality of the divine attributes'.¹³⁹ The thesis of §32 says that, 'divine personality, which is in its essence holy love, is also the unification and the *supreme power of all the divine attributes*'.¹⁴⁰ Dorner understands the attributes 'as determinations, which God as personal love necessarily and eternally has and wills for the eternal self-production of his own absolute ethical personality'.¹⁴¹ The centre that holds 'the principles of all the divine perfections united in itself' is love, 'the heart of God'.¹⁴² While the attributes are not all to be identified with love or seen as modes of love, love is the end for which the attributes exist in God. God, 'wills himself in all his attributes, as love requires and by virtue of love, for love is absolutely true being, the adequate form of existence of the absolute spirit'.¹⁴³ The trinitarian divine loving therefore forms the bond of unity of the attributes and is the basis for their harmony in the life of God.

Dorner then expounds God's justice as that determination of divine self-love which preserves the holy, God own essence. Other attributes may be 'presuppositions or means' of the love that lives and is eternally renewed in the heart of God.¹⁴⁴ In a special consideration of immutability, Dorner posits that 'to preserve his ethical self-identity'—i.e., to be always the God of holy love—God 'assumes diverse relations' in his participation in the world. Hence biblical passages with 'a strongly anthropopathical sound'—such as when God is said to repent—'have notwithstanding an objective and real ground'.¹⁴⁵ Dorner's final reflection is on the blessedness and all-sufficiency of God, the 'harmony and beauty of the divine life, and the eternal perception of the same'.¹⁴⁶

3. Observations and prospect

Polanus and Dorner operate very differently. Polanus marshals and presents a traditional doctrine of God that he wishes to endorse and epitomise. He does not attack the tradition as misguided, rather, he points out the errors it has rejected. Dorner, by contrast, regards the catholic tradition as infected with error regarding simplicity and the multiplicity of divine

¹³⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:454.

¹⁴⁰ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:448.

¹⁴¹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:454.

¹⁴² Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:455.

¹⁴³ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:456.

¹⁴⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:457.

¹⁴⁵ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:461.

¹⁴⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:463.

attributes in God. He consciously presents a non-traditional, reforming exposition of God's essence and attributes, on a rather original plan, culminating in a novel exposition of God's trinitarian being that posits the Triune realisation of holy love as the intelligible bond of all the divine attributes.

We consider Dorner because of our primary interest in Barth, and it is time to turn to Barth's mature treatment of the being, essence and attributes of God in the *Church Dogmatics*. Here, Barth applauds the line of thought he found in Dorner and signals his intention to develop it himself. We will note this influence as Barth adopts and adapts certain things we have seen here in Dorner, especially the emphasis on God's being as life, and some of Dorner's characterisations and criticisms of the tradition and its mainstream conceptualism. In the *Göttingen Dogmatics* Barth had set out a modified conceptualism, but in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth will claim to repudiate conceptualism entirely and present a realist account reformulating the relation of the one and simple God to his many distinct perfections.

As we explore what Barth has to say in the chapters that follow, we will offer fuller evaluations of that in Dorner which we find repeated in Barth, for the critique of the tradition that they share has been itself subject to criticism. We will also see that Barth does not follow Dorner at every point. Barth's acceptance of the identity thesis Dorner rejects will prove an early parting of the ways between Barth's approach and Dorner's account of the attributes. Indeed, Barth develops his doctrine of the divine essence and attributes in a fundamentally different way to Dorner, and we will maintain that the influence of Dorner on Barth in this section of *Church Dogmatics* consists in, first, the critique of conceptualism and the tradition, second, the principle that we must accept the objective multiplicity of God's attributes if we are to take revelation with full seriousness, and third, the idea of God's being as life.

CHAPTER 3

‘God lives his perfect life in the abundance of many individual and distinct perfections’

In this chapter we examine the realist approach to the essence-attribute relation that Barth advocated in the *Church Dogmatics*. We begin with Barth’s approach to the question of the essence of God, which Barth treats in §28. Here we encounter determinative principles that will shape Barth’s account of God’s being and his attributes. First among these is the principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation. In accordance with this principle, Barth develops his account of the actuality of God (a term he prefers to essence). His important summary statement describing this divine actuality is that God is the One who loves in freedom. This description of God’s being contains a duality of love and freedom that Barth will make extensive use of in his exposition of the divine perfections.

In the second and third sections of this chapter we turn to §29 where Barth addresses the question of the divine essence and attributes. Here Barth insists that God is both one and many, for to deny that God is both one and many is to risk separating the Lord from his glory. Along with Dorner, Barth charges that the tradition is corrupted by a nominalism which relativises the multiplicity of God’s perfections under the influence of an overmastering, devouring idea of divine simplicity. Barth believes that in the mainstream conceptualism, which he calls ‘semi-nominalism’, the many perfections are ultimately regarded as secondary, improper and merely subjective in relation to the simple unity of God’s being. With Dorner, Barth argues that the conceptualist settlement of the essence-attribute relation actually conceals a *de facto* nominalism. Hence it must be abandoned, and multiplicity must be placed on a par with simplicity in the being of God. The grasp of Barth’s position that we will have by the end of this chapter will equip us, in chapter 4, to consider Muller’s critique of Barth, and to advance our own.

1. God is the One who loves in freedom

Barth develops his account of what he calls God’s actuality in §28, where he names God as the One who loves in freedom, and here we take some time to explore this foundational description of God’s actuality.

1.1 God is who he is in the act of his revelation

In §28 Barth begins his account of the ‘actuality’ (*Wirklichkeit*) of God. This is a term which Barth says, ‘holds together being and act, instead of tearing them apart like the idea of “essence.”’ (II.1:262).¹⁴⁷ The *actuality* of God becomes Barth’s dynamic, fused basic concept of divine essence, existence and activity.¹⁴⁸ This divine actuality is known in accordance with the crucial and foundational principle that ‘God is who He is in the act of His revelation’ (II.1:257). This principle means that the ‘sphere of [God’s] action and working as it is revealed to us in His Word’ (II.1:260) is the place—and the only place—where we can form and fill out our understanding of the being of God. God’s Word reveals God’s action and working as works of salvation. These, and only these, establish our knowledge of God as the Lord, and as our Lord: ‘What God is as God, the divine individuality and characteristics, the *essentia* or “essence” of God, is something which we shall encounter either at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Saviour, or not at all.’ (II.1:261)

The revelation of God is ‘the revelation of the name which by which He wills to be known and addressed by us’ and which is ‘the disclosure and description ... of His innermost hidden essence.’ (II.1:273) Indeed, ‘in the very revelation of His name there occurs the act which is His being to all eternity.’ (II.1:273) In §28.2-3 Barth attempts a distillation of the inmost essence of God from the divine self-naming disclosed in the act of revelation, i.e., in the act of God dealing with us as Lord and Saviour, an act proclaimed in the gospel, testified to in the Scriptures and achieved in Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁹

Barth contrasts what he is doing with what he sees the tradition and Protestant Orthodoxy doing. Barth charges the tradition with constructing a theology of the God of pure being, of metaphysical abstraction, by proceeding according to general reasoning about what God must be, and not according to who God has revealed himself to be in the act of his revelation (II.261). Barth says of the tradition,

¹⁴⁷ The standard English translation translates *Wirklichkeit* with ‘reality’, so that the English chapter title obscures the connection Barth intends between the title and the thesis of §28: ‘God is who He is in the *act* of His revelation’ (II.1:257). Price and Asbill suggest that ‘actuality’ may be a better translation. Asbill in a footnote says that Barth himself did indicate a preference for rendering *Wirklichkeit* as ‘actuality’ in another context. See Brian D. Asbill, *The Freedom of God for Us*, 75 (and fn. 53); Robert Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 16.

¹⁴⁸ This actualism—i.e., a theological ontology characterised by act and not, e.g., substance—has long been noted as a motif of Barth’s theological thinking. See George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 30–32.

¹⁴⁹ Price comments on Barth’s manner of proceeding: ‘The task of a doctrine of the divine attributes, that of describing God, has often been aided by a consideration of the biblical names of God. Here Barth takes up this tradition, in what may seem like a highly presumptuous attempt to give God a new name. Yet this naming of God is simply an obedient response to revelation. This name captures precisely who the entire scope of creation, reconciliation and redemption shows God to be.’ Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 21.

It was certainly right to define the essence of God: *Essentia Dei est ipsa Deitas, qua Deus a se et per se absolute est et existit* [...].¹⁵⁰ But even in the definition of this *a se et per se* there ought never to have been an abstraction from the Trinity, and that means from the act of divine revelation. (II.1:261)

Here we encounter Barth's discontent with the very foundations of the tradition as found in Polanus. The question arises as to how accurately Barth reads and characterises the tradition as he offers such criticism. We remark here only that Barth is perhaps unfair not to have given Polanus credit for his earlier and more foundational statement about God: 'God is uncreated Spirit, existing from himself, one in essence, and triune in the persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'¹⁵¹ This description of God, which Polanus buttresses with Scripture, is not abstracted from the Trinity, and it provides the frame in which Polanus's later statement, quoted by Barth, should be located.

1.2 God lives

Barth characterises God's being as the event of his action, and further specifies the event of this divine action as God's life— 'God's being is *life*' (II.1:263). The attribution of life to God is not metaphor, but a description of 'God Himself as the One He is' (II.1:263). Barth makes the life of God the first of God's essential properties, the first characterisation of God's being-in-act to be discussed. Classically it does not enjoy this pride of place but for Barth it is foundational:¹⁵²

In the *Gottingen Dogmatics*, Barth did not take time between speaking of God as the subject of the event of his revelation and speaking of God as the 'thinking, willing, feeling I' (*GD* I:368) to speak of God's being as life. But in the *Church Dogmatics*, before he speaks of God's personal being, he speaks of God's being as *life*. We might see here Dorner's influence, recalling his proposition that '*God is absolute Life*',¹⁵³ and 'the Deity is the absolutely harmonious Life'.¹⁵⁴ Robert Sherman suggests Barth found Dorner's essay on immutability, with its emphasis on God's *vitality*, as he prepared *Church Dogmatics* II.1.¹⁵⁵ Barth acknowledged the influence of this essay in his treatment of divine constancy

¹⁵⁰ 'The essence of God is Deity itself, by which God is and exists from himself and through himself absolutely'. EN14 *CD* Study Ed. vol. 8, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ *Deus est Spiritus increatus, existens a seipso unus essentiâ, at trinus personis Pater, Filius & Spiritus Sanctus*. (*Syntag. Theol.* 857)

¹⁵² e.g., Aquinas treats God's simplicity next after his existence (*ST* 1a 3) and comes to God's life in Question 18. Polanus in his *Syntagma* considers simplicity as the first of the first class of God's essential properties (*Syntag. Theol.* II.8) and life as the first of the second class (*Syntag. Theol.* II.15).

¹⁵³ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:257–58.

¹⁵⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:269.

¹⁵⁵ Dorner and Williams, *Divine Immutability*; Sherman, "Isaak August Dorner on Divine Immutability," 393–94.

(II.1:493). If Sherman is right, Dorner may well have inspired Barth's affirmation of life as the 'fundamental element in the divine being' (I.1:322).

Barth further specifies the act of God's being as the act of a person, an act carried out in a unity of spirit and nature, by the knowing and willing 'I' who 'realises and unites [...] the fulness of all being' (II.1:268). This act is uniquely self-moved, so that, uniquely, God's being is 'His own, conscious willed and executed decision' (II.1:271) and hence '*propriissime solus Deus vivere did potest*' (II.1:272).¹⁵⁶

1.3 God loves

The 'primary and decisive thing' that the divine name has to say to us is that 'God is He who, without having to do so, seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us.' (II.1:273) This statement prefigures Barth's description of God as the One who loves in freedom. God acts 'without having to do so' (in freedom), and because fellowship with God is the greatest possible blessing, '[w]e recognise and appreciate this blessing when we describe God's being more specifically in the statement that He is the One who loves.' (II.1:275)

The essence of God is the particular divine loving we learn of in the gospel, and not love as we might define it generally (II.1:274, 277-80). And 'God loves' is not a statement that can be left behind:

Whatever else we may have to understand and acknowledge in relation to the divine being, it will always have to be a definition of this being of His as the One who loves. All our further insights about who and what God is must revolve round this mystery—the mystery of His loving. In a certain sense they can only be repetitions and amplifications of the one statement that "God loves." (II.1:283-4)

This is a conviction that Barth will carry through his whole doctrine of the perfections, which he sees as an ever-richer repetition and amplification of the meaning of the fundamental statement, 'God is', which means 'God lives' and 'God loves', and will soon be expanded to 'God loves in freedom'. The treatments of the divine perfections are then all themselves repetitions and amplifications of the truth that God loves in freedom. We are always talking in new ways about the same Subject, deepening our understanding, although not thereby introducing new elements not previously implicit in the earlier statements. Barth is concerned

¹⁵⁶ 'Most properly speaking, God alone can be said to live' EN39 CD Study Ed. vol 8 p. 16. Cf. Polanus, *Syntag. Theol.* 986.

to preserve and underscore the unity of God's being, and integrate tightly the perfections in and with one another.

Identifying God's being with his loving suggests that Barth might be on the way to joining Dorner in identifying God's loving as a governing principle in the being of God, and the bond of unity of all the perfections. Yet we should observe how different Barth's foundation for the doctrine of the Godhead is to Isaac Dorner's. As we have seen in chapter 2, section 2.2 above, Dorner describes the essence of God as his loving. He says, 'Love is the supreme, the only adequate definition of the Essence of God, or definition of God, if it is rightly thought, namely if it is thought as that unity of the ethically necessary and the free which is at the same time the principle of self-preservation and self-communication.'¹⁵⁷

Two important differences between Barth and Dorner should be noted. First and fundamentally, Dorner has produced a doctrine of God's triune loving rationally derived from the idea of God as the 'primary ethical Essence', the 'primary Goodness'.¹⁵⁸ Barth proceeds totally differently, eschewing all thought of deriving the contents of Christian faith by rational means from general ideas or principles. Instead, Barth takes who God is in the act of his revelation as the only basis for knowledge of God, whether in his triunity or his perfections. Second, in speaking of the divine loving, Dorner primarily means the divine loving of Father, Son and Holy Spirit prior to all divine love *ad extra*. But Barth means by the divine loving the love of God for us in Jesus Christ—God's free seeking and creating of fellowship with us. For Barth, only in knowing God's loving as his love for us can we come to know the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, since God is who he is in the act of his revelation. Barth could not tread Dorner's road of rightly thinking out what God must be to arrive at the triune loving. So despite the identification of divine loving as a description of God's essence that Barth and Dorner share, we should expect the significant differences just noted to limit what detailed influence Barth might receive from Dorner as he develops his doctrine.

¹⁵⁷ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:454.

¹⁵⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:427. Dorner's introduction describes the aim of systematic theology as 'to bring the immediate and matter-of-fact certainty, which faith possesses of its contents, to scientific cognition, or to the consciousness of the internal coherence and objective verification of those contents.' (17). Alfred Cave, Dorner's translator, explains Dorner's recurring term 'objective verification' (*Begründung*) as 'substantiation by reference to a wider generalisation' or, 'verification by reference to ultimate principles' (17). Barth repeatedly expresses his strong antipathy to proceeding in theology in abstraction from revelation, or according to general reasoning, especially in the treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. See, e.g., II.1:261.

1.4 In freedom

The conceptual standpoint that Barth pairs with divine love he names divine freedom, and this forms the second major focus to the exposition of the revealed essence of God's act of being. Freedom, for Barth, denotes the unique character of God's self-moved life which means God is the Lord. Divine freedom is, first, positive self-determination and, second, freedom from limitation:

freedom in its positive and proper qualities means to be grounded in one's own being, to be determined and moved by oneself. This is the freedom of the divine life and love. In this positive freedom of His, God is also unlimited, unrestricted and unconditioned from without. (II.1:301)

Divine freedom means divine freedom in his act of loving, of seeking and creating fellowship with us. This act should not be understood through any reductive conceptual lens, which would end up straitening our conception of God, but should be understood in all the richness of God's self-revelation. God,

has the freedom in all His *opus ad extra* to remain the One who He is in an apparently inexhaustible abundance of distinctions which have to be noted. And He can be a valid object of our knowledge only if we do not deny Him this freedom and the apparently overwhelming richness of distinctions within His being, but conscientiously reckon with it at every point, being concerned only to realise and accept Him as He is. (II.1:316)

This affirmation of the inescapable presence in our knowledge of God of many distinctions within his being, and the rejection of any project that would make these distinctions improper to God's being, serves as a prelude to the coming denial that the multiplicity of distinct divine perfections is improper to the being of God. Price is correct to say that here,

Barth is preparing the reader for the introduction of the formal concept of divine perfections in §29. As Barth will elaborate, both in §29 as well as in his discussion of the divine unity in §31, the unity and simplicity of God's being do not exclude, but include, the rich multiplicity of the divine life.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 30–31.

2. God lives in both unity and multiplicity, and his perfections are both one and many

The thesis at the head of §29 indicates the realist direction that Barth's account of divine attributes will take:

God lives His perfect life in the abundance of many individual and distinct perfections. Each of these is perfect in itself and in combination with all the others. For whether it is a form of love in which God is free, or a form of freedom in which God loves, it is nothing else but God Himself, His one, simple, distinctive being. (II.1:322)

Note the interplay of singular and plural. Barth begins and ends with the singular ('his perfect life' and 'his one, simple, distinctive being'), and in the middle we find plurality ('many individual and distinct perfections', perfections in combination, some which are forms of love and others which are forms of freedom). In this interplay, plurality is not subordinated to singularity. The one life of God possesses an 'abundance of many individual and distinct perfections'. This strikes a different note to Polanus, whose first axiom subordinates all difference in God's being to unity when he avers that the essential properties of God do not differ among themselves, 'whatever is in God, is One; and from that principal Unity every difference and every magnitude must be entirely absent. In God is nothing that is not either essence or person.'¹⁶⁰ In Barth, the first thing is not that every difference is absent from God's prime unity, but that in that unity an abundance of individual and distinct perfections is present. In this even-handed alternation between the oneness and plurality at the outset of discussion the divine essence and attributes, Barth is more like Dorner, who put it thus:

With the Essence of God, we think His unique idea, as it is re-absorbed into itself out of the multiplicity of elements which constitute that idea, and thus becomes a living unique totality; but in the attributes we think the Essence of God unfolding itself into a multiplicity of determinations.¹⁶¹

We note this difference between Barth and Dorner, however: Dorner's formulations relating essence and attribute above and elsewhere omit reference to the simplicity of God or the identification of the attributes with the whole being of God. Barth, by contrast, says that each perfection 'is nothing else but God Himself, His one, simple, distinctive being' (II.1:322).

¹⁶⁰ *quicquid in Deo est, UNUM est; à prima autem Unitate omnis prorsus differentia, omnisque numerus abesse debet. In Deo nihil est, quod non sit aut essentia aut persona.* (Syntag. Theol. 901)

¹⁶¹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:192.

Barth's thesis does not quite endorse the mutual identity of the perfections explicitly, but it is close. He will affirm their identity soon enough.

2.1 God's perfect life

Barth's formulation of divine perfection is thoroughly integrated with his essential description of God as the one who loves in freedom: 'God's being consists in the fact that He is the One who loves in freedom. In this He is the perfect being: the being which is itself perfection and so the standard of all perfection'. (II.1:322) While the tradition tended to define God's perfection through the affirmation that God suffered no lack, but possessed the perfections of all things,¹⁶² for Barth, divine perfection is the perfection of God's loving in freedom, the perfection of God's particular, definite act of being. While the tradition tended to give extended attention to divine perfection as a divine attribute,¹⁶³ Barth moves quickly from the one perfection of God to the many perfections of God, bringing his characterisation of God's being as *life* to the fore again:

It is as we return to life as the fundamental element in the divine being that we also move forward to God's perfections. The one perfection of God, His loving in freedom, is lived out by Him, and therefore identical with a multitude of various and distinct types of perfection. (II.1:322)

Here Barth gives expression to his realist conviction, that the one perfection of God's being is identical with a multitude of divine perfections that remain distinct and individual even as they constitute the being of God. Because God's being is a rich multitude of perfections, we cannot know him apart from this real abundance of individual attributes.

The real God is the one God who loves in freedom, and as such is eternally rich. To know Him means to know Him again and again, in ever new ways—to know only Him, but to know Him as the perfect God, in the abundance, distinctness and variety of His perfections. (II.1:322)

Barth's choice of the term 'perfections' instead of attributes or properties also suits a realist understanding of the essential divine properties 'because it points at once to the thing itself instead of merely to its formal aspect, and because instead of something general it expresses at once that which is clearly distinctive.' (II.1:322) God's perfections are the perfections of his being, and they belong to that being as characteristic, uniquely divine perfections of that

¹⁶² e.g., Polanus, *Syntag. Theol.* 914.

¹⁶³ Cf. Aquinas *ST* 1a 4 or Polanus, *Syntag. Theol.* II.9.

very being itself. They are not merely attributions made by us, or the kind of qualities predicated of beings generally.

2.2 God is *who he is in both unity and multiplicity*

In his general treatment of the problem of God's attributes Barth wishes to set multiplicity on an even footing with unity in the being of God:

Let us first attempt to define the problem as such. In this connexion our primary affirmation must be that here too it is a question of nothing else but of God Himself. But because we are thinking of God Himself, we are thinking of the One who at the same time, in confirmation and glorification of His oneness, is also many. (II.1:323)

He is many, not merely something, not merely one. He is who He is and what He is in both unity and multiplicity. He is the One who is this many, and the many who are this One. The One is He who loves in freedom. The many are His perfections—the perfections of His life. (II.1:323)

He quotes approvingly and embraces the theological tradition in its affirmation that God is what he has, and the perfections are essential to him: 'everything which can be described as perfect is so because He is this thing. He not only has it as others might have it. He has it as His own exclusively. And not only so, but He *is* it, so that it has its essential being in Him.' (II.1:323)

Barth sees a great deal at stake in the formulation of the unity and diversity of God's perfections. He speaks of God as the Lord of glory and doctrine of the perfections as articulating the unity of the Lord and his glory. Barth warns against any cleavage of this unity. 'It is dangerous and ultimately fatal to faith', he says, if, on the one hand, we imagine that the glory of who God appears to be in relation to us—the Almighty, the Holy, the Just, the Merciful, the Omnipresent, the Eternal—belongs only to God's relations to the world, and not to God's own being (II.1:325). Then the glory donned in the divine economy may conceal an inscrutable Lord whose arbitrary will might be to sport with us. 'Again it is inevitably dangerous and ultimately fatal to faith' if we acknowledge the divine glories but not that they really belong to the Lord (II.1:326). Then the perfections have no unity, and amidst this plurality of ultimates we might prefer to be lord ourselves and forge our own notions of the divine. If God is to be known and trusted as the Lord of glory, then the perfections God appears in must be truly his, and truly him.

In this we might hear a transmuted development of this argument Dorner makes asserting that all the perfections of the divine essence must be actualised in that essence:

If it were not possible for everything that is actually an excellence to be united in one, then there could not be one God: the divine could only be exhausted in a plurality of divine figures. Or again, if there were nothing that is in and through itself good ... then God would be only *liberum arbitrium*.¹⁶⁴

For both Barth and Dorner, thinking that God cannot exist in many perfections which genuinely belong to his essence leaves us with the unacceptable alternatives of either polytheism or an essentially arbitrary ‘Unknown’ (II.1:325). In their estimation, the stakes are sky-high here. Barth sees the necessary guarantee that God is ‘actually and unreservedly as we encounter Him in His revelation’ (II.1:325) as provided by Scripture. On the one hand, Scripture does not treat the Lord’s glory as a phenomenon, but ‘certifies to us that this Lord of glory is as such the real and true God’ (II.1:325). On the other hand, Scripture does not summon faith in ‘ultimate values’, but in ‘a single genuine sovereignty’ (II.1:326). Taught by Scripture, we may trust that the Lord in his glory is the true God, and that the abundance of glory is truly his. God is who he is in the act of his revelation.

Barth then draws parallel to the doctrine of the Trinity to illustrate his notion of the correct characterisation of the relationship of God and his perfections.¹⁶⁵ Just as God does not assume the trinitarian modes of being economically (the error of modalism), so God does not assume his perfections economically, but he possesses them immanently. And, just as the trinitarian modes of being do not dissolve the unity of the Godhead (the error of tritheism) but disclose its true being, so the many divine perfections do not dissolve the unity of the Godhead, but rather disclose its glory, being, as it were, letters spelling out the divine Word (II.1:327).¹⁶⁶

3. Criticising nominalism and especially ‘semi-nominalism’.

Having laid out his basic position, Barth turn to the question of its ‘possibility, legitimacy and necessity’ (II.1:327), especially given that he sees the tradition against him here: ‘That there exists objectively in God Himself a multiplicity of this kind, and therefore individuality and diversity, contradicts what we have indicated as the characteristic relation of simplicity and

¹⁶⁴ Dorner and Williams, *Divine Immutability*, 138.

¹⁶⁵ N.B. Barth is not arguing that the Trinity determines or gives rise to this relationship of God and his perfections.

¹⁶⁶ Dorner argues that the trinitarian distinctions in God’s being set a precedent for admitting objective distinctions in the being of God: ‘If theologians cleave to trinitarian distinctions in God in spite of His simplicity, it is illogical if the same men fancy themselves compelled to deny the objectivity of the divine attributes out of love for the divine Simplicity’. Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:198.

plenitude in the being of Him who is the Lord of glory.’ (II.1:327) Simplicity and plenitude must be related in the being of God, but, says Barth, the tradition has not regarded multiplicity as a suitable way of characterising divine plenitude. Rather, ‘The multiplicity of attributes as contrasted with the simplicity of the being of God has always been affirmed to be improper. The simplicity of the divine being has always been held to be the only true description of that being.’ (II.1:327) Whether the latter statement is true is a question to which we shall return. Suffice to say here that in the tradition the *perfection* of the divine being has *also* been taken as a true description of that being, and in divine perfection lies divine plenitude.

Barth proceeds to argue that the tradition does not ultimately allow for divine plenitude because of its opposition to divine multiplicity in the name of divine simplicity. He identifies this opposition in two forms: nominalism, and semi-nominalism. Barth says of nominalism that, ‘[a]ccording to this all individual and distinct statements about the being of God have no other value than that of purely subjective ideas and descriptions (*conceptus, nomina*) to which there is no corresponding reality in God, who is pure simplicity.’ (II.1:327) Barth places Eunomius, William of Ockham, Gabriel Biel and Schleiermacher in this camp.¹⁶⁷ He then describes the ‘main stream of theological tradition’ (II.1:327) as the view that, ‘the statements concerning a multiplicity of perfections in God are statements expressing our vision of God. They may be made quite decidedly in regard to the characteristic limitations of the human understanding face to face with this object.’ (II.1:328)¹⁶⁸ He adds that,

‘The emphasis could also be laid on the fact that, in becoming known to us in this multiplicity of attributes, God Himself has condescended to adjust Himself to our capacities of understanding.’ (II.1:328)¹⁶⁹ This is what we have termed conceptualism. Barth accepts that in this there is no desire to separate God from his attributes. He notes the assertion in Polanus (among others) that, ‘*Proprietates essentielles Dei sunt in Deo ab aeterno in aeternum ... non sunt posteriores essentia Dei quia reipsa sunt idem. ... Sine proprietatibus divinis essentialibus Deus esse non potest, ne sine seipso sit.*’¹⁷⁰ (II.1:328) But Barth believes all this is undone by the qualifications regarding our talk of many divine properties. As Polanus puts

¹⁶⁷ ‘In this context he [Barth] mentions the names of Ockham and Biel, perhaps because he found them in Polanus’. Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 58.

¹⁶⁸ We have met this conviction in Polanus in chapter 1 above: ‘we portray many excellences and activities of a singular object with various concepts when we cannot [do this] in one [concept].’ (*unicae rei multiplices virtutes & operationes, nos variis conceptibus effigiamus, quum uno non possimus. Syntag. Theol.* 880).

¹⁶⁹ Cf Polanus: ‘the Holy Spirit lowers himself to our capacity, and, with the attributes, describes his essence in certain ways.’ (*Syntag. Theol.* 879-80.) [*Spiritus Sanctus demisit se ad nostrum captum, & attributis, quibusdam essentiam suam descripsit.*]

¹⁷⁰ ‘The essential properties of God are in God from eternity to eternity ... They are not subsequent to the essence of God, since they are identical with it ... God cannot be, without the essential divine properties, otherwise he would be without himself’ (EN20 CD Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 73) These quotes are from Polanus, *ST II.7* axioms 7, 8 and 11 (*Syntag. Theol.* 903-4.)

it: '*Non sunt proprie loquendo multae proprietates in Deo sed una tantum, quae nihil aliud est quam ipsa divina essentia ... sed respectu nostri quasi multae proprietates dicuntur, quia in nobis sunt multae.*'¹⁷¹ (II.1:329)

Barth understood that the conceptualist view did maintain that our conceptions of the perfections of God do contain such knowledge of God as our minds can receive, because our varied conceptions have a basis (*fundamentum*) in God's being or his works or both. But Barth felt that:

an explanation of what is to be understood by this *fundamentum* has never been vouchsafed. Nor could it properly be investigated. For the presupposition stood firm that by the being of God must be meant His *essentia* as such, i.e., at bottom His *nuda essentia*, whose simplicity must be conceptually the first and last and real thing, [...] in comparison with which every other statement can have no further value than that of a concession, a purely secondary truth. (II.1:329)

Hence Barth judges that conceptualism shares with nominalism a view that simplicity is ultimately God's only proper perfection. This is why he refers to it as semi-nominalism. Barth regards this view of simplicity as deriving from ideas found in Stoicism and Neo-Platonism, and as having been 'exalted to the all-controlling principle, the idol [...] devouring everything concrete.' (II.1:329) Barth regards this as a loss of an older, better notion of simplicity that might embrace the Augustinian phrase *multiplex simplicitas* or *simplex multiplicitas*¹⁷² to express 'the triumphant unity in God of the Lord with glory and of glory with the Lord' (II.1:329). Barth laments that '[f]rom this startingpoint we can speak only hesitantly about the reality of the divine perfections. On this basis, when we speak of God, we must mean essentially only the simplicity and not the richness, at best the simplicity of the richness, but at bottom only the simplicity.' (II.1:329)

¹⁷¹ 'Strictly speaking, there are not many properties in God, but only one, which is nothing other than the very divine essence. But as far as we are concerned, many properties are spoken of, since for us there are many' (EN22 CD Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 73) Quotation from Polanus, *Syntag. Theol.* 904.

¹⁷² 'multiple simplicity' and 'simple multiplicity'. These phrases appear in *De Trinitate* 6.4.6, where in the course of discussing the equality of the Son and the Father Augustine uses the analogy of the inseparable existence of distinct virtues in the human soul. Despite the 'clearly defined meaning' of virtues such as, e.g., strength, justice or wisdom, 'one can in no way be separated from the others'. For strength is tempered by justice and wisdom and all the other virtues present to whatever extent, and a soul's strength is what it is because it is alloyed with whatever measure of other virtues is present in the soul. Justice is likewise tempered by wisdom and strength etc. Augustine continues, 'How much more so, then, is this true of that unchangeable and eternal substance, incomparably more simple than the human soul', since, 'for God to be is the same as to be strong, or to be just, or to be wise, and to be whatever else you may say of that simple multiplicity, or that multiple simplicity.' Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, 1. paperback reprint., vol. 45 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2002), 205. Barth takes up and affirms the idea that simplicity implies the inseparability and entire mutual participation and interpenetration of each divine virtue in all the others, so that, in Barth's view, speaking of God's being as a multiplicity, as Augustine willing to do here, is legitimate, its utter simplicity notwithstanding.

In the *Göttingen Dogmatics* Barth rejected Strauss's characterisation of conceptualism as an 'unhappy midway position' between nominalism and realism. Here he regards it as 'indisputable' (II.1:330).¹⁷³ The conflicted state of conceptualism arises, 'because the attributes of God had to be affirmed *proprie*'—to avoid the nominalism of purely subjective attributes with no basis in God's being—'and yet they could not be'—because properly, God has only his simplicity, and not his perfections (II.1:330). Barth's reformulation of conceptualism in *Göttingen Dogmatics* has become a rejection of conceptualism as 'semi-nominalism'.

Barth now acknowledges the lead given by Frank, Thomasius and Dorner in rejecting the tradition and attributing 'the many, the manifold, the diverse' to God in himself, resulting in his various attributes 'objectively belonging to him' without contradiction of 'the unbroken unity of God' (II.1:330, quoting Frank). The attributes of God properly describe both God's own being in itself and his relation to the other; these things are not opposed. 'God cannot wish to appear other than he is' and 'no dualistic power checks his will to reveal himself'; hence 'in God's self-revelations we see revelations of what and how He is (not simply what and how He is not), and therefore the revelation of objective attributes' (II.1:330, quoting Dorner). Dorner here expresses Barth's core principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation and draws the implication from it that the perfections are more than conceptual, but are objective. This is a moment of deep agreement between Dorner and Barth, and hence Barth says, 'This is the line of thought which we must develop' (II.1:330)—that is, the line that leads from the conviction that God's self-revelations give positive knowledge of God in himself to a realist view of the attributes. As we shall see in chapter 5 below, Barth will develop this line of thought, but not as Dorner does.

We can identify many connections between Dorner and Barth in their advocacy of a realist view of the unity and multiplicity of the divine perfections.¹⁷⁴ Both Barth and Dorner argue that the mainstream conceptualist view does not escape collapsing into nominalism (cf. chapter 2, section 1.2 above). They both see conceptualism as an unstable attempt to maintain a basis in God for the multiplicity, individuality and diversity of divine perfections in our knowledge of God, while also maintaining that this multiplicity, individuality and diversity is completely absent from the reality of God's being. Both assert that despite the conceptualist claim that there is a *fundamentum* (basis) in God's being for the distinctions between the attributes in our knowledge, no such basis can truly exist when the distinctions between the

¹⁷³ See *GD* I:381 and chapter 1 above.

¹⁷⁴ See chapter 2 section 1 above.

attributes in God are as radically qualified by divine simplicity as they are in the conceptualist tradition (cf. chapter 2, section 1.3 above). Both regard the unity of the divine essence implied by the traditional view of divine simplicity as stripping God of his rich plenitude, leaving him without his perfections as *nuda essentia* ('bare essence', so Barth, II.1:329) or as 'wholly indefinite existence' (so Dorner).¹⁷⁵ Both regard the consequence of such a view of the simplicity of God's essence and the multiplicity of his perfections as severely deleterious to our knowledge of God. For Dorner it means 'an absolute denial of any knowledge of God'.¹⁷⁶ For Barth it means that 'in the last resort the *proprietaes Dei*, [properties of God] necessarily lose their reality in favour of the *essentia* [essence]' (II.1:329). Both regard conceptualism as untenable given it implies either an unwillingness or an inability on the part of God to reveal himself to us as he is. We have their shared commitment to a positive and objective knowledge of God arising from God's self-revelation, with a consequent realist view of the attributes:

Since God cannot wish to appear other than He is, and since no dualistic power checks His will to reveal Himself, then it must be that in God's self-revelations we see revelations of what and how He is (not simply what and how He is not), and therefore the revelation of objective attributes. (II.1:330, quoting Dorner)

Barth's adherence to conceptualism in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* was qualified. His reservations about the conceptualism of Polanus and the Protestant Scholastics was based on his convictions that our positive predications about God should arise from a grounding in revelation and not from the principle that the perfections in creatures have their archetype and origin in God. It seems that the reasoning of Dorner and others about the implications of true divine self-revelation for the objectivity of the attributes touched this chord in Barth and drew him on towards the realism we have from him in *Church Dogmatics*. However, Barth's realism will not be like Dorner's. While Dorner affirms the mutual non-identity of the attributes, we will see that Barth denies it. Both Barth and Dorner propose a governing principle for the internal relations of the attributes, but these differ substantially from one another and function in different ways. Dorner rejects the dichotomous classification of the attributes, but we will see that Barth affirms it.

However, this must wait until we have assessed Barth's attack on 'semi-nominalism'. The critique of conceptualism and the Protestant Orthodox that Barth advanced (and shared, we have argued, with Dorner) has been itself criticised. In the next chapter we shall look at the

¹⁷⁵ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:197.

¹⁷⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:195.

defence of the Protestant Scholastics advanced by Richard Muller, and we shall attempt our own assessment of Barth's reading of Polanus and the conceptualist tradition.

CHAPTER 4

Testing Barth's critique of Protestant Orthodox conceptualism

Barth's criticism of 'semi-nominalism' is uncompromising and sustained. He charges that a major way of understanding the relationship between God's essence and his attributes is deeply flawed and leads to consequences those who propounded it were striving to avoid. Such figures as Aquinas, Calvin and the whole of Protestant Orthodoxy are regarded as compromised by their conceptualism. Conceptualism posits a basis (*fundamentum*) in God's being for the various divine attributes. Yet Barth says that an overriding commitment to simplicity strips everything but simplicity out of the ultimate idea of God's essence in the tradition. How correct is Barth in his reading of the tradition and in his assessment of the conceptualist view? In this chapter we consider objections raised against Barth by Richard Muller and undertake our own engagement with Barth's reading of Polanus and Quenstedt. We argue that Barth overlooks the role of divine perfection in the tradition and misreads certain Protestant Orthodox statements about divine predication. We conclude that Barth's charge that the conceptualist tradition robs God of the plenitude described by the perfections fails.

1. Did the Protestant Orthodox fail to explain the *fundamentum in re*?

Richard Muller has taken issue with Barth's assessment of the Reformed Orthodox. Muller says, regarding the assertion of a *fundamentum in re* for the distinction of the attributes, that

Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1 p. 329, rightly identifies this language in the older orthodoxy and then proceeds, incorrectly, to argue "an explanation of what is to be understood by this *fundamentum* has never been vouchsafed." It is one of the burdens of this section to indicate that the Reformed orthodox did precisely this—namely to explain how the attributes or properties are distinguished in God as well as our conception of God.¹⁷⁷

The section goes on to survey the variety of the Reformed orthodox approaches to this question, and Muller finds that 'all of the Reformed orthodox assume the simplicity of the

¹⁷⁷ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. p .287 n. 324.

divine essence, and all understand the attributes as in some sense distinct.’¹⁷⁸ As to the question of the distinction of attributes, Muller finds ‘echoes’ of all three kinds of solutions among the Reformed Scholastics.¹⁷⁹ First, solutions that are nominalist, or verge upon nominalism.¹⁸⁰ These views eschew the assertion of a *fundamentum* in God’s being, holding that the distinctions between attributes are grounded in God’s works *ad extra* only. Second, there are the conceptualists, who argue in Thomistic fashion that the distinctions between the attributes are grounded in the works of God and correspond to distinctions *intrinsic* to God’s being. These distinctions may be eminent—arising as ‘the causal foundation or ground in one thing of some other thing’¹⁸¹ is identified and distinguished. Or they may be virtual—arising as ‘a quality belonging to the potency or power of a thing’¹⁸² is identified and distinguished.¹⁸³ Last, there are those who verge on realism, who may speak of some perfections belonging to God properly and formally, adopting a somewhat Scotist inflection.¹⁸⁴

As Muller sees it, the majority of the Protestant Scholastics insist on ‘an eminent or virtual distinction *intrinsic* to the divine essence, reflected in the distinction of attributes in their operation *ad extra*’.¹⁸⁵ Basically Muller addresses Barth’s accusation by pointing to the Thomistically-derived eminent and virtual distinctions as a sufficient explanation of what is to be understood by the *fundamentum* of the distinctions between the attributes. The *fundamentum* is thus God’s being inasmuch as it is the source and cause of his various works

¹⁷⁸ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 296–7.

¹⁷⁹ Muller at one point comes close to agreeing with Barth’s charge that there is an inconsistency in the conceptualism of the tradition. Regarding the formulations of Reformed theologian Edward Leigh, Muller says, ‘Leigh even appears to pose a possible contradiction: on the one hand he states that the attributes are identical to the divine essence and “differ only in our apprehension,” even augmenting this definition with the marginal comment, “these Attributes differ not among themselves, not from the divine essence,” while, on the other hand, he states that the attributes are “actually and operatively in God”, which like the larger part of his analysis, seems to posit distinctions between the attributes.’ This is very close to the complaint of contradiction that Barth himself levels at the tradition, but Muller does not discuss this further. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 203.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Some, like Alting, Burman, Owen, and Maastricht, argue the essential identity of the attributes and point to their rational distinction *ad extra* on the basis of their effects, and echo elements of the Ockhamist solution to the problem, albeit without drawing the conclusion that God, in an ultimate sense, is perfection, without any “attributes” or “properties” in the usual sense. Maccovius and Heidanus clearly follow the nominalist solution, denying distinctions of attributes *ad intra*’ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 297.

¹⁸¹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 287.

¹⁸² Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 287.

¹⁸³ ‘Many, including Ames, Maresius, Leigh, Wendelin and Twisse, argue in continuity with the medieval discussion that distinctions between attributes can be defined *ad intra*, whether as eminent or virtual, following a more or less late Thomistic pattern of argument, resembling the views of John of Paris and Cajetan.’ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 296.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Others, notably Turretin and Voetius, argue a slight variant—namely an eminent distinction of the attributes, but, adopting a slightly Scotistic accent, allow a formal distinction of the attributes in their *ad extra* conception in the mind. Le Blanc may go so far as to argue a formal presence and distinction of attributes in God.’ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 296. Muller’s summary of Le Blanc’s view is that divine perfections ‘do belong to God *proprie et formaliter* ... properly according to his essence—among which are life, intellect, will, wisdom, goodness and justice—given that God does not merely have these but is essentially living, knowing, willing, wise, good and just. Such perfections *vere sunt intra essentiam divinam*.’ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 296.

¹⁸⁵ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 296–97.

which exhibit many perfections. Divine perfections corresponding to the perfections of God's works are individuated in God inasmuch as God is the source from which each of these particular perfections arise. Muller does not explicitly engage Barth's argument that the tradition relegates the divine properties to a secondary, improper status relative to the divine essence. And Barth, for his part, does not spend time discussing the eminent or virtual distinctions found in the Protestant Scholastics. So, we are left with the feeling of an incomplete engagement between Muller and Barth. We shall engage Barth directly by first looking at the little he said about virtual distinctions and the perfections as forms, and then examining his reading of the Protestant Orthodox in his critique of conceptualism.

1.1 Barth on virtual and formal distinctions

On the matter of virtual distinctions, there is a passing comment from Barth, in his later discussion of distinctions in God's will, where he refers to virtual distinctions. Barth objects to those who would say that God's will regarding objects distinct from himself 'is not a characteristic of the divine being and will as such' (II.1:592). Barth sees the separation from God's being of the richness of these distinctions made regarding God's willing *ad extra* as an improper impoverishment of our concept of God's fullness that makes the glory of who God is in relation to his creation something gained through his relation to his creation. Against this Barth asserts,

God is one in the fulness of His deity and constant in its living vigour. He does not therefore acquire fulness and life from His relation to creation. He has it in Himself before all creation and every relation to it, in a way incomparably higher, richer and stronger than all the fulness and life which is in creation or which He displays in His relation to it. We have, therefore, no reason to say (rather uneasily) of these distinctions that they are only "virtual." On the contrary, we can take them more seriously, i.e., more concretely than the older theology ever did.' (II.1:592-3)

This suggests that Barth's objection to virtual distinctions is that what they distinguish are mere abstract potentialities that have no proper existence without the realisation of those potentialities in concrete external action. The implication of this is that if the mode of existence in God of his attributes is virtual, then God requires creation to possess those attributes actually. However, virtual distinctions need not be seen as distinguishing between mere possibilities that might be realised out of a divine essence that remains unrealised without such external action. Rather, the attributes that are distinguished in God by means of virtual distinctions can be seen as eternally characterising the concrete plenitude of the completely actual divine will and power that has expressed something of its plenitude in the

corresponding and derivative fullness of creation. Indeed, given what conceptualists say about the existence in God of his essential properties apart from any external works, we should charitably understand them to intend virtual distinctions to have this sense.¹⁸⁶

Although Polanus does not use the language of virtual distinctions, he is a conceptualist in the mainstream of the Old Orthodox, and he does not mean to say that the essential properties we distinguish are not really in God, or that they are only actualised as God relates to his creation.

Barth does not discuss explicitly the nature of the distinctions that delineate the perfections as individual and multiple in God. He does use of the language of *form* in drawing distinctions between the attributes, although not the Scotist language of formal distinctions. In the paragraph thesis of §29 he says of each perfection: ‘whether it is a *form* of love in which God is free, or a *form* of freedom in which God loves, it is nothing else but God Himself, His one, simple, distinctive being.’ (II.1:322, italics mine) In relating our various affirmations about the perfections to one another he says, ‘We not only can but must place alongside our first affirmation a second and a third: not with the idea of adding something new, but with the idea of continually saying the one thing, on the presupposition of what has already been said, in ever new *forms*.’ (II.1:368, italics mine) So, while the perfections are spoken about in their individuality as *forms*, this use of the term is not developed into any rigorous specification of the kind of distinction that is being made between the attributes. Barth does not seek to position himself relative to Scholastic debates and definitions on this question, although George Hunsinger posits that Barth’s distinctions do count as formal distinctions.¹⁸⁷ (Velde mistakenly claims Barth made real distinctions—*differentia realis*—between the perfections.¹⁸⁸) Seemingly Barth regarded it as unnecessary or undesirable to characterise the distinctions he wished to make between the perfections as formal. Certainly, in *Church Dogmatics* chapter VI, he said nothing about this.

2. Does the idol simplicity really devour everything concrete?

Barth claims that divine simplicity became ‘the all-controlling principle, the idol’ in the traditional doctrine of God, which devoured all the reality of God’s perfections, leaving God

¹⁸⁶ E.g., Polanus *Syntag. Theol.* II.7 axioms 7, 11 (col. 903, 904).

¹⁸⁷ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (2. [Dr.]; Grand Rapids, Mich [u.a]: Eerdmans, 2000), 196, n. 11.

¹⁸⁸ Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 447. Real distinctions are made between different things, so that really distinct perfections would be different things. Barth never says this of the perfections. Velde’s more accurate description of what is Barth’s consistent position is that ‘in moving from one perfection to another, we do not encounter a different ‘thing’’ (448). Barth asserts a real *multiplicity* of divine perfections in God, but not a real *difference* between those perfections. We return to Velde’s comments in chapter 6 below.

barren and spectral—mere bare essence (II.1:329). We now assess this claim by reference to the tradition, engaging with Aquinas, Polanus and Quenstedt. We argue that Barth overlooks the important role played by divine perfection in the tradition and that he misreads certain Protestant Orthodox statements that are properly about divine predication, not the divine qualities the attributes refer to.

2.1 Barth overlooks the role of divine perfection in the tradition

In setting out to defend his position, Barth claims that, ‘The simplicity of the divine being has always been held to be the only true description of that being’ (II.1:327). However, the perfection of God’s being has for as long been held as a true description of that being. In *Summa Theologiae* 1a 4, Aquinas treats God’s perfection immediately after he treats God’s simplicity, precisely to prevent misunderstanding about the nature of divine simplicity.¹⁸⁹ Will simple being be *mere* being: rudimentary and elemental rather than rich and comprehensive? Divine perfection means the answer is no. In Article 2, Aquinas asks whether God contains the perfections of everything. His answer will be ‘yes’, but he begins with arguments for ‘no’. The first is: ‘It seems that God does not contain the perfections of everything. For God, as I have shown, is simple, while the perfections of everything are many and diverse. So, God does not contain every perfection of things.’ (*ST* 1a 4.2)¹⁹⁰ Aquinas does not agree. He says, ‘On the contrary, we have Dionysius saying that, “God pre-contains in one all existing things”’, and he concurs with the Areopagite: ‘the perfections of everything exist in God’ and even ‘things that are diverse and opposite in themselves pre-exist as one in God without detriment to his simplicity’ (*ST* 1a 4.2)¹⁹¹. In *Summa Theologiae* Questions 3 and 4, we have a dialectic being brought into mutual coherence. Denying composition unifies the being of God in a radical way—he is one simple actuality. Denying imperfection enriches the being of God in a radical way—he is one rich actuality. The first denial sets God off from all other beings—only he exists as he does. The second denial connects God and creatures—whatever is good in creatures is perfect in God, existing in him a higher manner. The richness of God and the simplicity of God must not be set against one another.

Polanus also treats God’s perfection directly after God’s simplicity, and, for Polanus too, the perfection of God’s being denotes the divine plenitude and guarantees that all the glory we see in his works is grounded in his being.

¹⁸⁹ ‘because simplicity implies imperfection and incompleteness in the material world I shall then ask, second, about God’s perfection’ *ST* 1a 3. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 28.

¹⁹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 46.

¹⁹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 46, 47.

The perfection of God is the essential property of God through which it is understood that nothing at all is lacking from the divine essence, but that it itself possesses everything in a flawless way from eternity into eternity, including the perfections of all things in themselves, and is for others the exemplar and cause of every perfection, of nature and of grace.¹⁹²

Polanus regards the richness of created perfections as having their perfect, archetypal pre-existence in the simplicity of God's being. Simplicity *and* perfection *both* govern the way that the perfections of God's works exist in God before all those works: '[N]o perfection inheres in created things, without an utterly perfect archetype or concept of them existing in God's eternity in accordance with complete simplicity and his divine perfection.'¹⁹³ The perfect God of Aquinas and Polanus can lack no perfection of life, love, or freedom, or any of the perfections Scripture attributes to him. Divine perfection expresses the richness of God's being and affirms that it embraces in itself and before all worlds all the abundance, distinctness and variety that exists in creatures and in our talk of God's attributes. The truth of divine perfection is taken just as seriously as the truth of divine simplicity in these thinkers. Barth seems completely to overlook this affirmation of divine plenitude in divine perfection when he says that the tradition held simplicity to be the only true description of God's being. He says the Protestant Scholastics 'made the multiplicity of the divine attributes, which they wanted to ascribe to God only *improprie*, dependent on the discursiveness of the human intellect and the manifoldness of the created world.' (II.1:335) It would be more complete to say that in conceptualism the multiplicity of the attributes is *also* dependent on the fullness of the divine perfection, of which the multiplicity of the attributes is an imperfect but true reflection.¹⁹⁴

Stephen Duby makes this point in his response to Barth's critique of conceptualism. He says that, for the conceptualist, there is a *principium essendi* (an origin in the essence of God) of the multiplicity and individuality of the attributes. 'The *principium essendi* is the plenitude of God which cannot be conveyed in a single human concept', and which precludes 'an expulsion of the richness of God's essence' from our idea of God's being.¹⁹⁵ God's simplicity is not the lowest simple, but '*sumum simplex* (the highest simple), which lacks in nothing'.¹⁹⁶ Polanus can speak so straightforwardly about the essential properties of God

¹⁹² *Perfectio Dei, est essentialis Dei proprietas, per quam intelligitur, essentiae divinae nihil planè deesse, sed omnia ipsam integerrimo modo ab aeterno in aeternum atque etiam perfectiones omnium rerum in se habere, atque aliis esse exemplar ac causam omnis perfectionis, Naturæ & Gratiae.* (Syntag. Theol. 914)

¹⁹³ *Nulla [...] perfectio rebus creatis inest, cuius idea seu ratio perfectissima; non sit in Deo aeternum secundum simplicissimam & divinam eius perfectionem* (Syntag. Theol. 983)

¹⁹⁴ See chapter 1 above.

¹⁹⁵ Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 183–84.

¹⁹⁶ Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 184.

really being in God ‘from eternity into eternity’¹⁹⁷ because he does not regard divine simplicity as stripping God down to bareness. Indeed, God’s simplicity does not mean that his predicates can only properly be abstract, subjective ways of referring to the undivided divine essence. Rather, it means that all God’s properties are also predicated of him concretely and objectively, ‘so that we might understand him [...] really to be good, living, wise, righteous and to work things that are good, fitting for a living and wise essence, and righteous, characteristics which cannot unite except in an essence subsisting through itself.’¹⁹⁸ For Polanus, the divine essence, which, uniquely, subsists through itself, is uniquely able to unite and possess in simplicity all the concrete perfections of the divine predicates.

2.2 Barth misreads certain Protestant Orthodox statements about divine predication

Barth charges that the Protestant Orthodox may claim that God’s essential properties are eternally in God, and are God’s very self (*Syntag. Theol.* II.7 axioms 7, 11), but they contradict it by also claiming that properly God has no properties (Quenstedt), or only one property (Polanus; see II.1:329). Barth thinks that by this qualification these theologians unintentionally imply that God is properly only his bare essence, having, in its utter simplicity, no properties, or only the property of existence, contradicting the claim about all the essential properties being in God. But we argue here that Polanus and Quenstedt are making a point about our language of properties, a point that does not imply the bareness of God’s essence or the impropriety of thinking God is what the attributes say he is.

Barth juxtaposes statements from Polanus that, ‘*Proprietates essentielles Dei sunt in Deo ab aeterno in aeternum*’,¹⁹⁹ (II.1:328) and, ‘*Non sunt proprie loquendo multae proprietates in Deo sed una tantum, quae nihil aliud est quam ipsa divina essentia ... sed respectu nostri quasi multae proprietates dicuntur, quia in nobis sunt multae.*’²⁰⁰ (II.1:329) Analogous quotations from Quenstedt also appear. Quenstedt’s statement is, ‘*Attributa divina ante omnem intellectus nostri operationem revera et proprie sunt in Deo.*’²⁰¹ (II.1:328) His qualification is,

Si enim proprie et accurate loqui velimus, Deus nullas habet proprietates sed mera et simplicissima est essentia quae nec realem differentiam, nec ullam vel rerum vel modorum

¹⁹⁷ *ab aeterno in aeternum. Syntag. Theol.* 903

¹⁹⁸ *ut intelligamus, eum [...] reipsa bonum, viventem, sapientem, iustum esse, & operari bona, essentiae viventi & sapienti consentanea, iusta, quae non nisi essentiae per se subsistenti convenire possunt.* (*Syntag. Theol.* 906)

¹⁹⁹ the essential properties of God are in God from eternity into eternity (EN20 CD Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 73)

²⁰⁰ ‘Strictly speaking, there are not many properties in God, but only one, which is nothing other than the very divine essence.

But as far as we are concerned, many properties are spoken of, since for us there are many’ (EN22 CD Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 73)

²⁰¹ ‘Divine attributes in fact exist strictly speaking in God himself, even before the all the operation of our intellects’ (EN19 CD Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 73)

*admittit compositionem. ... Quia vero simplicissimam Dei essentiam uno adaequato conceptu adaequate concipere non possumus, ideo inadaequatis et distinctis conceptibus inadaequate essentiam divinam repraesentantibus eum apprehendimus, quos ... attributa vocamus. Et sic intellectus noster distinguit, quae ex parte rei distincta non sunt.*²⁰² (II.1:329)

The trouble for Barth is that in the original contexts it is clear that these qualifications address the nature of the predication being made, not the reality of the divine qualities being predicated as essential properties. Polanus and Quenstedt are not saying that what the essential properties refer to does not in the end belong to God. Rather they are saying that the essential divine properties are not God's properties in the same sense as creatures have properties. They are making a point about the nature of divine predication given our creatureliness, not about the bareness of God's essence. This can be most easily seen if we begin with Quenstedt.

Quenstedt

In the immediate context of Barth's quote from Quenstedt, Quenstedt specifies a distinction he wishes to make between properties used in a strict sense and properties used in a wider sense as a mode of conceiving and explaining something about a subject. He says,

Distinguish between properties truly, rigorously and strictly so called, distinguished really from their subject, and between that which is conceived and explained in the mode of properties and attributes. Affections and properties truly and rigorously so called, which are really distinct from the divine essence, have no place in God, nevertheless it is apparent that there is something in and of God that is to be conceived and explained, and to this extent also to be predicated, in the mode of affections or attributes.²⁰³

Quenstedt is saying that because, strictly, the term *property* denotes something really distinct from the subject possessing the property, and from other properties of the subject, it cannot be used *strictly* with reference to the 'properties' of God's essence, because these are not to be really distinguished from God's essence or one another. However, we do talk less strictly in the mode of attributes in order to conceive and explain something in God that is really

²⁰² For if we were wanting to speak strictly and accurately, God has no properties, but is pure and utterly simple essence, which admits no real differentiation, and no composition of items or modes. But since we cannot adequately conceive of the utterly simple essence of God with one adequate conception, therefore we represent the divine essence inadequately with inadequate and distinct concepts and apprehend him in this way. These concepts we call attributes. And thus our intellects distinguish what are not distinct parts. (EN23 CD Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 74)

²⁰³ *Disting. inter veras, rigorosè & strictè dictas proprietates, à subjectis suis realiter distinctas, & inter id quod concipitur & explicatur per modum proprietatis aut attributi. Veræ & rigorose dictæ affectiones & proprietates, quæ sint ab essentiâ divinâ realiter distinctæ, in Deo neutiquam locum habent, concipi tamen & explicari, adeoque & prædicari aliquid in & de Deo per modum affectionis aut attributi evidens est.* Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, Sive Systema Theologicum* (Wittenberg: J. L. Quenstedt, 1691), 296.

there and really captured in our talk of attributes. Then follows the passage that Barth quotes (which he may have discovered in a footnote in Dorner²⁰⁴) where Quenstedt makes the same point over again: ‘*Si enim proprie et accurate loqui velimus, Deus nullas habet proprietates sed mera et simplicissima est essentia quae nec realem differentiam, nec ullam vel rerum vel modorum admittit compositionem.*’²⁰⁵ (II.1:329) Quenstedt is not saying that simplicity denudes God of all the excellences of his being, he is saying that a strict application of the term property would result in us saying that God has no properties because nothing in God can be distinguished as separate from his whole being. Quenstedt continues (and included here are the phrases Barth elides):

Because in reality we cannot adequately conceive the utterly simple essence of God with one adequate conception, therefore we apprehend it with inadequate and distinct concepts, inadequately representing the divine essence. These inadequate conceptions, which from the material point of view are identified with the divine essence and are apprehended by us in the mode of affections, we call attributes.²⁰⁶

Our conceptions and our terms as developed for creaturely realities are inadequate for—i.e., unequal to—the task of dealing with the simple divine essence. And yet by a series of inadequate, distinct concepts of the divine essence that we call attributes, we do represent and apprehend God’s simple essence, even if inadequately. As we will see, Barth says these things himself in the course of his exposition of the perfections.

Polanus

Where Quenstedt says the properly speaking God has no properties, Polanus says that properly speaking God has only one property, which on the face of it is quite a different claim: ‘There are not (properly speaking) many properties in God, but one only; nothing of which is other than the divine essence itself, which is one, whatsoever it is; but in respect to us it is as if many properties are meant because for us they are many.’²⁰⁷ Yet Polanus is best understood to be making the same point as Quenstedt. Because God’s essence is one, we should not imagine the language of many properties means that God’s essence is divided as it would be if God really had many properties. To be sure we must implicitly supply here the

²⁰⁴ See Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 196 fn. 2.

²⁰⁵ For if we were wanting to speak strictly and accurately, God has no properties, but is pure and utterly simple essence, which admits no real differentiation, and no composition of items or modes. (EN23 CD Study Ed. vol. 8 p. 74)

²⁰⁶ *Quia verò simplicissimam Dei essentiam uno adæquato conceptu adæquare concipere non possumus, ideo inadæquatis & distinctis conceptibus, inadæquatè essentiam divinam repræsentantibus, eam apprehendimus, quos inadæquatos conceptus, qui à parte rei essentiae divinæ identificantur, & à nobis per modum affectionum apprehenduntur, attributa vocamus.* Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, Sive Systema Theologicum*, 296.

²⁰⁷ *Non sunt (proprie loquendo) multæ proprietates in Deo, sed una tantum, quæ nihil aliud est, quàm ipsa divina essentia, quâ unâ est, quicquid est: sed respectu nostri quasi multæ proprietates dicuntur, quia in nobis sunt multæ.* (Syntag. Theol. 904)

understanding that was explicit in Quenstedt, that distinct properties, understood properly speaking, mean real distinctions in the subject possessing them. Simplicity does rule out such distinctions in God's being, but our (improper) talk of many *properties* is necessary to take account of human incapacity to comprehend the divine nature. To buttress this reading, we note that elsewhere Polanus says that on the one hand nothing is properly *attributed* to God by our verbal expressions, but on the other that our verbal expressions *nonetheless do signify* what properly conforms to God: 'If you consider the expressions in which the attributes of God are conveyed, nothing is properly attributed to God. [...] But if indeed you consider the thing which is signified by the expression, that does properly conform to God.'²⁰⁸ In these places, Polanus is talking about how the infinity and ineffability of the divine essence means our usual forms of predication are inadequate and cannot be understood to apply strictly. He is not talking about the impropriety of thinking that what the essential attributes signify really belongs to God's being. On the contrary, many distinct concepts are essential to deploy if we are to represent and apprehend the divine essence, for 'of [that] unique object we portray many excellences and activities with various concepts when we cannot [do this] in one [concept]'.²⁰⁹ Polanus's denial of many properties in God does not evacuate God of all his richness or indicate that Polanus thinks that God's simplicity is the first and last thing in God. Rather it means that if we are going to think of the attribution of properties to God, we should most appropriately think in terms of a single property, even though we cannot even begin to outline a concept of what that property would be. Instead of trying that impossible task, we must embrace the various essential divine properties in their classes and orders, which is the way we can grasp what is available to us of the richness of the divine essence. Again, we shall see Barth advocate substantially the same approach himself.

We note that Steven Duby makes the same point against Barth. Countering Barth's interpretation of the impropriety of understanding God to have many properties, Duby says,

In reality the *improprie* does not concern whether the *proprietates* themselves are proper to God but only the way they are ascribed to God. Breaking with predicative convention, what we apprehend and characterise as divine properties are not actually qualities inhering in God, but rather only the divine essence variously represented to us.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ *Si voces consideres quibus attributa Dei efferuntur, nulla propriè attribuitur Deo. [...] Sin verò rem spectes, quae voce significatur, illa Deo propriè convenit. (Syntag. Theol. 880)*

²⁰⁹ *unicæ rei multiplices virtutes & operationes, nos variis conceptibus effigiamus, quum uno non possimus. (Syntag. Theol. 880)*

²¹⁰ Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, 182.

We endorse Duby's point clarifying that the issue under discussion is ascription and predication. However, we would quibble with Duby by arguing, on the basis of the foregoing discussion, that, in the conceptualism we have encountered, what we apprehend and characterise as divine properties *does* inhere in God, and is proper to God, albeit in a way that makes our usual manner of predication inadequate. If Duby is saying that all that we apprehend and characterise as divine properties *in no way* inheres in God, he would have stepped away from Polanus, Aquinas and Quenstedt, for whom the many divine properties truly, if inadequately represent what really inheres in the plenitude of God. Let us emphasise the point by considering Polanus's definition of God's glory:

The glory of God is his essential majesty, through which he is understood to be God indeed; to be, by his essence itself, truly that which he is said to be—utterly simple, utterly perfect, infinite, eternal, immense, immutable, living, immortal, blessed, wise, understanding, omniscient, prudent, willing, good, gracious, loving the good, merciful, just, true, holy, pure, powerful, ultimately omnipotent—and to declare himself such in all his works. In brief, the powers existing in God himself and shining out in his works are the essential glory of God.²¹¹

Polanus clearly asserts the essential unity of God and his glory, between who God is and who his essential divine properties say him to be, so that we know the Lord in his glory, and his glory in him. The various excellences described by the attributes are said to belong essentially to God and are not merely assumed economically.

3. Conclusion and prospect

We reach the first major conclusion of this thesis, which is that Barth's attack on the Protestant Scholastics fails in the terms in which Barth has made it. Barth overlooks the important role played by divine perfection in the tradition and he misreads Protestant Orthodox statements that are properly about divine predication, not the divine qualities the attributes refer to. Someone might still wish to argue that Barth's sense of a problem in the conceptualist viewpoint is not mistaken, and that there is some instability or inconsistency in the Protestant Orthodox. However, we argue that Barth has failed to exhibit such an inconsistency, and his critique does not take into account important aspects of the conceptualist view as represented by the Protestant Orthodox.

²¹¹ *Gloria Dei, est essentialis eius maiestas, per quam intelligitur Deum revera esse, eundem essentia sua esse revera id quod esse dicitur, simplicissimum, perfectissimum, infinitum, æternum, immensum, immutabilem, viventem, immortalem, beatum, sapientem, intelligentem, omniscium, prudentem, volentem, bonum, graciosum, amâtem boni, misericordem, iustum, veracem, sanctum, castum, potentem imo omnipotentem, & talem se in omnibus operibus suis declarare. Breviter, essentialis gloria Dei sunt virtutes in ipso Deo existentes & in operibus eius relucentes.* (Syntag. Theol. 1213)

Yet this does not mean his view of the attributes is without merit. It may still improve on conceptualism. Next, we examine the way Barth develops his doctrine of the multiplicity of God following his small print critique of the tradition (II.1:327-330). We will argue that Barth's own view develops in a manner that diverges from the realism of Dorner, and remains in the mainstream of the tradition, at the realist end of the spectrum.

CHAPTER 5

The multiplicity of divine perfections: Barth develops his realist account

Having examined and assessed Barth's case against semi-nominalism, we go on to ask to what extent Barth's account amounts to a substantial and consistent reformulation of the tradition. Can Barth provide something better than what he has faulted and aims to replace? In this chapter we first trace ways in which Barth's development of his realist account in three explanatory propositions diverges from Dorner's manner of developing his realist account. For Barth affirms the identity thesis, one of the touchstones of the orthodox tradition, and hence we discover that Barth's reformulation does not diverge from the mainstream tradition as much as we might imagine it could have, and as much as Dorner's does.

Second, we examine divergences between Barth's account and the conceptualism of Polanus when it comes to how to understand the knowledge of God that we have through our talk of the divine perfections. In brief, Barth does not regard our proper speaking of God as the result of a divine self-lowering to match our meagre capacities to know God, as Polanus does. Barth's guiding principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation produces a reformulated account of predication that features a gracious divine exaltation of our concepts in revelation, so they convey a real knowledge of God as he is in himself. Barth builds his reformulated account of predication on different foundations to Polanus, and Barth's consequent divergence from Polanus is real and not because of a misunderstanding.

1. Divine multiplicity: three explanatory propositions

Given Barth's dissatisfaction with the conceptualist mainstream of the tradition, arising from its alleged idolisation of divine simplicity, and given Barth's indicated intention to develop a line of thought he found in Dorner, and the way that Barth characterised God's being as life, possibly influenced by Dorner (see chapter 3, section 1.2 above) we could imagine that Barth might now proceed by returning 'to life as the fundamental element in the divine being' (II.1:322) and developing an account of the harmony of the divine life, as an ordered fullness of individual perfections united by the fact that that act of that divine living is loving in

freedom. The first sentence of Barth's paragraph thesis sounds this note of fullness and distinction: 'God lives his perfect life in the abundance of many individual and distinct divine perfections' (II.1:322). We might anticipate Barth next developing in his own way a version of Dorner's doctrine that divine love (and not divine simplicity) constitutes 'the bond of the plurality of the divine attributes', and declining the identity thesis.²¹² Yet as Barth develops his thought in three explanatory propositions, we discover that even as he insists on the multiplicity of God's essence alongside its simplicity and sees himself as maintaining distance between himself and the tradition's so-called semi-nominalism, his development of these propositions aligns his account more with the tradition of Polanus and less with Dorner. Significantly, Barth accepts the identity thesis, which is a parting of the ways with Dorner that ties Barth more closely to the mainstream.

1.1 The divine multiplicity of perfections does not imply any second divine being

In the first proposition Barth wants to guard against a charge that has come against a realist view of the attributes of God, most notably in the West brought at Rheims in 1148 by Bernard of Clairvaux against the teaching of Gilbert de la Porrée.²¹³ This charge is that on a realist account, the attributes must be things distinct from himself that he possesses, so that the fullness of these divine perfections is a kind of Godhead—the 'allied' divine nature Barth refers to—the possession of which is what makes God God. Against this Barth asserts: '1. The multiplicity, individuality and diversity of the divine perfections are those of the one divine being and therefore not those of another divine nature allied to it.' (II.1:331). In expanding on this proposition Barth says of the fullness of the divine perfections that, 'He does not possess this wealth. He Himself is this wealth.' (II.1:331) Barth identifies God with the fullness of his divine attributes. However, as Barth continues, he speaks about individual perfections as repeated answers to the question: Who is God? The fundamental answer is that God is the One who loves in freedom, and so, Barth says, 'In describing God as almighty, eternal, wise, or merciful, we are only repeating this answer; we are only naming Him again and yet again as the One who loves in freedom.' (II.1:331) This repeated naming is necessary, 'in continual recognition and confirmation of the plenitude and richness of this one being of God.' (II.1:331). Note here that all this is completely compatible with the tradition as represented by Polanus, since in characterising the perfections as various namings describing the one rich being of God, Barth has located the variety of the perfections more in our conceptualisation and discourse than in the being of God itself. Barth immediately returns to

²¹² Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:454.

²¹³ See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 36–37 for more on this controversy. Polanus also mentions it (*Syntag. Theol.* 902), so it is possible that in discussing the case Barth may have been prompted partly or wholly by Polanus.

the assertion of an essential divine multiplicity, saying, ‘He is in essence not only one, but multiple, individual and diverse. And these are His perfections.’ (II.1:331)

However, having given his account of the multiplicity of perfections arising as our repeated namings of God, Barth does not seek to specify how God is *in essence* multiple, individual and diverse, or how his perfections are such in his essence. He asserts it but does not develop it. This notion of our manifold naming of the one rich being of God is a more conceptualist strand that exists in Barth’s account of the perfections, and that will become more pronounced, especially in his concrete exposition of the perfections of the divine loving.

1.2 Divine simplicity and divine multiplicity in the being of God.

With the second proposition Barth speaks of the special character that the many perfections of God have that means that their multiplicity and individuality do not divide God’s being or impair his unity. In doing this Barth indicates his preferred role for divine simplicity in this doctrine of the perfections, namely, to affirm the identity of God himself with each of his many perfections, and the many perfections with one another and their fullness and the whole being of God, yet without denying their objective multiplicity and diversity in the life and being of God. In this he departs from Dorner, and aligns with Polanus rather more, but still goes his own way in asserting the inclusion of simplicity and multiplicity in the being of God. He begins,

2. The multiplicity, individuality and diversity of the perfections of God are those of His simple being, which is not therefore divided and then put together again. In God multiplicity, individuality and diversity do not stand in any contradiction to unity. Rather the very unity of His being consists in the multiplicity, individuality and diversity of His perfections (II.1:332).

Divine Simplicity

Barth’s assertion of divine multiplicity will not be a repudiation of divine simplicity. On the contrary, Barth will posit complete congruity between divine simplicity and divine multiplicity. This comports with Dorner’s call to understand divine simplicity as ‘compatible with the fulness of divine attributes’ and ‘of such a form that the supreme Unity must suffice to be a principle of a plurality’, so that the divine unity ‘carries plurality within itself and controls it’ and ‘indissolubly combines’ the differences inherent in plurality.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:236–37.

However, in his integration of divine simplicity and divine plurality, Barth affirms that God's being is simple, and in such a way that the multiplicity of his perfections is incapable of any 'dissolution or separation or non-identity', and yet is also 'capable of genuine multiplicity, individuality and diversity' (II.1:332). Barth then goes on to affirm the *identity thesis* regarding the attributes, consequent upon divine simplicity:

Our doctrine therefore means that every individual perfection in God is nothing but God Himself and therefore nothing but every other divine perfection. It means equally strictly on the other hand that God Himself is nothing other than each one of His perfections in its individuality, and that each individual perfection is identical with every other and with the fulness of them all. (II.1:333)

Here Barth and Polanus agree. Polanus says:

The essential properties of God are really the divine essence itself, and in fact they differ neither from the essence of God nor among themselves. [...] any essential property is itself the essence of God whole and entire, and so the essence of God and the essential properties of God are not one thing and another, but one and the same.²¹⁵

However, here Dorner and Barth diverge. Dorner does not affirm the identity thesis. As we saw in chapter 2 section 1.6 above, Dorner said, 'Evangelical faith does not allow an identification of righteousness with love or grace, but a distinction between them without separation.'²¹⁶ For Dorner the multiplicity of 'moments' in God's life is bound in indissoluble unity, but this unity does not imply the 'identity or mere self-sameness' of these 'moments'.²¹⁷ Dorner explicitly takes the *perichoresis* of the Trinitarian persons as extending to the attributes of God, and this is incompatible with the identity thesis. In his essay on immutability Dorner says:

In the multiplicity of his actual powers each has and preserves its place, the "position" appropriate to it. But they are not broken up into an indifferent separateness of emancipated from one another; rather there is an intelligible order here, by which they are yet also in one another, without dissolution of their difference or their position, so that the *Perichoresis* or

²¹⁵ *Proprietates Dei essentialis sunt realiter ipsamet Dei essentia, & nec ab essentia Dei, nec inter se reipsa differunt. [...] quælibet proprietates essentialis est ipsamet Dei essentia tota & integra: ita ut essentia Dei & essentialis Dei proprietates non sint aliud & aliud, sed unum & idem.* (Syntag. Theol. 901, 902)

²¹⁶ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:201.

²¹⁷ Dorner and Williams, *Divine Immutability*, 136–37.

Immanentia extends not merely to the trinitarian hypostases but also to the actual determinations and powers of God, to his attributes.²¹⁸

Trinitarian *perichoresis* implies the non-identity of the persons. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, nor are either of these the Spirit, and nor is the Spirit either of them. The identity thesis implies the identity in God's being of the attributes with one another and the whole Godhead. In God, the divine grace is identified with the divine holiness, and each of these are identified with the whole being of God. To think of Barth's realist doctrine as *perichoresis* of perfections just as the Trinity is a *perichoresis* of persons is inaccurate. The 'exact parallel' between the Trinity and the perfections he drew earlier is a parallel concern properly to respect both unity and multiplicity in each case, not a claim that both cases exhibit the same kind of perichoretic unity.²¹⁹

Barth's divergence from Dorner and his alignment with Polanus's basic position on the identity of God and his perfections is further signalled when, in the excursus subsequent to the exposition of the explanatory proposition, Barth quotes Polanus, *Syntag, Theol.* II.7 axioms 4, 6 and 7 with approval, as well as Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa and Wolleb. Polanus's axioms expound the unity and identity of the essential properties of God and the essence of God. Yet Barth also here reminds us that he rejects 'the semi-nominalistic reservation' regarding the final impropriety of our talk of God's properties he believes Polanus (and his tradition) has made. Barth restates the realist corrective he advocates in a new way, averring that 'God's being transcends the contrast of *simplicitas* and *multiplicitas*, including and reconciling both' (II.1:333). Without this, he claims, 'it is hard to see how we can escape the view of a God who is extremely lofty in His pure simplicity but also quite empty and unreal.' (II.1:333) Here we may trace an echo of Dorner's desire that divine

²¹⁸ Dorner and Williams, *Divine Immutability*, 140–41.

²¹⁹ George Hunsinger writes that, for Barth, 'just because God's inner being is that of the Trinity, the multiplicity of God's perfections must also be thought through in terms of the *perichoresis*.' (Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 195). If 'the *perichoresis*' is the particular perichoretic unity of the Trinitarian persons, this is not correct—or at least it is not what Barth does. It is not something Barth himself says he is doing, so Hunsinger cannot cite Barth to that effect. Hunsinger resorts to saying, 'What Barth says in a slightly different connection would apply also to the perfections'. (196) The 'slightly different connection' is our 'knowing and not knowing' God in his self-unveiling and his self-concealment (II.1:342). Of our knowledge of God and our ignorance of God Barth says, 'God's reality is of such a character that the one exists with the other, in the other, alongside of and after the other, an eternal simultaneity and successiveness.' (II.1:343) It is far from clear that Hunsinger is right to imagine that what Barth says about this knowledge and ignorance would apply also to his view of the divine perfections, or that it has anything to do with Trinitarian *perichoresis*. The fact is, Barth does not talk about the unity of the perfections in terms of *perichoresis*, and hence we cannot endorse Hunsinger's claim that for Barth 'because God's inner being is that of the Trinity, the multiplicity of God's perfections must also be thought through in terms of the *perichoresis*.' (195) Hunsinger's assertion that on this basis the unity of the perfections has for Barth an 'eternal simultaneity and successiveness', or 'is dynamic and to that extent diverse' is not supported by what he has cited (195–6). For Barth, the perfections do each in a sense indwell the other, and in their fullness constitute the being of God, and in that way their unity may be thought of as partially resembling the *perichoresis* of the divine persons. But if we posit a *perichoresis* of the perfections to explain Barth's account of the unity and diversity of the perfections, it will have to be a different *perichoresis* to the *perichoresis* of the trinitarian persons. Pokrifka also mistakenly asserts that, 'Barth believes in the *perichoresis* of the divine perfections' (Pokrifka, *Redescribing God*, 145).

simplicity would not be thought ‘as an abstract and empty identity with self, not as empty, pure being, which can scarcely be distinguished from non-being’, but rather as ‘compatible with the fulness of the divine attributes.’²²⁰ Yet Barth’s realism, which asserts an essential divine multiplicity alongside an essential divine simplicity, divides him not only from Polanus and the conceptualist view (which denies the objective non-identity of the attributes in God’s being), but also from Dorner’s realism (which denies the objective identity of the attributes in God’s being). We now examine Barth’s distinctive doctrine of the reconciliation of divine multiplicity and divine simplicity, which has its roots in Barth’s earlier assertion in §28 that the act of God’s being takes place in a unity of spirit and nature.

The inclusion of both multiplicity and simplicity in the being of God

Barth wishes to recognise that God’s being is rich and full, not bare and impoverished, and his assertion of divine multiplicity is an important way he expresses and protects that divine plenitude. Barth believes that in the act of his revelation, we learn that God is rich in himself and one in his works, and so we must accept and interpret God’s richness and oneness as we find it there (i.e. in the *many* perfections of the *one* Lord), without imposing upon God the exclusions our rational dichotomies might seem to demand. This means accepting the inclusion in God of the real multiplicity of his perfections and the real simplicity of his being, without proceeding to resolve the multiplicity-simplicity contrast:

If God is the God who is rich in Himself, and if He is the one true God even in His works *ad extra*, we cannot emphasise either His *simplicitas* or His *multiplicitas* as though the one or the other *in abstracto* were the very being of God, as though the one inevitably precluded the other. We can only accept and interpret God’s *simplicitas* and *multiplicitas* in such a way as to imply that they are not mutually exclusive but inclusive, or rather that they are both included in God Himself. (II.1:333)

This manner of speaking of simplicity and multiplicity does not derive from either Polanus and the tradition, or Dorner and his line of thought. Neither of them asserts this kind of antithetical pairing of apparently opposed divine properties. Polanus qualifies the multiplicity of God’s attributes in favour of divine simplicity (without conceding any diminution of God’s plenitude), and Dorner qualifies the simplicity of God’s essence in favour of the plurality of divine perfections (without conceding any diminution of God’s unity). Barth refuses to qualify either simplicity or multiplicity, but asserts both.

²²⁰ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 236-7. We have seen in the previous chapter that this is not a fair reading of the character of divine simplicity in the conceptualist tradition. That tradition does not deny the propriety of our talk of God’s properties in a way that empties God of the substance of what the perfections signify. It rather denies that God’s properties are properties in the strict and proper sense the term ‘property’ is used with reference to created and composite things.

Barth set the stage for this kind of undialectical inclusion of contrasting terms in his earlier discussion of spirit and nature, where he argued that God's being embraces without contradiction the natural and the spiritual. In §28.1, Barth asserts that the Bible's description of God's being and action in such apparently earthly and incompatible terms as wrath and mercy, remembrance and forgetting, corresponds to 'the saving contradiction of God found in His revelation, which is more than a mere difference that can be removed dialectically' (II.1:265). Since we cannot remove these differences in a higher synthesis, in a 'new idealistic interpretation' (II.1:265), God's transcendence is *undialectical*; its particularity must be respected by a refusal to resolve the contrasting and distinct divine attributes and actions. They must and do stand together as each necessary to proper speaking of God.

Barth then affirms that God's being transcends the contrast of the natural and the spiritual. Barth distances himself from what he calls a 'purely spiritual' understanding of God's being, which on principle regards only the spiritual—the incorporeal, the invisible, the simple, the heavenly—as providing proper concepts with which to speak of God. On this view the natural—the bodily and extended, the visible, the multiple and the earthly—is to be translated into the spiritual before it can properly speak of God. Barth argues that God's being 'must be allowed to transcend both spirit and nature, yet also to overlap and comprehend both' (II.1:266). 'Acts happen only in the unity of spirit and nature', says Barth (II.1:267), and this is true of the act of God's being. If this unity of (divine) nature and (divine) spirit is denied to God, Barth fears we are left with 'the formless, motionless being of a spirit which is open to the serious suspicion that it is nothing but a hypostatisation of our own created spirit.' (II.1:267).²²¹ From this root comes Barth statement that 'God's being transcends the contrast of *simplicitas* [of a 'spiritual' character] and *multiplicitas* [of a 'natural' character], including and reconciling both' (II.1:333). Such nature-spirit antitheses included and overcome in God's being accumulate as Barth expounds the perfections in §31.²²² That Barth turns to characterise God as lord of the antithesis of simplicity and multiplicity is a departure from Dorner's manner of developing the truth of the objective multiplicity of divine attributes, as

²²¹ Roelf T. te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 357 shrewdly comments that, 'Barth's discussion of the spirit–nature problem seems to be complicated by the interference between the scholastic classification (spirit–matter) on an Aristotelian basis and the sharpening of the spirit–nature division in nineteenth century German Idealism.' Barth is looking back, somewhat anachronistically, upon Polanus through a history in which Enlightenment rationalism diverted theology into what Barth later calls 'a hypostatization of the world of ideas' (II.1:288), in which *spirit* became absolute and impersonal and which also led to Feuerbach's accusation that God is constituted by human self-projection. Barth has perhaps involved the Protestant Orthodox in the blame for enabling these developments more than is warranted. See; Brian D. Asbill, *The Freedom of God for Us*, 66–67. Robert Price rightly sees that Barth is seeking to 'win back what he considers the biblical concept of 'spirit' from its distortion in much modern thought'. But Polanus' view of divine spirituality does nothing to undermine divine activity or agency. Robert Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 18–19.

²²² For example: 'God's constant divine nature lies beyond the antithesis between rest and movement.' (II.1:493) 'There is in God both supreme necessity and supreme contingency.' (II.1:547-8) 'God Himself is not only timeless, but that in this readiness for time, in the timeless ordering and succession of His triune being, He is also temporal.' (II.1:618)

well as from the tradition represented by Polanus. Barth develops his realism regarding the perfections in his own way.

1.3 The divine multiplicity of perfections is in God originally and not by participation

Barth's final explanatory proposition denies that the perfections of God are his participation in something shared with other beings. In the exposition of this proposition Barth again aligns himself with positions standard in the tradition, yet repeats his opposition to its alleged semi-nominalism. The proposition runs:

3. The multiplicity, individuality and diversity of God's perfections are rooted in His own being and not in His participation in the character of other beings. The recognition of divine attributes cannot be taken to mean that for us God is subsumed under general notions, under the loftiest ideas of our knowledge of creaturely reality, and that He participates in its perfections.
(II.1:333)

Here is Barth's hostility to beginning with 'general notions', 'the loftiest ideas' and then claiming that God instantiates those concepts in a perfect, infinite or eminent sense. Barth rejects this kind of metaphysical theologising as projection, as fashioning an image of God 'after our own image' (II.1:334). Rather, 'God is subordinate to no idea in which He can be conceived as rooted or by which He can be properly measured.' (II.1:334) For, 'God is the being of all beings, the law of all laws, and therefore the nature of every nature. In Himself, then, He is rich, multiple, individual and diverse.' (II.1:334)

The subsequent small print excursus begins with Barth endorsing 'the older dogmatics', quoting and paraphrasing with approval the substance of Polanus's ninth axiom (II.1:334, *Syntag. Theol.* 903-4). This again signals Barth's basic alignment with the tradition and its formulations. His criticism of the tradition is, again, 'the cloven hoof of semi-nominalism' (II.1:334) allegedly appearing in Polanus's qualification, 'There are not (properly speaking) many properties in God, but one only'.²²³ He explains the denial of *the many* as the consequence of subjecting God to a philosophical prejudice for *the one*: 'owing to the dazzling effect of the Platonic-Aristotelian idea of being, in which men thought they had attained knowledge of God, it was felt necessary to ascribe a much higher dignity to the idea of the one as against that of the many'. (II.1:334) Barth regards this prejudice as pushing the Protestant Orthodox into a twofold error:

²²³ *Non sunt (proprie loquendo) multae proprietates in Deo, sed una tantum* (*Syntag. Theol.* 904).

On the one hand, they falsely defined the being of God, which they were supposed to be defining *proprie*, in such a way that it did not transcend but was subject to this notion of unity. On the other hand, they made the multiplicity of the divine attributes, which they wanted to ascribe to God only *improprie*, dependent on the discursiveness of the human intellect and the manifoldness of the created world. (II.1:335)

We have discussed in section 2 of chapter 4 above the flaws in Barth's charge of such a twofold error. But in pointing to a philosophical prejudice for oneness, Barth introduces a new aspect to his critique. The tradition relativises multiplicity in God compared to unity, but Barth rejects this on the grounds that it does not reflect God's revealed being. The older dogmaticians, captive to Hellenistic philosophy, instead,

should have done justice conceptually to His revealed being as such. That is, they should have given the glory to God in His multiplicity just as seriously and truly as in His unity and confessed Him unreservedly in His multiplicity as such—God Himself as the One, but as the One who is also the Many. (II.1:335)

In Barth's view, the theologian's work is a faithful conceptualisation arising from and corresponding to revelation. To qualify the confession of God's multiplicity when God in revelation is possessed of a multiplicity of perfections is to fail in the theologian's duty. If faithful conceptualisation of God's being in revelation requires confessions of both simplicity and multiplicity, then so be it.²²⁴ Barth did not understand multiplicity and simplicity in the being of God to be in contradiction, tension or opposition, or to be resolved by a third thing we might subsequently conceptualise. Rather than prefer oneness to multiplicity (or *vice versa*), we must give God the freedom of his divinity. As he expressed this principle of his theology later, in §31: 'It is the freedom of God that the antithesis between nature and spirit is overcome in Him, that He has fully mastered it, although the antithesis itself is there.' (II.1:543). Barth does not explain how in the being of God antitheses such as that between simplicity and multiplicity exist, and yet are 'overcome' and 'mastered'. The problem of explaining how the multiplicity of divine perfections belong to the one and simple being of God is subtle. In Polanus, and conceptualism, God's being is rich and full without possessing an objective multiplicity of distinct attributes. Nonetheless God's being embraces and contains all diverse perfections in its perfection, without being divided or multiple. How this

²²⁴ In discussing this, Pokrifka says of Barth's method that, 'complete logical consistency or coherence is neither possible nor proper for theology. Thus the aim to have consistency in the sense of freedom from contradiction must be subordinated to the aim to have theology that is descriptively and hermeneutically adequate in correspondence to the unique God who is its revealed object.' (Pokrifka, *Redescribing God*, 171) However, since Barth affirmed that there is in God no contradiction or opposition (e.g., II.1:445), he presumably regarded the doctrine of God as resting upon the coherence of its Subject, and being *both* descriptively adequate *and* logically consistent, even if that consistency might not seem apparent.

may be so is not comprehensible by finite, discursive minds. Barth, believing this view to be infected by a nominalism that separates the essence and attributes of God, prefers to locate the mystery elsewhere. For him the richness and fullness of God's being consists in its existence as, and possession of, an objective multiplicity of divine perfections, which preserve their individuality and diversity in God, and are nonetheless also really identical with one another and the whole being of God. How this may be so is not explored. As far as his general account of the unity and diversity of God's attributes goes, Barth's view falls within the bounds and at the realist end of the traditional spectrum of views, much as the realism Duns Scotus does. By contrast, Dorner diverges far more from the tradition, dispensing with simplicity as an explanation for the unity of the attributes and enlisting the trinitarian *perichoresis* in that role.

2. Speaking properly of the perfections of God

Another side to Barth's rejection and reformulation of the conceptualist tradition exists in his differing account of the predication of divine perfections, which finds its root in Barth's guiding principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation. We have had reason to examine Polanus's treatment of divine predication, and now we turn to examine Barth's.

In §29, Barth next turns to the question of how to speak of the perfections '*proprie*, i.e., on the basis of God's revelation, and in responsibility to this revelation, without reservation in respect of their truth' (II.1:335). Barth's discussion weaves two related topics together. The first and more prominent is the problem of the derivation and distribution of the divine attributes, namely, the question of the basis upon which certain particular attributes will be chosen for exposition, and how will they be related to one another in that exposition. Scattered through this discussion is material bearing upon a second topic, namely, the question of what kind of knowledge of God is conveyed by the predication of attributes to God, and what is the character of such predication. We will separate these topics out and discuss the second one here, and the first in the next chapter. In short, Barth does not regard our proper speaking of God as the result of a divine self-lowering to match our meagre capacities to know God (more as he is not, than as he is), which is what we find in Polanus. Rather Barth sees our proper speaking of God as a divine exaltation of our concepts, so they convey a real knowledge of God as he is in himself, although ignorance of God always accompanies this knowledge of God, because God's revelation is always his self-concealment as well as his self-disclosure. This does mark a real and significant divergence of Barth's thought from Polanus and the tradition he represents.

2.1 Our concepts are graciously exalted to share in the truth of God

Barth handles divine attribution according to his commitment to the principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation. In his characteristic undialectical style Barth asserts the co-existence of divine self-disclosure and divine self-concealment as God's Word is expressed in human words, without resolving this antithesis. As we speak of God as almighty, eternal, just, wise, merciful,

He is concealed from us in so far as these words are our words and not His own Word about Himself, yet it remains true that we are invited and authorised by His revelation to name Him with these words of ours in the confidence that in this way we are moving in the sphere of truth and not of falsehood so long as we are always willing to allow Him to be Himself the interpreter of these human words which He has placed upon our lips. (II.1:336)

Revelation authorises our naming of God, our predications in human words, which can move 'in the sphere of truth'. Polanus said that in predicating attributes of God, 'the Holy Spirit lowers himself to our capacity, and with the attributes, describes his essence in certain ways.'²²⁵ In the attributes 'it is more what and how he is not that may be learned by us, than what and how and what kind he is.'²²⁶ But for Barth, revelation is not a divine self-lowering that produces a knowledge of God in his attributes that is negative rather than positive. Instead, revelation is the gracious divine elevation of human conceptualisations so that they convey a positive knowledge of God himself: 'by the grace of revelation our human views and concepts are invited and exalted to share in the truth of God and therefore in a marvellous way made instruments of a real knowledge of God (in His being for us and as He is in Himself). (II.1:341) This capacity to convey a knowledge of God is not intrinsic to human conceptualisation. On the contrary, 'our human views and concepts (the only ones at our disposal for the knowledge of God, and claimed by God Himself as a means to this end) have not in themselves the smallest capacity to apprehend God.' (II.1:342) Even so, we may speak of God because God is 'fully revealed [...] in His self-disclosure' (II.1:341). And yet along with the knowledge of God this gives is also an ongoing ignorance, for, says Barth, God is also 'fully concealed in his self-disclosure' (II.1:341). Even in the knowledge given in revelation, our ignorance of God is not removed: 'in His self-revelation and concealment He has become for us an object of our human knowledge while remaining completely unknowable to us in both aspects (even in that of revelation).' (II.1:342) In consequence, Barth gives counsel that sounds challenging to follow: 'At every point, therefore, we have to

²²⁵ *ideo Spiritus Sanctus demisit se ad nostrum caput, & attributis, quibusdam essentiam suam descripsit.* (Syntag. Theol. 879-880) See chapter 1, 1.2 above.

²²⁶ *Quoniam ex illis potius quis & quomodo non sit, quam quis & quomodo qualisque; sit à nobis cognoscatur.* (Syntag. Theol. 879)

be silent, but we have also to speak.’ (II.1:342) Here is another set of paradoxical Barthian formulations to add to our collection. Barth proposes to follow his own counsel by confessing both to our knowledge of God and to our ignorance of God in a succession corresponding to the succession of God’s love and his freedom (II.1:342-3). What guarantees our knowledge of God and what necessitates our ignorance of God exist in an eternal simultaneity in God, but must be confessed discursively and in succession by us, just as is the case with divine love and divine freedom (II.1:343).

2.2 Diverging from Polanus over the reality of human speaking of God

Rinse Reeling Brouwer argues that ‘the real difference between Polanus and Barth is [...] in their divergence in addressing the *reality* of the human speaking of the simplicity and multiplicity in God’.²²⁷ What we have noted regarding the gracious elevation of our concepts to be instruments of a real knowledge of God in himself in Barth, contrasted with the divine self-lowering that Polanus saw involved in the knowledge conveyed in the attributes, suggests that Reeling Brouwer’s thesis has cogency. Reeling Brouwer has it that Polanus was content for human speaking of God to be *ektypal* (communicated and adapted to our finitude) and not *archetypal* (original and unadapted) as it can be only for God.²²⁸ We have seen above (chapter 1, section 1.2) the emphasis Polanus placed on God’s infinity and ineffability that entailed the divine self-lowering that implies a fundamental limitation and inadequacy in our understanding of God in his attributes.

For Barth, by contrast, God ‘becomes completely recognisable by us, not because of our capacity, thinking and speaking, but because of the grace of His revelation, which we cannot refuse to receive, however little we may be able to control it.’ (II.1:342) Hence, ‘we are not compelled to retire within the limitations of our capacity for knowledge, but speak directly in view of the reality of the object itself’ (II.1:343).²²⁹ Barth’s assertion of God’s objectivity in revelation (i.e. that God is who he is in the act of his revelation), and of the gracious elevation of human conceptualisations together constitute the basis for our realistic speaking about God. On this basis Barth asserts the real multiplicity of God’s perfections on the divine side, and the true knowledge of God in the multiplicity of his revealed perfections on the human side. If revelation places upon our lips ways of speaking about God that convey divine multiplicity, we cannot deny this multiplicity to God. Barth may have unnecessarily distanced

²²⁷ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 61–62.

²²⁸ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 60.

²²⁹ Velde seems to overlook Barth’s discussion of the limitation of our knowledge and concepts here in §29 in his discussion of the multiplicity of God’s perfections. Velde reaches back to Barth’s earlier discussion of incomprehensibility to bring out Barth’s attitude to the limitation of our concepts and understanding. Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 447.

himself from Polanus and the Old Orthodox on the basis of his misreading of their qualifications about ‘many properties’ in God. But a real divergence over divine predication between Barth and the Protestant Orthodox tradition exists beyond this misunderstanding of statements in Polanus regarding the proper attribution of many properties to God.

This divergence is itself rooted in Barth’s larger doctrine of revelation, which Barth shaped in response to his understanding of the Enlightenment attack on theology. Barth believed that that attack exploited deep weaknesses in the tradition’s account of revelation and the knowledge of God, weaknesses that he thought arose because of ‘the dazzling effect of the Platonic-Aristotelian idea of being’ (II.1:334). In reflecting on the intellectual environment which may have caused Barth to reject Polanus’s understanding of human speaking of God, Reeling Brouwer suggests that, ‘Polanus lived in a milieu where the experience of unity was very strong, or felt to be very strong. What Scriptures says and what logic says (to the regenerate), what the confession believes and what reason proves, is in the end all the same’.²³⁰ Hence the Protestant Scholastics, and the tradition before them, could develop their theology proper with the use of logic and reasoning upon propositions generally knowable, apart from revelation, and found it obvious and attractive to do so, drawing such reasoning from the theological tradition which had retooled Hellenistic philosophy for Christian theology. Reeling Brouwer notes Barth’s ‘completely changed’ intellectual situation in which the experience was fragmentation, not unity.²³¹ Modernity developed in such a way that ‘what the confession believes and what reason proves’ did *not* turn out to be in the end all the same.²³² Barth judges that the weaknesses that the Enlightenment critique of Christian theology exploited were present as metaphysical reasoning in the mixed methodology of the Old Orthodox.²³³ As Barth expresses it at one point, the Enlightenment featured the ‘reduction of the idea of God to the eternal truth of the theoretical and practical aesthetic ideas of human reason’ (II.1:288), and, because the old doctrine of God was, ‘essentially constructed according to the directions of heathen antiquity’, God was readily seen to be an ‘hypostatisation of the world of ideas, or of the idea of all ideas, which may just as well and perhaps better be named reason rather than God’ (II.1:288).

²³⁰ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 68.

²³¹ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 69.

²³² Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 68.

²³³ Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 64–73 discusses the complexities of assessing whether the Protestant Scholastics contributed to the Enlightenment. The Barthian tradition in research on Protestant Orthodoxy views them as ‘a partial forerunner of Enlightenment’, due to their intellectualist and rationalist approach (64). But Velde, representing the newer school of research on Protestant Scholasticism, acknowledges the ‘complicated relation’ to Cartesian philosophy, and the increasing prominent of both evidences for Christian doctrines such as the trustworthiness of Scripture, and of natural theology, in the old orthodox, but he rejects ‘the older hypothesis that Orthodoxy’s intellectualism and logical systematising of doctrine constitute a major step towards the rationalism of the eighteenth century’ (75).

Barth's reaction to the hypostatisation of the ideas of human reason as God that he diagnoses in the Enlightenment is his strong allergy to any hint that we can find our reason to be a mirror in which to behold God's being, even darkly and in the negative. Hence, as Reeling Brouwer says, Barth 'deems it necessary only to make statements in theology that—in a certain exaggerated epistemological boldness—can be said to truly derive from God in his "revelation"'.²³⁴ This alone is what can and must return our theology to its proper source. This also involves Barth's view of revelation as being of such a nature as by God's gracious action to exalt our human concepts so that they do become instruments of a real knowledge of God as he is in himself (II.1:341-2). Hence, for Barth, as we have seen, and as Reeling Brouwer says, 'human speaking of God must correspond with the inner being of God. And for that reason it is important that also the *multiplicity* in human speaking of God truly corresponds to a multiplicity within God himself'.²³⁵

3. Conclusion and prospect

Barth and Polanus both seek to develop an account of how we can speak properly of God's being and attributes. Both Polanus and Barth acknowledge in their own ways human limitations, God's incomprehensibility, and the consequent need for God to reveal and describe himself in the attributes that we understand from Scripture, if they are to produce knowledge of God for us. Both assert that a knowledge of God is possible under these conditions, without removing God's enduring incomprehensibility. Despite these shared and parallel concerns, Barth was seeking to re-found the theological tradition upon objective divine revelation in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and modernity. Thus, for Barth, any view that might suggest that this revelation was less than thoroughly objective, or that it might rather exist only in our subjectivity, could not be admitted. Hence Barth's movement to realism, and his animus towards nominalism, and also towards conceptualism when it sought to locate certain aspects of God in his revelation (e.g., the multiplicity of his perfections) as existing only in our conception and not in God himself.

Given this thoroughgoing opposition to conceptualism, and Barth's indicated intention to develop the line of thought which emphasises objective attributes, it is unexpected to find, as we will in the next chapter, Barth's exposition of the perfections executed in such conceptualist terms. For, in §30, Barth's urgent insistence on the objective multiplicity, diversity and individuality of the perfections in the being of God fades away, replaced by a concern to assert the unity and plenitude of God's being, and the necessity for us to use

²³⁴ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 69.

²³⁵ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 69–70.

many mutually augmenting concepts (i.e. our notions of the perfections) to develop our knowledge of God's one rich being. Before we come to that, however, in the first part of the next chapter we examine the way Barth derives and divides the perfections of God, comparing and contrasting it with the approaches of Dorner and Polanus. Barth has affinities with each and differences from each, but is overall much more in the tradition of Polanus.

CHAPTER 6

Mapping the contours of God's being: the structure of Barth's account of the perfections

We continue our inquiry into the nature and coherence of Barth's reformulated, realist account of the perfections, asking to what extent Barth's account amounts to a substantial and consistent reformulation of the tradition. We have noted how Barth diverges from both Dorner and from Polanus, developing his account in his own particular manner from the conviction that God faithfully discloses himself in the perfections manifest in his revelation.

In the first section of this chapter we pick up the main topic of the last section of §29, which is 'the problem of the derivation and distribution of the divine attributes' (II.1:335). Barth uses his characterisation of God as the One who lives in freedom, with its mutually-including and reciprocally-fulfilling duality, to structure his account of the perfections, in their unity and diversity. This approach differs from both Dorner and Polanus, while also having points of commonality with each of them too. Barth's discussion of the perfections will align itself formally with the two-class mode of classification of Polanus and his tradition, and so Barth will place himself closer to Polanus than to Dorner on this question. However, Barth's use of his love-freedom duality will make the order of his discussion of the perfections a distinctive inversion of Polanus's ordering.

In the second section of this chapter we will argue that in his concrete exposition of the perfections of divine love, Barth drops the emphasis of §29 that God's perfections must be recognised as having a real multiplicity, individuality and diversity in the divine life. Instead, Barth falls into a conceptualist mode of relating the perfections and the being of God. In this mode, Barth emphasises that for us to appreciate something of the rich plenitude of God's one being it requires us to know God through a multiplicity of distinct concepts that qualify and augment one another. This new emphasis in Barth's exposition is accompanied by a new line of critique of the Protestant Orthodox tradition. Barth charges that Protestant Orthodoxy has not properly integrated its concepts of the perfections with one another, and this needs to be done in order to grasp the unity of God, which in Barth's terms is the unity of his love and freedom. So again, we find that Barth in some ways embraces and follows Protestant

Orthodoxy while at the same time criticising it and seeking to correct it in light of his own distinctive principles for developing the doctrine of God.

1. Barth's general account of the order of the divine perfections

In this section we analyse Barth's derivation and distribution of the divine attributes, comparing and contrasting it with the approaches of Dorner and Polanus. Barth and Dorner will each propose a single principle for relating and ordering the attributes, although Dorner's principle is unitary and crowns his exposition, whereas Barth's principle is dual, and grounds his exposition. This duality prompts Barth to embrace the traditional use of a twofold pattern of classifying the attributes, such as we find in Polanus. Yet Barth's exposition transforms the traditional pattern under the influence of his essential characterisation of God as the One who loves in freedom.

1.1 Mapping the contours of God's being

As he takes up 'the problem of the derivation and distribution of the divine attributes' (II.1:335), Barth rejects the idea that because all the divine perfections are identical with one another and all God's fullness, the perfections cannot and should not be conceptualised, formulated and related to one another and to the being of God. Rather, this task can be and must be undertaken. He says, 'we not merely may but must ask in human words and concepts what God is and is not, and in what way He is what He is, and therefore in some sense what are the upper and lower aspects, the right and the left, the contours of His being.' (II.1:336) This statement implies relations between aspects of God's being, and so Barth must organise his exposition of the perfections to elucidate the order of these relations. He promises that the task is not so difficult, as there is a suitable road to travel that coheres with his exposition of God's being-in-act (II.1:337). Barth identifies a twofold ordering of the attributes in the tradition as the classic, ecumenical and correct way to proceed (II.1:340-1). The ways that the attributes have been distinguished into two classes vary in detail (e.g., communicable and incommunicable, metaphysical and moral, attributes of being and of activity), but Barth senses a kinship between them all, and also a shared connection to the twofold question *Who and what is God?*

Barth wishes to join this classic stream; however he rejects, 'all those types of a doctrine of attributes which attempt to define and order the perfections of God as though they were the various predicates of a kind of general being presupposed as known already' (II.1:337). Barth regards many of the more recent attempts to derive and distribute the attributes of God as misguided. He categorises such failures in three types: psychological, religio-genetic and

historico-intuitive (II.1:337-340). Dorner does not seem to be on Barth's mind, for good or ill, for he does not mention Dorner's derivation of the attributes as corollaries of the several 'moments' in an unfolding, integrated proof of God's existence, essence and attributes. It is not clear which one of Barth's three categories of erroneous approaches, if any, Dorner's approach would fit within (although Dorner's whole project of independent rational verification of the essence and attributes of God would be unlikely to elicit Barth's approval).²³⁶

Dorner and Barth do have in common that they both seek 'a principle existent in God, which arranges and which governs' the relations between the attributes, so that the attributes are not merely co-ordinate, but there is a structure to their relations in the unity of God's essence. As we saw in chapter 2 section 2 above, Dorner ultimately finds this governing principle in the triune life of divine loving.²³⁷ Whereas, however, Dorner's principle is unitary—it is the divine loving—Barth's principle is dual, namely *loving-in-freedom*. For Barth, the right way to tackle the task of derivation and distribution 'will consist in understanding the attributes of God as those of this His special being itself and therefore of His life, of His love in freedom' (II.1:337). This reappearance of the characterisation of God's being as loving in freedom signals the major way Barth will express the order of the perfections. As he comes to the manner in which love and freedom order and relate the perfections, Barth wishes neither to separate, nor to merge, God's love and God's freedom, but to set these two in a particular reciprocal duality, in their singular unity and distinction.

[I]f we do not wish to deviate from Scripture, the unity of God must be understood as this unity of His love and freedom which is dynamic and, to that extent, diverse. What we have here is, then, a complete reciprocity in the characterisation of the one Subject. Always in this reciprocity each of the opposing ideas not only augments but absolutely fulfils the other, yet it does not render it superfluous or supplant it. On the contrary, it is only in conjunction with the other—and together with it affirming the same thing—that each can describe the Subject, God. (II.1:343)

Like Dorner, Barth has reservations about certain kinds of classifications.²³⁸ This duality of love and freedom should not be equated with a God-for-us/God-in-himself distinction (II.1:344-6). Nor does it arise from the notion that God is the transcendent creator, and, as such, his properties both negate creaturely limitations and perfect creaturely excellences

²³⁶ Cf. footnote 138, chapter 3 section 1.3 above.

²³⁷ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:202.

²³⁸ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:202–6.

(II.1:346-8). This duality leads to a revision of the traditional order of the perfections. Barth divides the perfections into two classes: the perfections of God's love and the perfections of his freedom. Although neither love nor freedom exceeds the other in significance, there is an intrinsic order to their duality. The tradition has generally treated divine aseity—God *à priori* and absolutely—before divine activity—God *à posteriori* and *ad extra*—but 'this sequence corresponds neither to the order of revelation nor to the nature of the being of God as known in His revelation.' (II.1:349) The order of classes in the tradition must be reversed so that first comes God's love—i.e., his seeking and creating of fellowship with us—then the freedom in which he loves—i.e., the fact of his complete lordship in that act of creating of fellowship with us. This reversal of the traditional order does not mean that divine love is more fundamental to God than divine freedom. But neither does their complete reciprocal unity mean that they may be treated in any order: 'If there is full reciprocity, as we have seen, this order obtains even in the full reciprocity, not signifying a difference of value between the two aspects of divinity, but the movement of life in which God is God, corresponding exactly to His revelation of Himself as God. (II.1:350) Using this ordered, reciprocally-fulfilling duality to divide the attributes into classes injects originality into an approach that otherwise identifies itself with the tradition. Its similarity to Dorner's approach appears only in the identification of a 'governing and arranging' principle for the relations of the attributes related to divine loving. Barth give no clear sign of having been influenced by Dorner's unitary principle of triune divine *loving*. The Barthian *loving-in-freedom* duality is a different sort of governing principle to the Dornerian divine loving.

1.2 The intrinsic order of the divine life

We come now to §30, where Barth begins his concrete exposition of the divine perfections with the perfections of God's loving. In the previous section we noted Barth's connections with and differences from Dorner's derivation and division of the divine attributes. In strong continuity with this discussion, here we will note the connections with and differences from Polanus's derivation and division of the divine attributes. Barth treats a set of attributes that greatly overlaps with Polanus, but Barth's governing principle of love-in-freedom leads to a different manner of organising the exposition of the attributes in their mutual relations.

As Barth begins §30 and continues his discussion about the specification and ordering of these perfections, he turns explicitly to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the ground and guide for this task. This gospel prompts us to understand God's perfections in the first instance as perfections of his loving: 'If then, as is proper, we are to be told by the Gospel who and what God is, we must allow this primary word to be spoken to us—that God is love. We must recognise and understand all His perfections as the perfections of His love.' (II.1:351)

Barth proposes to deepen his characterisation of God's loving as exhibited in the gospel by treating in §30 what he calls the perfections of God's love in three pairs of concepts: the grace and holiness of God, the mercy and righteousness of God and the patience and wisdom of God. In each of these pairs, the accent of the first of the pair lies upon God's loving as it creates fellowship with us in our sinfulness, and the accent of the second lies upon God's loving as it creates this fellowship in his freedom, integrity and lordship.

God is gracious, merciful and patient both in Himself and in all His works. This is His loving. But He is gracious, merciful and patient in such a way—because He loves in His freedom—that He is also holy, righteous and wise—again both in Himself and in all His works. For this is the freedom in which He loves. (II.1:352)

It is the reciprocal unity of these two accents that characterises God properly, as he is in his revelation, as he is proclaimed to be in the gospel. Barth sees these concepts of the perfections of God's loving as attempts to discern the 'specific determinations' either in which 'the love of God in Jesus Christ, as attested in Holy Scripture' becomes for us a reality, or in which the freedom of God stands 'when His love is actualised for us' (II.1:352). Such determinations may be inferred truly to be 'determinations of the divine being' (II.1:352).²³⁹ As Barth sees it, the choice of which concepts to use is always, and thus in his case also, a proposal by the theologian attempting faithfully to follow and to describe 'the self-manifestation of the living God' (II.1:353).²⁴⁰

Let us compare the manner in which Polanus derives and divides the attributes, in order to appreciate the distinctive way Barth seeks to use the gospel of Christ to order and integrate his treatment of the perfections. Polanus treats the essential properties of God in two classes

²³⁹ Both Barth and Dorner at times describe God's perfections as determinations of his being. Yet despite any terminological kinship at play here, this does not point to a close connection between their understandings of what God's attributes are. Dorner describes the divine attributes as 'determinations, which God as personal Love necessarily and eternally has and wills for the eternal Self-production of His own absolute ethical Personality.' (Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 454). However, Dorner is careful not to identify the attributes with the divine love, nor to allow that they are modes of that love: 'It may not, of course, be said that Love is itself immediately all the other attributes, and that they are to be thought of as *modi* of love only, or as submerged in love: that would be identification, and would make the objective distinction of the attributes a merely subjective distinction—a view previously refuted.' (Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 455–56) Dorner includes divine justice within holy Love, as the love that is divine Self-preservation, but other attributes such as life, power and knowledge are the *presuppositions* and *means* of the divine love, for the sake of which they exist. (Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 456–57). Nonetheless, the attributes are united in the eternal realisation of holy love that is the triune life of God (See chapter 2 above). For Barth, by contrast, the idea of the perfections as determinations of God's love is much closer to the notion of modes of God's love. Indeed, the translation of Barth's specification of divine grace uses 'mode': 'Grace is the distinctive mode of God's being in so far as it seeks and creates fellowship by its own free inclination and favour.' (II.1:353)

²⁴⁰ In the spirit of making attempts to follow God's self-manifestation, Ian McFarlane critiques Barth's choice of freedom as the divine characteristic best paired with love if God is to be most faithfully described. He recommends characterising God as 'the One who is present in love', replacing divine freedom with divine presence and reversing the order of the duality. McFarlane, "Present in Love," 244.

based upon an *à priori* / *à posteriori* distinction in the nature of the attributes. The first class is based upon God's being *à priori*, as he is in himself. They are, 'those which reveal the essence of God as he is in himself, absolutely—and in him alone they inhere and are attributed after essence, act and life; and so are also simply incommunicables. Of these there are first simplicity and perfection, then infinity and immutability.'²⁴¹ As for the second class, they are, 'those which we say of God *à posteriori*, inasmuch as he is the origin of action. They are incommunicable, since they are in God: yet they are called communicable by analogy, because of a certain likeness of theirs found in creatures.'²⁴² Polanus specifies the major second-class attributes as life and immortality, blessedness and glory.²⁴³ His principle for ordering them is not based on God's love for sinners manifest in the gospel, but on their likeness found to varying degrees in various creatures. Polanus says of the second class of attributes:

Their distinction and order may be assessed. Life is more widely possessed than blessedness and glory; just as existing is more widely possessed than living. For certainly every creature exists, yet not all live. Likewise, life comports with many more creatures than blessedness in glory. Life and immortality differ, as separate attributes, and life is more widely possessed, for indeed all things which are immortal live, but not all things which live are immortal. So, a human being is alive now, to be sure, but is not immortal. Further, not everything which lives and is immortal, is also blessed, as [is the case with] Satan. Glory is the companion of blessedness.²⁴⁴

Reeling Brouwer has a convenient diagram of the attributes Polanus treats, which include many other attributes grouped under the major ones.²⁴⁵ Under God's beatitude, Polanus treats, as co-ordinate sub-attributes, God's wisdom and will, his power and freedom. Under God's will, Polanus treats in co-ordinate manner God's goodness and righteousness (*iustitia*). God's goodness includes as sub-attributes his grace, mercy and patience (as well as his love). God's righteousness includes as sub-attributes his truth and holiness. In this way Polanus co-ordinates grace, mercy and patience with truth and holiness as specifications of God's will as

²⁴¹ *quæ essentiam Dei declarant ut est in se absolutè, eique soli insunt & tribuuntur secundum essentiam, actum & vim; ac proinde sunt simpliciter incommunicabiles. Cuiusmodi sunt tum simplicitas, & perfectio: tum infinitas, & immutabilitas.* (Syntag. Theol. 905)

²⁴² *sunt quæ de Deo à posteriori dicuntur, ut est agendi principium. Et hæc sunt incommunicabiles, ut sunt in Deo: communicabiles tamen dicuntur κατ' ἀναλογίαν, quia earum similitudo quædam in creaturis reperitur.* (Syntag. Theol. 983)

²⁴³ *vita & immortalitas: beatitudo & gloria.* (Syntag. Theol. 984.)

²⁴⁴ *Proprietates Dei essentielles secundi ordinis sunt, vita & immortalitas: beatitudo & gloria. Harum distinctio & ordo perpendatur. Vita latius pater, quàm beatitudo & gloria: sicut esse latius patet, quàm vivere: nam omnes quidem creaturæ sunt, at non omnes vivunt. Sic longè pluribus creaturis cõpetit vita, quàm beatitudo & gloria. Vita & immortalitas differunt, ut alia attributa: & vita latius patet; nam omnia quidem quæ sunt immortalia, vivunt; sed non omnia quæ vivunt, sunt immortalia; ut homo vivit iam quidem, sed non est immortalis. Deinde non omnis qui vivit & immortalis est, etiam beatus est, ut Satanas. Beatitudinis comes est gloria.* (Syntag. Theol. 984)

²⁴⁵ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 51.

good on the one hand and righteous on the other. As we have seen, Barth makes a similar set of co-ordinations himself. But while Polanus's exposition develops from the absoluteness of divine simplicity and perfection to the fullness of divine blessedness and glory, Barth's exposition begins with the divine blessedness which is his act and decision to love, all the while working in the absoluteness of divine freedom as well. They both treat God's glory last.

Like Dorner, Barth values and makes explicit an integrating and ordering principle for all the attributes in their diversity. Polanus does not have such an explicit, single integrating principle, and so his exposition, with its branching dichotomies, may first appear less integrated and focused than Barth's consistent framing of the perfections as the exposition of God's loving in freedom as proclaimed in the gospel. Reeling Brouwer believes Barth distrusted Polanus's dichotomies, thinking them to represent 'a *dualistic* view of reality'.²⁴⁶ We have discussed above (chapter 5, section 2) Reeling Brouwer's suggestion that Barth's discontent with the Protestant Orthodox was connected to his attempt to respond to the intellectual fragmentation of post-Enlightenment modernity by deriving theology wholly from revelation.²⁴⁷ Whether or not this rightly identifies Barth's motives, it remains that Barth's love-in-freedom dynamic lends his exposition of the perfections a high level of integration, and makes it a distinctive renovation of the Reformed tradition. The interaction between the tradition and Barth's description of God as the One who loves in freedom (derived from the principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, an act proclaimed in the gospel of Christ) gives Barth's its distinctive character as a substantial restructuring and reformulation of Barth's Protestant Orthodox inheritance.

2. A conceptualist account of the unity of the divine life

We now consider the manner in which Barth relates the perfections to one another as he expounds them. Here we argue that in his concrete exposition of the perfections of the divine loving, Barth almost completely submerges any realist insistence he had championed in §29 that God's perfections must be recognised as having a real multiplicity, individuality and diversity in the divine life. Instead, Barth falls into a far more conceptualist mode of accounting for the unity and distinction of the perfections, where he emphasises that for us to appreciate something of the rich plenitude of God's one being it requires us to know God through a multiplicity of distinct concepts that qualify and augment one another. Barth's concerns change due to what he sees as the tradition's failure to expound the attributes in a

²⁴⁶ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 61.

²⁴⁷ And see Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 61–70., especially 68–70.

way that integrates them with one another and the one being of God. Barth reacts to this perceived separation of the attributes from one another in the tradition by emphasising the unity and plenitude of God's being, and of the mutually enriching concepts we must use to develop our understanding of that plenitude. The assertion of the formal unity of the pairs of perfections is complemented by an account of their material unity that lands on Christ as the revelation and operation of their unity.

2.1 Grace and holiness

Observe that in his exposition of grace and holiness, Barth is discussing in the first place *concepts* of these perfections that work together to build up our grasp of God. He says, 'We begin our consideration of divine love with a study of the concept of divine grace as it stands directly confronted with and controlled and purified by the concept of divine holiness.' (II.1:353) In line with the identity thesis, these concepts do signify who God is wholly and without remainder: 'In grace we have characterised God Himself, the one God in all His fulness. We are not wrong, we do not overlook or neglect anything, if we affirm that His love and therefore His whole being, in all the heights and depths of the Godhead, is simply grace.' (II.1:358) And yet, for the sake of our knowledge of this God who is his grace, we must consider other concepts alongside our concept of God's grace:

But in our heart and on our lips, in our mode of knowledge, this thing grace is in no sense so fully and unambiguously clear, or above all so rich and deep, as it is in the truth of God which by this concept we apprehend—yet apprehend as we men apprehend God by faith, i.e., in such a way that our knowledge must needs expand and grow and increase. (II.1:358)

Grace as the *divine perfection* of God's love is God's being simply and entirely, but grace as *our notion* of God's being needs clarification and enrichment if we are to see all that is involved in saying God is gracious. In saying God is gracious, God's holiness and all the other perfections have already also been implicitly included in this, since in God every perfection includes the fullness of all the others. Yet to convey to our understanding what is truly meant by God's grace we need other concepts.

if we are to go on to speak of the one rich grace of God, we must in fact develop further concepts. We shall do so always from the point of view that God is utterly and wholly grace, yet not by clinging stubbornly to our idea of grace as the focal point, but by realising that that one focal point may bear other names and thus by allowing the one focus to express other ideas and in that way to control what we think and say. (II.1:359)

There is one focal point of our attention, namely God's being, but this one focal point 'may bear other names', which are the concepts we use to develop and enrich our knowledge of the rich being of God. The idea that our concepts of the perfections are alternative names for what is one and the same in God is a very conceptualist way to state the matter. As Polanus put it: 'we portray many excellences and activities of [that] singular object with various concepts when we cannot [do this] in one [concept]'.²⁴⁸ Barth would seem to be doing just this.

Why this change of emphasis? The answer would seem again to lie in a critique of the Protestant Orthodox. After quoting the definitions of God's holiness in Polanus and Quenstedt, Barth says concerning their formulation that, 'in spite of its correctness in detail it makes the fatal mistake, precisely in regard to the grace of God, of not realising clearly the unity of the divine being, and of allowing holiness to appear as a second or third factor in God alongside the primary one.' (II.1:359) In other words, the Protestant Orthodox have an account of the divine attributes in general distorted by an excessive commitment to unity over multiplicity, but their formulation of the individual perfections is distorted by an insufficient commitment to unity over multiplicity. In particular, by speaking only of God's holiness as his detestation and punishment of all impurity, they have not made it clear that God's grace is holy, and his holiness is gracious (II.1:359).

Barth labours throughout his exposition of divine holiness to emphasise its unity with divine grace, because they are both ultimately perfections of God's loving, of God's act of seeking and creating fellowship with us.

we shall distinguish, but we shall certainly not separate, between God's grace and God's holiness. The link between the two is decisively summed up in the fact that both characterise and distinguish His love and therefore Himself in His action in the covenant, as the Lord of the covenant between Himself and His creature. (II.1:360)

This unity is revealed and operative throughout God's dealing with Israel and the church in judgment and grace (cf. II.1:363-367). Ultimately and definitively, it is known in Jesus Christ:

If God's love is what is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, if Jesus Christ Himself is the revealed love of God, there is an end of the divorce between God's grace and holiness, and there remains

²⁴⁸ *quia unice rei multiplices virtutes & operationes, nos variis conceptibus effigiamus, quum uno non possimus.* (Syntag. Theol. 880)

to us only the recognition and adoration of Him who is both gracious and holy: gracious as He is holy and holy as He is gracious. (II.1:367)

2.2 Mercy and righteousness

The conceptualist style of exposition that accumulates various concepts to signify the fullness of the one being of God continues as we come to the mercy and righteousness of God. Barth says,

as the being of God in itself is really one in real plenitude and not in poverty, our knowledge of God can be coherently developed yet still be more than the mere logical unfolding of a single principle and proposition. We not only can but must place alongside our first affirmation a second and a third: not with the idea of adding something new, but with the idea of continually saying the one thing, on the presupposition of what has already been said, in ever new forms. (II.1:368)

All this reflects and expounds what Barth has said in §29: ‘To know Him means to know Him again and again, in ever new ways—to know only Him, but to know Him as the perfect God, in the abundance, distinctness and variety of His perfections’ (II.1:322). Here, however, the ‘distinctness and variety’ among the perfections here exists more in *our affirmations* developing *our knowledge* of God than among the perfections in God himself. The being of God is not said here to be one in real *multiplicity*, as was so prominent in §29, but one in real *plenitude*. Barth’s concern is not so much for the real multiplicity of diverse divine perfections existing apart from our conceptualisation. Rather, he is concerned to emphasise that God’s being is one rich plenitude to which all our many concepts refer and of which all our many concepts are to be understood as mutually enriching variations on a single theme, different names for a single focal point.

Barth returns to this thought of developing our knowledge of God’s being in its unity and plenitude at the outset of his discussion of the concept of God’s righteousness. Barth emphasises first the identity of God’s righteousness with the paired perfection of God’s mercy,

we are not concerned with a second thing side by side with a first; but that in both cases we have to do with one and the same thing. Is it not, then, a question of the second thing? Of course it is, and absolutely. Indeed, we can even say that it is only a question of the second thing because this second thing is so utterly identical with the first. (II.1:375)

He emphasises the oneness of God's being as the guarantor of this identity, and also emphasises the distinction between the perfections proper and our concepts of them, whose individual distinction leads to their mutual augmentation.

In this one thing, in God Himself, in the plenitude of His being, there is no division and therefore no mutual qualification and augmentation of His attributes. But this does apply to the concepts by which we are allowed to recognise God on the basis of His revelation and in the truth of His unity and plenitude, i.e., when [...] we allow these concepts to qualify and augment each other, and, recognising and attesting the One in His unity and fulness, we pass from one idea to the other. (II.1:375)

Barth does retain a sense of divine multiplicity. He has this to say about God: '[i]n the multiplicity of His perfections He is not comparable to the multiplicity of the points on the periphery or surface of an object of this kind, which are all equally near to the centre, and equidistant from it.' (II.1:376) For Barth the true multiplicity of the divine perfections includes the fact that there are 'specific relations' of precedence and subsequence between God's perfections in revelation and therefore in the being of God (II.1:376). 'We have seen that there exists a relationship between God's grace and holiness, a relationship of mutual penetration and consummation determined by grace, which necessarily precedes. The relationship between God's mercy and righteousness is similar.' (II.1:376) Grace comes first and determines the relationship with holiness.²⁴⁹ Also with mercy and righteousness 'divine mercy necessarily precedes' (II.1:376). 'For only in this way does it correspond to the economy of the revelation and therefore the being of God, which must always be respected and never replaced by any arbitrarily introduced symmetry.' (II.1:376)

Yet in setting forth this ordered relationship, Barth is not so much trying to expound the perfections as individual and diverse, as trying to characterise how they should be seen as a unity. For again, the small print excursus discloses Barth's underlying concern that the Protestant Orthodox tradition does not allow God's perfections to be seen as a unity, but permits the thought to arise that they may be separate factors in God, and potentially or inevitably in conflict with one another. In discussing the mercy and righteousness of God, Barth says, 'We have seen that the weakness of the definitions of Protestant orthodoxy in respect of the relationship between God's grace and holiness was that they did not make clear the unity of the divine being. The same is true in this connexion.' (II.1:377)

²⁴⁹ Although Barth has said earlier that the concept of divine grace is 'controlled' by the concept of divine holiness (II.1:353).

Barth then critiques Quenstedt's and Polanus's definitions of divine righteousness as either in conflict with divine mercy (Quenstedt, II.1:377-8) or insufficiently integrated with divine mercy (Polanus, II.1:379). He later says, 'The mistake of the orthodox dogmatists was not that they held fast to this concept [i.e., God's distributive justice], but that they did not follow the direction of Scripture and include and explain in their understanding of this concept the mercy of God.' (II.1:382) Whereas Barth's labour in §29 was to defend the real multiplicity and diversity of God's perfections, here in §30 he is concerned to ensure that grace and mercy, as the determinative divine perfections, control what is said about holiness and righteousness, so that there is no possibility of division or conflict between them, so that: 'As He is merciful, He is righteous. He is merciful as He really makes demands and correspondingly punishes and rewards.' (II.1:383) Barth labours at length towards the material integration of these perfections in his exposition of mercy and righteousness and finds their unity in Jesus Christ. 'According to the witness of the Old and New Testaments, the love and grace and mercy of God, Jesus Christ, are the demonstration and exercise of the righteousness of God.' (II.1:384)

In all this we see Barth's concern to 'develop [...] divine theology from the divine economy, the divine attributes of the 'first order' (in Polanus's terms) from those of the 'second order'.²⁵⁰ This integrating development of Barth's theology appears not only in the way that the characterisation of God as the One who loves in freedom orders the relations of the perfections, but also in the way that God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ provides the definitive demonstration of the unity of God's grace and mercy with his holiness and righteousness.

2.3 Patience and wisdom

At the outset of his discussions of the concepts of divine patience and wisdom Barth reiterates the same procedure of the consideration of concepts in reciprocal pairs in order to gain an ever-richer mapping of the one divine being in its plenitude. Commencing the section on the patience and wisdom of God he says: 'all further consideration of the divine attributes can but move in a circle around the one but infinitely rich being of God whose simplicity is abundance itself and whose abundance is simplicity itself.' (II.1:406) Barth shifts from this orbital image to that of God's being as an ocean that we must survey from a number of standpoints, but can never exhaust:

²⁵⁰ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 69.

We are continuing to contemplate the love of God and therefore God Himself as the One who loves in freedom. What end can there be to this development? We are drawing upon the ocean. [...] But a third affirmation must now be added to the first two if we are to gain at least the authorised and commanded view of this inexhaustible ocean. (II.1:406)

Barth shifts again to the image of a journey along an endless path, following the movement of God's being, as we proceed from one proposition to the next.

We have again to magnify the plenitude of the divine being by not lingering unduly over any one proposition or letting it become the final word or the guiding principle, but by proceeding from one to another, from the second to the third. As we do so, we realise that even if we make a provisional halt at the third, this does not mean that we have spoken the last word. It is simply an indication that we are on a human path where in the very face of God we cannot even try to rival His infinity. (II.1:407)

Once again, the language of divine plenitude with its different suggestions of fullness, abundance and richness—indeed inexhaustibility and infinity—dominates. Our way of coping with this infinity is to accumulate various propositions about God drawn from God's self-revelation, attested in the Bible. These further propositions reaffirm our previous propositions in new ways and hence develop our knowledge, according to 'the movement demanded by the object' (i.e., God in his revelation). Again, Barth does not highlight the individuality, multiplicity and diversity of the divine perfections in God's own being, as he did so urgently in §29. God's being is affirmed as infinite, rich, abundant, inexhaustible, but not as multiple.

However, as Barth turns from patience to the divine wisdom, he characterises the relations between the perfections in a way that returns to their individuality in the being of God:

The distinctive feature of the knowledge of God and of God Himself is that He is all that He is in particular, apart, newly and differently in the inexhaustible plenitude of His one being, so that in all that He is He wills to be considered and apprehended in particular, apart, newly and differently. (II.1:422)

This language of particularity, apartness and difference in God's own being represents a reassertion of the real diversity of the perfections, in accordance with Barth's fundamentally realist account of the attributes.

As was the case with holiness and righteousness, Barth is critical of Polanus and Quenstedt regarding their definitions of divine wisdom:

Polanus and Quenstedt, whom we have so far consulted for the orthodox doctrine of God, fail us at this point. For Polanus [...] the wisdom of God seems to be dissolved in the general idea of divine knowledge as omniscience. [...] Quenstedt [...] can really say about the wisdom of God only that as divine and therefore hidden wisdom it surpasses all human knowledge and understanding. (II.1:426)

For Barth these statements are one-sided, because they are not connected to the love of God. But Barth says that God's wisdom must concern 'what befits Him as He loves' (II.1:426). The wisdom of God is not to be defined apart from God's act of patient loving, but is to enrich our grasp of this patient love. For Barth the 'meaning behind His patience is His wisdom', (II.1:432) so that we understand God's patience is not capricious or fortuitous, but ordered by divine wisdom. More than that, argues Barth, if we attend to what we read in the New Testament about Christ being the wisdom of God, we will see that 'Jesus Christ is the meaning of God's patience' (II.1:432) and so again the wisdom of God manifest and active in Jesus Christ is the patient love of God. In Christ the perfections are integrated according to their proper unity.

3. Discussion and conclusion

Velde says that, in the treatment of the perfections, 'it seems that Barth does not in practice maintain the 'real difference' as he claimed before. He often argues that, moving from one perfection to another, we do not encounter a different 'thing' but merely a continuation and necessary complement of what was said before.'²⁵¹ Now, *pace* Velde, Barth never wished to say that the perfections have *real differences* between them, making them one thing and another in God. He only meant to assert a *real multiplicity* of divine perfections. But Velde has noticed a difference between the way Barth talked in his general account of the perfections in §29, and in his practice of expounding the perfections in §30, and in this he is not mistaken. Barth's exposition of the perfections of divine loving emphasises the unity of the rich being of God as described by our concepts of the perfections, rather than the multiplicity and individuality of the attributes in God he was so concerned to assert in §29.

Also in line with what we have observed above, Velde notes that Barth's anti-nominalist counterarguments to the tradition, 'only deal with [the] threat of separation between essence

²⁵¹ Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 448.

and attribute and do not discuss the asserted limitation of our concepts and understanding' (cf. II.1:328).²⁵² Velde's footnote then adds, '[i]ronically, Barth's introductions to the successive discussions of pairs of divine perfections do appeal to our limited capacity to understand and express the richness of God's life.'²⁵³ It would be inaccurate to equate the nature of the limitation of our capacity expressed in Barth to the limitation expressed in, say, Polanus.²⁵⁴ Still, Velde detects that Barth, in his concrete exposition of the attributes, adopts a mode far more akin to the conceptualism he has claimed to reject in his general approach. Velde is right to sense a certain irony here.

However, we have noted above that Barth's adoption of this conceptualist style of exposition comes as a reaction to a flaw he detected in the Protestant Orthodox. This flaw is not an overemphasis on the simplicity of God's being, but an underemphasis on the unity of God's being. As Barth saw it, this produced a set of definitions and expositions of divine attributes that failed to express the unity of God's being, and especially the unity of his grace, mercy and patience with his holiness, righteousness and wisdom. Barth has endorsed the identity thesis and in that way established divine simplicity as the bond and guarantee of the unity—indeed the identity—in God of the divine attributes. But for Barth that unity has to be manifest in the material exposition of the perfections, and Barth wishes to manifest that unity by expounding the perfections as reciprocally fulfilling determinations of God's loving.

Polanus does not expound grace, mercy and patience as determinations of God's love, but as determinations of his will. For Barth God's one willing is his loving-in-freedom, but for Polanus God's one will is directed to the good and, in this way, God is both good, gracious and loving, and righteous, true and holy: 'The essential will of God is his essential property through which he wills the good as an end and all things to the good, from all eternity, from himself and independently, in one constant act.'²⁵⁵ That one will incorporates both God's goodness, 'the source of God's grace, love, mercy, patience, and clemency',²⁵⁶ and God's righteousness: 'The will of God, considered in particular, is both his goodness and his righteousness.'²⁵⁷ Reeling Brouwer says that in Polanus a such dichotomy of God's will,

²⁵² Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 447.

²⁵³ Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School*, 447.

²⁵⁴ Barth speaks of limitation in the sense that our knowledge must grow and develop by means of the conceptualisation of many divine perfections. Polanus means this, but, as we saw, he also has the idea that the Holy Spirit lowers himself to our capacity when speaking of God's attributes, giving us such inadequate knowledge as we may have. Barth allows that our concepts may be marvellously exalted to become instruments of a knowledge of God in himself, even while our ignorance of God is also included in the phenomena of revelation. See chapter 5, section 2 above.

²⁵⁵ *Essentialis voluntas Dei, est essentialis eius proprietates, per quam vult bonum ut finem & ad bonum omnia, ab omni aeternitate, à seipso & independenter, uno constantique actu.* (Syntag. Theol. 1025)

²⁵⁶ *Bonitas Dei est fons gratiae, amoris, misericordiae, patientiae, clementiae Dei* (Syntag. Theol. 1039)

²⁵⁷ *Voluntas Dei speciatim considerata tum bonitas eius est, tum iustitia.* (Syntag. Theol. 1034)

was used to throw light on one aspect of the same reality found in Holy Scripture, without attempting to describe the reality to which both sides refer in an unequivocal manner such that there is no occasion for misunderstanding. Karl Barth, although he could have recognised in this ‘speaking two words’ some features of his own dialectical method, nevertheless distrusted these dichotomies because he feared they in fact represented a *dualistic* view of reality.²⁵⁸

This seems correct. We might add that the dualism Barth feared was a dualism in which divine grace, mercy and patience did not precede and in an important way determine our concepts of divine holiness, righteousness and wisdom. In such a dualism the mercy of God and the righteousness of God may be disconnected and even conflicting. Worse, divine righteousness might be thought to precede and control divine mercy, so that God’s relationship to his sinful creatures may be thought to be finally determined by judgment, wrath and impatience, which would radically qualify or annul his grace, mercy and patience. Barth resists admitting such a possibility. For him grace ‘necessarily precedes’ holiness, and mercy ‘necessarily precedes’ righteousness: ‘For only in this way does it correspond to the economy of the revelation and therefore the being of God’. (II.1:376) This distinctive concern with correspondence to the economy of revelation drives Barth’s emphasis in §30 on the unity of God in his plenitude and the substance of his ordered mutual integration of our concepts of the perfections. Especially it is expressed in the way he seeks and finds the true manifestation of that unity and integration in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Having looked at the particular conceptualist style in which Barth relates the perfections of God’s loving to one another, we now turn to consider something unexpected in Barth’s exposition of the grace and holiness of God, namely that it contains elements that are fairly characterised as nominalist. In a theologian so determined to expunge all trace of nominalism from his theology of the attributes, this is awkward and potentially crippling. Yet as Barth moves to the mercy and righteousness of God, he adjusts his approach so as to efface and correct this misstep. This will be the subject of our final chapter, to which we now turn.

²⁵⁸ Reeling Brouwer, *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*, 61.

CHAPTER 7

Neutralising a nominalist element: Barth's Christological derivation of the divine perfections

Let us take stock of our inquiry into Barth's reformulated, realist account of the perfections. Barth's account has as a key principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, and the description of God's being that Barth derived from that is that God is the One who loves in freedom. From this key principle of revelation came also Barth's basic assertion about God having a real multiplicity of perfections in the unity of his simple being, and his criticism of 'semi-nominalism'. In chapter 4 we examined that critique, and, in the first major conclusion of this thesis, we found it wanting. From chapter 5 we have further traced out Barth's development of his account of the perfections, noting how it is driven by Barth's foundational conviction that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, and hence is to be known in both the multiplicity of perfections, and the simplicity of being manifest in his self-revelation. In further working out his foundational conviction in the context of the structure for theological discourse provided by Protestant Orthodoxy, Barth has concurred with some aspects of the tradition, e.g., the identity thesis and a two-class classification of the perfections, and diverged from other aspects of the tradition (e.g. the nature of the knowledge of God we have in the perfections). The way the interaction of Barth's conviction about God in his revelation and the theology of the Protestant Orthodox shapes Barth's doctrine is also displayed in Barth's change of emphasis from divine multiplicity to divine unity and fullness, in reaction to differing faults he found in different parts of their work.

In this chapter we will examine one more feature of Barth's reformulation, one that threatens to undermine his whole account, but which he adjusts his account to neutralise. We argue that nominalism creeps into Barth's exposition of grace and holiness, because Barth admits a distinction of form between God's grace and holiness as they are towards us and God's grace and holiness as they are in God himself, and then accepts that the form of God's grace in God is hidden from us. There are severe strains as Barth leaves God's immanent grace and holiness more or less unknown and inexpressible, and sharply distinguished from God's grace and holiness *ad extra*. Barth's manner of adjusting his approach to address this inconsistency will be to remove the distinction of form between God's mercy and righteousness in God and God's mercy and righteousness in relation to us. Barth identifies

them on the basis that what we see of God in Jesus Christ is what God is in himself. He moves to what Katherine Sonderegger calls ‘the christological derivation of the divine attributes’, a mode of exposition that seems more properly to reflect the convictions that have driven §§28-29.²⁵⁹ In the previous chapter we touched upon the way that Christ becomes the manifestation of the unity of the perfections. Here we trace the way that turning to Christ as the manifestation of the perfections as they are in God becomes central to Barth’s concrete characterisation of each of the perfections.

1. A nominalist account of grace and holiness in God himself

Barth, as we have seen, condemned as nominalism any hint that God’s essence was not known in the attributes, and remained therefore finally unknown. In the discussion of the grace and holiness of God, Barth himself makes a distinction between the form of these perfections in God himself and their form in God’s relation to us. In admitting this distinction Barth is drawn into the very nominalism he has so determinedly attacked in others. Barth still asserts that God’s hidden, immanent grace becomes his manifest, economic grace, and that his manifest holiness is grounded upon his immanent purity. But, troublingly, Barth seems to leave the gracious and holy God different in himself to what he is in works *ad extra*, and even to leave God’s own being hidden and incomprehensible.

1.1 Divine grace

In discussing divine grace Barth says that ‘in the linguistic usage of the Bible, grace is an inner mode of being in God Himself’ (II.1:353), whose ‘archetypal form’ is the self-giving seen in ‘the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ’ in which the ‘secret essence of grace’ is manifested (II.1:354). Grace is no intermediate gift between God and creatures, but,

Everything depends here on the immediacy of the relation and on the fact that the being and action of God, of which we are thinking, is really God’s *essentialis proprietas* [essential property] and is understood as God Himself who, as He is Himself and acting according to His nature, is gracious. (II.1:354)

This asserts a strong unity between God’s grace seen in the economy of salvation in Christ, and God’s grace as God’s own being. However, because Barth defines God’s loving as his seeking and creating of fellowship *with us*, we, the creature, and God’s relations with us are always in the picture as we conceptualise grace, and so the concept of grace is specified in a way that presumes a divine condescension to an inferior.

²⁵⁹ Sonderegger, “Barth and the Divine Perfections,” 462.

Grace denotes, comprehensively, the manner in which God, in His essential being, turns towards us. This turning, which is that of a superior to an inferior, and takes place in the form of a condescension, is contained even in the meaning of the word χάρις, the Latin *gratia*, our English grace, and most strongly of all the German *Gnade*. (II.1:354)

Barth intensifies this condescension to that offered not simply to an inferior, but to an *unworthy* inferior: 'The biblical conception of grace involves further that the counterpart which receives it from God is not only not worthy of it but utterly unworthy, that God is gracious to sinners.' (II.1:355) Barth continues to underline that God's very being is divine grace: 'grace is the very essence of the being of God. Grace is itself properly and essentially divine. [...] He reveals His very essence in this streaming forth of grace. There is no higher divine being than that of the gracious God.' (II.1:356)

But the difficulty in all this is that Barth has specified God's grace as a characteristic of God's turning towards us in condescension. God's grace can only be grace as Barth has specified it if there is an unworthy inferior to whom God gives himself in grace. And this is not true, and cannot be true, if we restrict ourselves to the nature of God's loving *ad intra*, the love which is the essence of the eternal triune life of God, prior to and apart from all creation. How can grace characterise the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit if it necessarily involves condescension to an unworthy inferior? And yet Barth does wish to say that God is gracious eternally in himself, before and above his graciousness to us: 'For it is in this way, graciously, that God not only acts outwardly towards His creature, but is in Himself from eternity to eternity.' (II.1:357) Barth acknowledges the objection that arises when he asserts this eternal graciousness of God in himself:

One might object that in His own being there cannot be a creature standing over against Him, still less any opposition from this other, and therefore that there cannot take place any special turning, or condescension, or overcoming of the resistance of the other, and consequently that there cannot be any scope for grace. (II.1:357)

Incredibly, Barth here accepts that divine grace in God cannot have the same form as it does in the manifestation of divine grace to us, and in doing this he separates God's grace as it is manifest to us from his being as it is in himself: 'there is not in fact any scope [in God] for the form which grace takes in its manifestations to us. The form in which grace exists in God Himself and is actual as God is in point of fact hidden from us and incomprehensible to us.' (II.1:357) Of this admission from Barth, Robert Price exclaims, 'Astounding!'²⁶⁰ For if Barth

²⁶⁰ Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 58.

does concede that all he has said about the form of God's grace only applies to its manifestations to us, but that this perfection takes a different, hidden and incomprehensible form in God himself, then Barth must work to escape hoisting himself on his own petard. For he has said exactly what he criticises the nominalist for saying, namely, that divine grace towards us is one thing, and it describes God's relations to the world, but grace as it appears in the divine economy does not correspond to God's own inner being. Barth here contradicts his basic axiom that God is who he is the act of his revelation. Price comments, 'This leaves the character of grace in the divine life, if not disconnected, then at least so incomprehensibly and mysteriously connected to God's grace to us, that a *de facto* nominalism inevitably follows'.²⁶¹

Barth does go on to assert that, nonetheless, by grace and as appropriated by faith, divine grace 'is actually revealed and operative as God's being and action in our midst' (II.1:357). Here is the reassertion of Barth's axiom that God is who he is in his act of revelation, even if he is completely concealed from us in that revelation, as well as being completely revealed. From there Barth reasons:

How then can it be denied that primarily [divine grace] is real in God Himself in a form which is concealed from us and incomprehensible to us—in Him who as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is One, who is utterly at one in Himself, in whom therefore there is neither the need nor the capacity for any turning and condescension, in whom there is no strife and therefore no reconciliation? (II.1:357-8)

So, Barth holds that despite the fact that in God there is no scope for grace as it is manifest in revelation, due to the oneness and equality of the persons, grace is real in God although in a hidden and incomprehensible form. This might be seen as Barth's version of asserting a primary and ineffable *fundamentum* in God's being upon which the reality of what we know as God's grace is grounded, a *fundamentum* which is *not* grace in the form which Barth has derived from the Scriptures for us to discern and comprehend, but which *is* the source in God of the grace we see in the revelation of God's love for us. Barth goes on to say,

From the sphere and source alone where it is not yet a special turning, not yet condescension, not yet an overcoming of opposition, where it is manifest in the pure love and grace which binds the Father with the Son and the Son with the Father by the Holy Spirit—from this sphere and source alone can it become what in our experience we know it to be: a turning towards the creature, a condescension, an overcoming of resistance. (II.1:358)

²⁶¹ Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 58.

Barth here asserts that grace does bind the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but that there it is not what we know it to be, and with respect to us it becomes something different, namely, God's condescension in his relations with us. Barth complained that the Protestant Orthodox never vouchsafed an explanation of the *fundamentum in re* upon which they rested the true belonging of the various attributes of God to the essence of God. He further complained that their *fundamentum* could not properly be investigated (II.1:329). But they might justly complain in return that Barth has here done no better establishing the true belonging of revealed divine grace to the very being of God. He has simply affirmed, on the basis that God reveals himself, that the hidden and incomprehensible form of 'grace' in God is somehow the ground in God of the rather different revealed and comprehensible form of the grace of God we see in his grace to us. But we are still left with two forms of grace, one hidden in God and another manifest to us. The nominalist cleavage of the hidden Lord from his manifest glory insinuates itself into Barth's exposition here.

1.2 Divine holiness

Barth finds himself in a similar place in his briefer discussion of God's holiness in himself. Barth specifies God's holiness to be the perfection in which God maintains his will against every other will, condemning and excluding all resistance to his will in the creation of fellowship with the creature (II.1:359). As it was with God's grace, this specification of divine holiness ties holiness to God's creation of fellowship with his creature, and in particular to the opposition to God's will of the will of the creature. Again, the question arises concerning how God could be understood to be eternally holy in himself, without reference to his dealings with creatures. Again, Barth does not discuss divine holiness at any length in terms that pertain only to God's own life in himself. He only says,

In Him, of course, there is no sin which He has first to resist. But in Him there is more. There is the purity, indeed He is Himself the purity, which as such contradicts and will resist everything which is unlike itself, yet which does not evade this opposing factor, but, because it is the purity of the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, eternally reacts against it, resisting and judging it in its encounter with it, but in so doing receiving and adopting it, and thus entering into the fellowship with it which redeems it. (II.1:368)

We see that almost as soon as Barth begins to speak of what holiness might be in God himself, he begins to speak of *what is unlike God*, of *opposing factors*. Barth does not make a way to characterise the holiness of the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in itself, apart from the word 'purity'. And this purity can only be that which 'contradicts' and 'eternally

reacts against' opposing factors. The language of 'eternally reacting' might suggest an eternal dependence of God upon an opposing factor outside himself in order that he might be who he is as holy in eternity, a dependence which no doubt Barth would wish entirely to deny and repudiate. And yet Barth does not manage to speak of God's holiness in himself beyond all creaturely relations in any other way than by the single term, 'purity'. Barth's approach to grace and holiness has left him nearly powerless to characterise the grace and holiness of God in himself.

Price thinks Barth has done better with divine holiness than he did with divine grace:

Whereas Barth gives no indication what grace might look like within the divine life and apart from sin, with holiness Barth points explicitly to the 'purity' of Father Son and Holy Spirit. [...] Barth's explanation of God's 'immanent' holiness is not an empty concept like his explanation of 'immanent' grace.²⁶²

However, the lack of any further characterisation of the 'purity' of Father Son and Holy Spirit makes 'immanent' holiness a near empty concept for Barth, if not quite empty.²⁶³ There are great difficulties here as Barth seeks to speak of God's loving in its determinations as grace and holiness in exclusively *ad intra* terms, when he has described God's loving primarily and decisively in *ad extra* terms: 'God is He who, without having to do so, seeks and creates fellowship *between Himself and us*.' (II.1:273, italics mine) Barth wants to assert that God's freedom means that he begins *with himself*, and that he is all that he is without us. But he also wishes to assert that God's creating of fellowship *with us* is the fundamental characterisation of the act of his being. In his account of grace and holiness Barth has not clarified the way he will elucidate the unity of the two characterisations: *in himself*, and, *with reference to us*, and they have become separated from one another.

Having canvassed and set aside certain other remedies for this problem, Price suggests that,

the tension in Barth's thought on grace finds some relief in his doctrine of election, where Barth associates grace not with the divine essence understood apart from election, as seems to be the case here in II/1, but with God as he has determined himself to be in Jesus Christ. Thus, it is grace which is "the beginning of all the ways and works of God" *ad extra*.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 65.

²⁶³ Price also suggests that Barth hints that 'the perfecting of fellowship' is the substance of the immanent divine holiness. Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 65.

²⁶⁴ Price, *Letters of the Divine Word*, 60.

This connection to election is a promising suggestion and it recalls what Barth himself says at first about grace: that its ‘archetypal form’ is the self-giving seen in ‘the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ’ in which the ‘secret essence of grace’ manifested (II.1:354). Indeed, if Barth had stayed true to this beginning, he may not have conceded the hiddenness and incomprehensibility of grace in God himself. If the heart of divine election is that God fulfills his will to be ours and his will that we be his through his choice of Jesus Christ (cf. II.1:273), then ‘the sphere and source alone where [grace] is not yet a special turning, not yet condescension, not yet an overcoming of opposition’ (II.1:358) might be the sphere of God’s eternal election. But this is not a hidden and incomprehensible sphere, but a sphere whose mystery is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this way divine election would form the *fundamentum* upon which our knowledge of God’s grace in himself could be founded, specified and investigated, according to God’s revelation.

As it happens, we do not need to wait until II.2 for Barth to adjust his approach to avoid these problems. In treating the mercy and righteousness of God, Barth drops all discussion of God’s-mercy-in-God or God’s-righteousness-in-God having a form hidden from us and incomprehensible to us. Barth resolves his difficulty, not by turning to divine election as such and in those terms, but by returning to his original conviction that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, and hence finding in Christ’s saving work a true revelation of the very heart of God, the form of God’s own inner being and life. To this we now turn.

2. Banishing nominalism in the discussion of mercy and righteousness

Divine grace and holiness in Barth’s hands highlight the lordly freedom of the divine love: that God’s love is divine condescension (grace) and is characterised by God’s maintenance of his own will against others (holiness). Divine mercy and righteousness in Barth’s hands highlight the compassionate, affected engagement of the divine love that flows from the very heart of God and is manifest in the suffering of Jesus Christ. It is Barth’s willingness to talk so directly about the mercy and righteousness in the heart of God, manifest in Jesus Christ, that excludes the nominalism that he stumbled into in discussing God’s grace and holiness.

2.1 Divine mercy

From the outset Barth grounds divine mercy in the being of God, even before this mercy is directed towards distressed creatures. Barth says of God’s mercy:

Everything that God is and does is determined and characterised by the fact that there is rooted in Him, that He Himself is, this original free powerful compassion, that from the outset He is

open and ready and inclined to the need and distress and torment of another, that His compassionate words and deeds are not grounded in a subsequent change, in a mere approximation to certain conditions in the creature which is distinct from Himself, but are rooted in His heart, in His very life and being as God. (II.1:370)

In Barth's hands, God's grace characterised the action of God in turning in condescension to the creature to seek and create fellowship with the creature. Barth is more careful here. God's mercy does not characterise God's turning to us, but characterises his own heart, life and being. It is an *openness* and a *readiness* to incline in compassion to the need and distress of another, which determines God's action, but pre-exists the distress of the other and the action of God. This is the first important adjustment of Barth's approach that will allow him to overcome the nominalism that he has admitted to his exposition.

Here and elsewhere in the section on divine mercy Barth deliberately employs the anthropopathic language of compassion, of feeling, of sharing sympathetically in distress, of being moved by suffering. 'The personal God has a heart', writes Barth, 'He can feel, and be affected' (II.1:370). In speaking about the mercifulness of God in himself, Barth does not proceed as he does with grace and holiness. He does not speak about a prior, different, hidden and incomprehensible form in God's triune life of what is manifest to us in God's acts as his mercy. What he does do is to offer the name of Jesus Christ as the proof that God is merciful in himself in the way that Barth has claimed him to be, i.e., compassionate towards the distress of his creature, self-moved in himself by it and ready to act to remove the creature's distress. Barth asks, 'What else can we produce as a proof of this confession except the fact that God has given Himself to be known by us as merciful in the name of Jesus Christ? How can we try to recognise the reality of the mercy of God except in this name?' (II.1:373) The substitution Jesus made in his death, taking our place so that he might take our sin and guilt to himself, remove it and thereby remove our misery, is the revelation of the very being of God:

He took our place because He was God's eternal Son, because it was manifest in Him that God's eternal being is mercy, because there is nothing more real and true behind and beyond this substitution, because this substitution is the very essence of God's own being, of His divinity. (II.1:375)

Because the self-substitution of Jesus for us is identified with the merciful essence of God, there is no gap or change of form between God's mercy towards us and God's mercy in himself. Both of these are manifest in Christ as one and the same. When Barth reaches the

point where he might have discussed God's mercy in himself as distinct from God's mercy towards us, he says, 'In the nature of the case, we do not need to emphasise the point that God is as merciful in Himself as He is merciful in His action. For the idea of mercy itself refers back from God's attitude and act to the depths of God's being, to His heart, His mind, Himself.' (II.1:375) Here Barth can invoke the adjusted way he has specified the concept of divine mercy and say that '*the idea of mercy itself refers back from God's attitude and act to the depths of God's being*' (II.1:375, italics mine). No change of form or idea is required to understand mercy in the depths of God's being. We do not need to worry, as was the case in the earlier discussion of divine grace, about a hidden divine sphere where what becomes mercy in God's relations to the world exists but is not yet an 'original free powerful compassion', a readiness for self-chosen compassion for the distress of the other (II.1:370). Divine mercy is eternally in God just as Barth characterised it at the outset: 'The mercy of God lies in His readiness to share in sympathy the distress of another, a readiness which springs from His inmost nature and stamps all His being and doing.' (II.1:369)

Barth takes the opportunity to use what he has done in identifying God's mercy to us with God's mercy in himself to clarify that the grace we experience from God is the grace that is eternal in God. It is merciful grace, and is therefore exactly the gracious compassion that flows from God's heart:

All misunderstanding in regard to the idea of grace, as if it were not eternal in God Himself, becomes quite impossible when we have understood it as merciful grace. For it is then understood, *not simply as God's turning towards us*, but as His free, effectual compassion. Looking backwards, therefore, it is seen, not simply as an appearance, but as the disposition of the heart and being of God. (II.1:375, italics mine)

Barth thus quietly revisits God's grace in eternity, adding to his account of immanent grace so as to erase the difference between God's grace towards us and the grace in God himself, and to give the form of grace in God a positive characterisation as free, effectual compassion, an affection of God's very heart and being, manifest in Jesus Christ.

2.2 Divine righteousness

The same vivid sense of affective divine engagement pervades the discussion of divine righteousness, but God's engagement is not with the misery of the creature, but rather with his own worth. God's righteousness is the determination of God's love and grace and mercy such that,

when God wills and creates the possibility of fellowship with man He does that which is worthy of Himself, and therefore in this fellowship He asserts His worth in spite of all contradiction and resistance, and therefore in this fellowship He causes only His own worth to prevail and rule. (II.1:376-7)

The language of personal relations and emotions reappears in his section: the language of honour, of being true to oneself, of jealous demand, of wrath and anger, of offense and satisfaction. To be sure Barth takes pains to deny that God's sense of these things is arbitrary, tyrannical or disordered (II.1:379f). On the contrary, his concern is to express the unity of God's mercy and his righteousness. And Barth asserts that Jesus Christ demonstrates that in fact God does what is worthy of himself, preserves his own honour and remains true to himself, by becoming the object of his own anger, standing in our place in the divine-human conflict and remaining faithful to us, without becoming unfaithful to himself. References to the heart of God manifest in the suffering of Christ reappear as he discusses the conflict between God and sinners:

His mercy consists in the fact that He took this conflict to heart, indeed, that He bore it in His heart. But it was nonetheless a conflict between Himself and us that was borne. For in Him who took our place God's own heart beat on our side, in our flesh and blood, in complete solidarity with our nature and constitution, at the very point where we ourselves confront Him, guilty before God. (II.1:402)

Christ, says Barth, 'really suffered our distress as the distress in the heart of God Himself. He therefore became the object of divine wrath and judgment and the bearer of our guilt and punishment.' (II.1:402) This language of the heart of God present in the suffering of Christ on the cross serves to dissolve the distinction between God as he is in his saving acts and God as he is in his own inner life. In the section on divine righteousness Barth makes no reference to a distinction between God's righteousness in himself and God's righteousness in his acts. What is in God is what is in his acts, and there is no need to make the distinction. At the cross,

it is the actual and terrible wrath of God which rules according to God's free good-pleasure in the fulfilment of what is from the first His merciful righteousness, and it does not need any change of mood or weakening, but in its strictest fulfilment it is the self-expression of the eternal unchangeably good will of God. (II.1:402)

On the one hand, what we see in God's act in Christ displays the divine perfections as they are in the heart of God. At the cross it is exactly the 'actual and terrible wrath of God' ruling

without need of ‘any change of mood or weakening’ in fulfilment of ‘what is from the first His merciful righteousness’ (II.1:402). On the other hand, what we see in God’s act in Christ ‘is the self-expression of the eternal unchangeably good will of God’ and is entirely ‘according to God’s free good-pleasure’ (II.1:402). So, Christ’s cross faithfully reveals both the perfections of God’s being and the character of the eternal will and decision of God. That these things are two sides of the same coin is to be expected, since Barth has characterised the act of God’s being as his decision to be the One who seeks and creates fellowship with us, and the perfections of God’s loving are precisely the perfections of God’s *willing* and creating fellowship with us. Hence there is no qualification reverting to an incomprehensible hiddenness about the mercy and righteousness of God in God.

Katherine Sonderegger notices this change in Barth’s manner of speaking here:

Note that there is none of the language of veiling and unveiling here, none of the nearly unendurable tension between dialectical pairs held in unity, none of the appeal to an analogy properly conceived; really, none of this. [...] In their place stands *confession*, eloquent, impassioned confession of the personal work of Christ, who just *is* the dying and living and victorious merciful righteousness of God. This is the christological derivation of divine attributes taken at the flood, without hesitation or restraint, but gladly, confidently, in full measure.²⁶⁵

What Sonderegger says about the Christological derivation of the divine attributes is that, for Barth, ‘Christ just is the divine perfection of justice, the *relatio* of God with us, in atonement, yes, but also in our knowledge, our knowledge of God’s own heart.’²⁶⁶ Christ ‘just *is* the dying and living and victorious merciful righteousness of God’.²⁶⁷ Sonderegger’s language needs some parsing. To accurately reflect Barth’s thought, it must mean that the perfections of God manifest in Christ are the faithful enactments of the perfections of God’s innermost being, and that we know them with full confidence when we know them in Christ and his work. We take it in this way and endorse it.

Barth’s turn to this Christological predication of the divine attributes brings his exposition of the attributes in line with all he has argued for since the beginning of §28. Barth’s original principle for the doctrine of God is that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, and is known ‘where God deals with us as Lord and Saviour, or not at all’ (II.1:261). In bringing the

²⁶⁵ Sonderegger, “Barth and the Divine Perfections,” 461–62.

²⁶⁶ Sonderegger, “Barth and the Divine Perfections,” 461.

²⁶⁷ Sonderegger, “Barth and the Divine Perfections,” 462.

act of God as Saviour and Lord in Christ forward as the faithful economic manifestation of God's immanent perfections, Barth removes the nominalism that has compromised his discussion of grace and holiness. There is now a guarantee exhibited in Barth's doctrine that God's perfections do not take a different form in God to the form they take in God's relation to us. That guarantee is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, in whom lives the divine self-revelation. Barth had said that it is proper for us 'to be told by the Gospel who and what God is' (II.1:351), and he makes that good in his Christologically-centred exposition of the mercy and righteousness of God.

2.3 Divine patience and wisdom

To see whether Barth continues in this Christological vein, we briefly examine the exposition of divine patience and wisdom. If grace and holiness characterise the transcendence of God's loving, and mercy and righteousness characterise the affected engagement of God's loving, then patience and wisdom characterise the intentionality of God's loving. In the section on mercy and righteousness, Barth has banished the nominalism of his exposition of grace and holiness by affirming that the perfections of God manifest and active in Christ are the perfections of God in his innermost being, and are known as such when we know them in Christ. Barth continues in this manner when he expounds the patience and wisdom of God in a way that finds these enacted and known most truly and properly through knowledge of God's work in Christ, and through faith in him.

At the outset of his section on divine patience, Barth signals his intention to continue to rest his statements on the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ:

On the way of knowledge pursued so far we saw that our statements rested on an utterly factual and concrete necessity—that the God revealed in Jesus Christ loves in grace and mercy. The case is exactly the same now that we proceed to affirm that His love bears essentially the character of patience. (II.1:408)

Barth says of patience: 'Patience exists where space and time are given with a definite intention, where freedom is allowed in expectation of a response.' (II.1:408) His exposition of the patience and wisdom of God is developed in part through a consideration of two questions: Can God be patient? And is he in fact patient? To answer these questions only the revelation of God in Christ can help us: 'we can actually speak of the necessary patience of God only if we take as the pure source and necessary determination of our knowledge the factual and concrete revelation of God in Jesus Christ in its factual and concrete attestation in Holy Scripture.' (II.1:409)

Ultimately, argues Barth, God can be patient because God's expectation of a creaturely response, i.e., 'the fruits of penitence' (II.1:418), is fulfilled in Jesus Christ: 'such fruits have never been brought forth at any time or place except in Jesus Christ, [...] in the perfect obedience which He, the one and only direct and true hearer of God's Word, has rendered in human flesh.' (II.1:418) Christ's response to God in our flesh then makes it possible for God to be patient with us— i.e., to give space and time to the creature with a definite intention: 'Because there, in the One, the zeal of God is so powerful and attains its goal, therefore the others, the many who are summed up in Him, who in Him are conducted to the goal and have already attained it, can as the many be at their various times on the way'. (II.1:418)

Barth goes on to argue that because 'the obedience which He demands from His creature has been rendered' (II.1:419), by faith in Jesus Christ we may know that God is patient, and find comfort in the fact that 'God Himself has seen to it that [...] our preservation is meaningful and necessary' (II.1:419). This is 'because God has linked His own life with ours, and has sacrificed Himself for us so that as truly as God Himself lives we cannot perish' (II.1:419). In summary, God *is* patient, and his patience is made possible, enacted and known by us in the fact that he 'upholds all things by his powerful Word' which is spoken in and by Jesus Christ to us (II.1:423, cf. 416). Barth continues to develop his exposition of the perfections and our knowledge of them in a Christological manner.

Consideration of the wisdom of God adds to the foregoing that God's will, expressed in his Word, is a conscious, intentional and meaningful will, and is not chance or caprice. When we hear this Word, 'we hear the reason, meaning, purpose and intention of God', and we can accept our existence 'as a gift of God's patience' (II.1:424). By his wisdom God creates, maintains and rules the world in providence and patience (II.1:427), and through this activity God wills to unfold to us 'His holy and righteous, gracious and merciful meaning [...], to lead us to penitence, and therefore to make our own lives meaningful' (II.1:432). On the one hand, 'This meaning behind His patience is His wisdom.' (II.1:432). But on the other hand, this wisdom that is the meaning of God's patience has another name: 'That Jesus Christ is the meaning of God's patience is the result at which we have really arrived in discussing the perfection of the divine patience.' (II.1:432)

And so it has been prepared for us to see in Jesus Christ the wisdom of God also, that is, to see God's inner intention at work in the patience, mercy and grace, together with the holiness and righteousness, exhibited in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This wisdom is not the wisdom of the world, but is emphatically the wisdom of the cross, foolishness to the perishing, but in truth,

what Paul proclaims only by the Word of the cross, and what [believers] hear, is God's own wisdom: His wisdom which in this mystery (that of the cross of Jesus Christ) is just as concealed (for the world) as it is revealed (for believers); the wisdom which before all worlds God has appointed and foreseen for our glorification, as it has already served, and will further serve, to this end in the resurrection of Christ, by which He was made wisdom for us. (II.1:437)

Barth's exposition of divine patience and wisdom continues to have the character of 'eloquent, impassioned confession of the personal work of Christ, who just *is* the dying and living and victorious' patient wisdom of God.²⁶⁸ Barth's turn to a Christological derivation of the perfections is continued through his treatment of divine patience and wisdom. This demonstrates the manner in which Barth's principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation functions to bring coherence and material distinctiveness to Barth's account of the being and perfections of God.

²⁶⁸ Sonderegger, "Barth and the Divine Perfections," 462.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has made these inquiries into Barth's account of the being and perfections of God in *Church Dogmatics* §§28-30. First, whether Barth's diagnosis of problems in the conceptualist tradition is accurate, and hence whether the tradition needs reform for the reasons Barth advances. The results of this are, first, that Barth misreads statements in the Protestant Orthodox upon which his case relies, and second, he overlooks the role played by divine perfection as the guarantee of divine plenitude. Hence we concluded in chapter 4 above that Barth's diagnosis and critique are flawed. So Barth's particular case for the rejection of conceptualism as found in Protestant Orthodoxy is weak, as is the case for the necessity of reformulation on these grounds as a result.

We also inquired into the nature and coherence of Barth's own reformulated, realist account, comparing and contrasting it to the accounts of Polanus and Dorner. We here summarise Barth's account and gather our conclusions.

3.1 Barth's major affirmations

In *CD* §§29-30 Barth produces a distinctive realist account of God's being and perfections. Among its major propositions, Barth, as far as we have followed him, affirms:

1. The real multiplicity of the divine perfections in the being of God along with the unity and simplicity of God's being.
2. God's capacity by the grace of revelation to elevate the concepts we use so that they convey to us a real knowledge of God as he is in himself, even as God is also hidden from us in his revelation, requiring us to confess our ignorance of God also.
3. That in God, the divine perfections are identical with one another, with the fullness of all divine perfections and with the whole being of God.
4. That the perfections should be classified as the perfections of the One who loves in freedom, and hence in a twofold series: the perfections of the divine loving and the perfections of the divine freedom.
5. That the intrinsic order of the divine life requires that consideration be given both to love and freedom as elements of a reciprocally-fulfilling duality in our knowledge of God, in which love precedes without being more fundamental.
6. That God's loving, which is to say God in the act of his being, is gracious and holy, merciful and righteous and patient and wise.

7. That to grow in our knowledge of God, given the unity and plenitude of his being, we must develop the concepts of the divine perfections in a manner that reflects their order and unity, which is derived from the economy of salvation.
8. That God's holiness must be understood as a further specification of God's grace, God's righteousness as a further specification of God's mercy and wisdom as a further specification of God's patience.
9. That God's patience further specifies God's mercy which further specifies God's grace, which specifies the divine loving.
10. The perfections of God manifest in Christ and his work are the faithful enactments and revelations of the perfections of God's innermost being.

Regarding the extent to which Barth's account amounts to a substantial and consistent reformulation of the tradition, we conclude that Barth's principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation grounds his account of the being and perfections of God and contributes fundamentally to its coherence and character. It leads to his description of God, formulated according to Barth's understanding of the revealed act of God's being, that God is the One who loves in freedom (chapter 3, section 1 above). It leads to his opposition to nominalism, and whatever else prompts us to divide God's one being from his many perfections in our understanding of God (chapter 3, section 2 above). It leads to his insistence on the divine multiplicity of perfections being included in the divine simplicity of his nature as necessary to do justice to revelation (chapter 5, section 1 above). It leads to the positive view that in the attributes our concepts are elevated by grace to describe God as he is, over against the view that in the attributes the Holy Spirit lowers himself to our incapacity and more conveys what God is not, than what he is (chapter 5, section 2 above). Because it produces the description of God as the One who loves in freedom, it contributes to the choice of perfections to be treated, and to the re-ordering of their kinds into perfections of divine love and of divine freedom (chapter 6, section 1 above). It leads to Barth's readiness to say that in God's saving acts in Christ, we see God's own heart, his innermost character and disposition (section 2 above). It provides Barth's account of the being and attributes of God with a distinctive underlying logic.

3.2 Barth and Dorner

Regarding the role played by Dorner in the development of Barth's account, first, Barth credits him with breaking with 'the Thomistic and orthodox Protestant tradition' (II.1:330), and, second, we have found that Barth takes up and re-presents many of Dorner's arguments against the tradition. Barth shares Dorner's conviction that the traditional doctrine of simplicity undermines our knowledge of God in the attributes and leaves our vision of God

impoverished. Third, Barth explicitly and especially shares Dorner's affirmation that 'in God's self-revelations we see revelations of what and how He is (not simply what and how He is not) and therefore the revelation of objective attributes.'²⁶⁹ Thus Dorner holds the same convictions that Barth expresses by saying that God is who he is in the act of his revelation, that we therefore have a positive knowledge of God in the perfections, and that the perfections properly belong to God in their objective multiplicity (see chapter 3, section 3 above). Fourth, Dorner emphasises the being of God as life, an emphasis that appears in Barth also.

We have seen that Barth develops this line of thought quite differently to Dorner. While both Barth and Dorner emphasise God as living and loving (see chapter 3, sections 1.2 and 1.3 above), when it comes to their realist accounts of the perfections, they diverge. Dorner denied the identity thesis and sought a bond of unity for the attributes in the triune divine loving, rather than in divine simplicity. Dorner sought to extend divine *perichoresis* to the unity of the perfections in their mutual non-identity. Barth declined these moves, staying within the mainstream of the tradition by affirming the identity thesis, and finding the unity of the attributes in the divine simplicity (see chapter 5, section 1.2 above). Although both Barth and Dorner proposed a governing principle for the internal relations of the attributes, Dorner's unitary principle of trinitarian loving is substantially different to Barth's dual principle of divine love-in-freedom, and the divergence over the identity thesis leads Barth to structure the relations between the attributes very differently to Dorner (see chapter 6, section 1.1 above). We conclude that although Barth endorsed Dorner's critique of conceptualism and the principles that led Dorner to realism, Barth was not deeply influenced by Dorner's method of developing his realist account, and Barth provides a quite different exposition of the perfections to that of Dorner as far as structure and discussion of the perfections in §30 goes. Dorner's influence manifests itself in another form in §31, but that falls outside the scope of this study.

3.3 Barth and Polanus (representing Protestant Orthodoxy)

Regarding the role played by Polanus and the tradition he represents, we have seen that Barth does not use his principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation to develop his account according to a radically original plan. Rather, he uses it to reformulate the traditional concepts and reorganise the traditional structure of the doctrine of the divine essence and attributes that he found especially in Protestant Orthodoxy. In this, Polanus is both friend and foe for Barth, although Barth's criticism is more prominent than his appreciation. In §29

²⁶⁹ Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 1:186.

Polanus serves in the role of foe because of his alleged ‘semi-nominalism’, against which Barth advances his case for the simple multiplicity of God (see chapter 3, section 3 above). In §30 Polanus serves in the role of foe because in Barth’s view the Protestant Orthodox have not integrated their definitions and concepts of the attributes with one another, and they threaten to become separate factors in God, undermining the divine unity (see chapter 6, section 2 above). However, the Protestant Orthodox tradition provides Barth with a basic plan for theology and a standard to consult and critique. Barth affirms its formulations and conclusions at many points, and relations can be cordial at such moments. Barth’s three explanatory propositions largely align with the tradition, even in their realism, including the affirmation of the identity thesis in the second proposition (see chapter 5, section 1 above). Barth consciously follows the tradition when he takes up a twofold classification of the perfections, and he treats many of the same attributes as Polanus, albeit in a re-organised structure and renovated manner (see chapter 6 above).

We have argued that the root of the divergence between Barth and that tradition is Barth’s principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation. Polanus regards our attributions as indicating more what God is not than what he is. Barth is convinced that the reality of revelation demands that our knowledge of God be positive knowledge of who God is (see chapter 5, section 2 above). This contributes to Barth’s ongoing discontent with Polanus and the Protestant Orthodox. We conclude that the interaction between the Protestant Orthodox tradition and Barth’s principle that God is who he is in the act of his revelation provides a major shaping dynamic that makes Barth’s account a distinctive and substantial reformulation of the Protestant Scholasticism he both admired and faulted (see chapter 6, section 1 above).

3.4 Further research

There are two obvious ways this thesis could be extended. First, Barth’s treatment of the perfections of the divine freedom could be included. Given the way that Barth’s exposition evolved over the course of §30, it would be instructive to see whether there were further developments in the way Barth formulated, expounded and related the perfections of the divine freedom to one another and to the being of God, and to explore the continuing influence of Dorner and the Protestant Orthodox on Barth’s exposition. Second, the way a wider selection of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers and theologians, e.g., Hegel or Schleiermacher, might have influenced Barth’s treatment of the perfections could be included. We have noted the way that Barth’s anxieties about the Protestant Orthodox are connected to his opposition to what followed in the Enlightenment. It would be instructive to explore the role of such thinkers in shaping Barth’s handling of the divine being and perfections.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Pre-modern and Primary Sources

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae: Questions on God*. Edited by Brian Leftow and Brian Davies. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Augustine, Saint. *The Trinity*. Translated by Stephen MacKenna. 1. paperback reprint. Vol. 45 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2002.

Barth, Karl, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance. *Church Dogmatics*. 1st pbk. ed. London ; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004.

Barth, Karl, and Hannelotte Reiffen. *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*. 1st English ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991.

Dorner, I. A., and Robert R. Williams. *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*. 1st Fortress Press ed. Fortress Texts in Modern Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

_____. *A System of Christian Doctrine*. Translated by Alfred Cave. Vol. 1. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005.

_____. *System der Christlichen Glaubenslehre*, Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Herk (Besserche Buchhandlung), 1879.

Polansdorf, Amandus Polanus Von. *Syntagma theologiae christianae, juxta leges ordinis methodici conformatum, atque in libros decem tributum*. Hanoviae: Johannes Aubrii, 1610.

Quenstedt, Johann Andreas. *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, Sive Systema Theologicum*. Wittenberg: J L Quenstedt, 1691.

Secondary Sources

Asbill, Brian D. *The Freedom of God for Us: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Divine Aseity*. First edition. T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology v. 25. London ; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Barrett, Jordan P. *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account*. Emerging Scholars. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.

Bruce, Matthew J. Aragon. "Election." Pages 309–24 in *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Cross, Richard. *Duns Scotus on God*. Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology. Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub, 2005.

Duby, Steven J. *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*. T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology volume 30. London ; New York: Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016.

Franks, Christopher A. "The Simplicity of the Living God: Aquinas, Barth and Some Philosophers." *Mod. Theol.* 21.2 (2005): 275–300. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2005.00286.x>.

Gockel, Matthias. "On the Way from Schleiermacher to Barth: A Critical Reappraisal of Isaak August Dorner's Essay on Divine Immutability." *Scott. J. Theol.* 53.4 (2000): 490–510. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600056994>.

Gunton, Colin E. *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes*. London: SCM Press, 2002.

Heppe, Heinrich, Ernst Bizer, and G. T Thomson. *Reformed Dogmatics Set out and Illustrated from the Sources: Heinrich Heppe ; Foreword by Karl Barth ; Revised and Edited by Ernst Bizer ; English Translation by G.T. Thomson*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978.

Hinlicky, Paul R. *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016.

Holmes, Christopher R. J. *Revisiting the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes: In Dialogue with Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel and Wolf Krötke*. Issues in Systematic Theology v. 15. New York: Peter Lang, 2007.

———. "The Theological Function of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes and the Divine Glory, with Special Reference to Karl Barth and His Reading of the Protestant Orthodox." *Scott. J. Theol.* 61.02 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930608003967>, http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0036930608003967.

Hunsinger, George. *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. 2. [Dr.]. Grand Rapids, Mich [u.a]: Eerdmans, 20.

———. *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.

Johnson, Keith L. “Karl Barth and the Purification of Divine Simplicity.” *Mod. Theol.* 35.3 (2019): 531–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12518>.

Long, D. Stephen. “From the Hidden God to the God of Glory: Barth, Balthasar, and Nominalism.” *Eccles. J. Cathol. Evang. Theol.* 20.2 (2011): 167–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121102000203>.

McFarland, Ian A. “Present in Love: Rethinking Barth on the Divine Perfections.” *Mod. Theol.* 33.2 (2017): 243–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12313>.

Muller, Richard A. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academics, 2003.

———. “What I Haven’t Learned from Barth.” *Reform. J.* 37.3 (1987): 16–18.

Myers, Benjamin. “Election, Trinity, and the History of Jesus: Reading Barth with Rowan Williams.” Pages 121–37 in *Trinitarian Theology after Barth*. 1st ed. Vol. 148 of *A Princeton Theological Monograph Series*. Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011.

Norgate, Jonathan. *Isaak A. Dorner: The Triune God and the Gospel of Salvation*. T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology. London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2009.

Pokrifka, Todd B. *Redescribing God: The Roles of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason in Karl Barth’s Doctrines of Divine Unity, Constancy, and Eternity*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 121. Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2010.

Price, Robert. *Letters of the Divine Word: The Perfections of God in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics*. T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology. London: T & T Clark, 2011.

Reeling Brouwer, Rinse Herman. *Karl Barth and Post-Reformation Orthodoxy*. Barth Studies. Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015.

Sherman, Robert. “Isaak August Dorner on Divine Immutability: A Missing Link between Schleiermacher and Barth.” *J. Relig.* 77.3 (1997): 380–401. <https://doi.org/10.1086/490021>.

Smith, Garrett R. “The Problem of Divine Attributes from Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus.” University of Notre Dame, 2013. <https://curate.nd.edu/show/fj23611117n>.

Sonderegger, Katherine. "Barth and the Divine Perfections." *Scott. J. Theol.* 67.04 (2014): 450–63. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930614000210>.

———. *Systematic Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015.

Titus, Eric J. "The Perfections of God in the Theology of Karl Barth : A Consideration of the Formal Structure." *Kairos Evang. J. Theol. Nov 2010* (2010).

Velde, Roelf T. te. *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School: A Study in Method and Content*. Studies in Reformed Theology volume 25. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2013.

Williams, Robert R. "I. A. Dorner: The Ethical Immutability of God." *J. Am. Acad. Relig.* 54.4 (1986): 721–38.

Wittman, Tyler. *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Wittman, Tyler R. "Facticity and Faithfulness: Divine Simplicity in Barth's Christology." *Eccles. J. Cathol. Evang. Theol.* 26.4 (2017): 415–34.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121702600404>.