

# Letting the Bible Itself Speak

*The Mechanics of  
Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis  
in Church Dogmatics II/2*

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2019

*39,247 words*

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July 1, 2019  
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## ABSTRACT

Karl Barth is a theologian who continues to receive both strong criticism and endorsement for his Biblical exegesis, demanding that his use of Scripture is better understood. This paper demonstrates that Barth uses several theological exegetical tools in his theological argumentation in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, at a place where he is eager to highlight the exegetical foundations of his theological argumentation. Four theological exegetical tools—Narrative, Juxtaposition, Typology, and Dialectic—correspond to four successive stages in Barth’s argumentation in II/2, and account for the way that Scripture functions in Barth’s theological argument. Whole-of-Scripture *narrative* exegesis frames Barth’s argument (§32); his *juxtaposition* of disparate texts builds his reconstructed Christocentric election hermeneutic (§33); he uses *typology* to extend this hermeneutic to God’s other objects of election (the community and the individual) (§34-45); and, finally, Barth draws his discussions to careful conclusions with *dialectical* exegesis (§35). Each of these terms have also been used to describe Barth’s use of Scripture and argumentation as a whole, but I show that they are best understood as providing a specific function at different stages of his argumentation, even if they do also demonstrate significant overlap. Understood in this way, Barth’s theological exegesis is more complex than his critics and supporters have appreciated. But each of these theological exegetical tools also manifest something of the moral dilemma at the heart of theological exegesis, and much of the misunderstanding about Barth: that theological concepts are not brought to overbear upon the text of Scripture without having been thoroughly informed by Scripture. To use the language of Oliver O’Donovan, that Scripture is to be read “along the grain.” While the mechanics of Barth’s argument does not always demonstrate this moral virtue, his attempt to “let the Bible itself speak” provides a theological exegetical challenge that deserves its legacy of sustained reflection.

## PREFACE

The production of this thesis has been an arduous journey that began with my first encounter with Barth in a book club in my first year of Theological College. Barth continues to challenge and inspire me in my understanding and walk with our Lord Jesus and I remain grateful for the opportunity that I have had to read him in such depth. I am thankful for the love of all of my friends and family who have periodically had put up with my absence. I am particularly thankful for the love and generosity of my mother and father—Judy and Karl Irving—who have been abundantly hospitable to me over the last couple of years. I am also grateful for the advice, love, and patience of my friend and supervisor, David Höhne; along with the members of ‘Book Club’ who first introduced me to Barth and with whom I continue to wrestle in understand God, his church and his world. Above all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Lord Jesus who forms true subject of this study.

## Chapter 1

“Much of the opposition to seeing Barth as a genuine interpreter of Scripture seems to stem from an assumption that Barth imposes his own theological agenda on biblical texts that will not bear its weight. [...] Barth’s readings of Scripture deserve to be taken seriously as *readings*. On the other hand, many of the positive assessments of Barth’s biblical exegesis have paid much attention to the place of that exegesis within larger projects of theological construction without inquiring too much into the *mechanics* of how and why Barth chose to exegete specific biblical texts in the way he did.”<sup>1</sup>

If Karl Barth’s exegesis deserves to be taken seriously, it derives from his own clearly stated intentions in *Church Dogmatics* to “let the Bible itself speak.”<sup>2</sup> He elsewhere stated, that, “If I understand what I’m trying to do in the *Church Dogmatics*, it is to listen to what Scripture is saying and tell you what I hear.”<sup>3</sup> Francis Watson observes the fruit of this intention; that, “[f]rom beginning to end, Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* is nothing other than a sustained meditation on the texts of Holy Scripture.”<sup>4</sup> Barth’s successes in doing this are magnified in Barth’s legacy and influence, most

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley A. Hill, ‘The Church as Israel and Israel as the Church’, *Journal of Theological Interpretation* Vol. 6.1 (2012): 156.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Study ed. Vols. 10-11 (T&T Clarke, 2010), x.

<sup>3</sup> Account of Robert C. Johnson, cited in Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Romerbrief Period* (Eerdmans, 2004), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Watson, ‘The Bible’, in John Webster, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 58.

recently expressed in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS), and recognised in the field of Biblical Studies. Richard Bauckham, for example, observes that, “[a]dequate theological appropriation of the deepest insights of the New Testament Christology, such as we have observed in Philippians 2:6-11 and the Fourth Gospel, was not to occur until Martin Luther, Karl Barth and more recent theologies of the cross.”<sup>5</sup>

Of course, others express strong reservations about Barth’s work, for whom his work is unrecognisably exegesis; “wearisome, inept and futile,”<sup>6</sup> or “incredibly arbitrary and dogmatic.”<sup>7</sup> Otherwise sympathetic readers describe his exegetical readings as “excessive,” or ultimately dissatisfying.<sup>8</sup>

“Barth is clearly an interesting but not always satisfying interpreter of the Bible, whether judged by historical-critical criteria or, in some instances, even by his own hermeneutical standards.”<sup>9</sup>

In his quotation above, Wesley Hill articulates the key issue at the heart of this impasse; “[t]he mechanics of how and why Barth chose to exegete specific biblical texts in the way that he did.” This requires us to understand two things together—the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of Barth’s exegesis—his hermeneutical commitments, and his use of Scripture in the context of his own developing thought. Barth’s hermeneutic outlines his distinctive doctrines of Scripture and revelation, and not least the powerful place that the name of Jesus has in these doctrines. They frame his use of Scripture. Then, as Hill points out, Barth’s use of Scripture is often assumed to be an extension

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, (Eerdmans, 2008), 59.

<sup>6</sup> James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, (Clarendon Press, 1994), 203.

<sup>7</sup> Richard A. Muller, ‘What I Haven’t Learned From Karl Barth’, in *Reformed Journal*, Vol. 37 (1987): 16–18. “In his method, in his exegesis, and in his use of history Barth consistently fails to point his readers beyond his own individual theological wrestlings.”

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Bloomsbury, 1980), 97.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Porter and Jason Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Eerdmans, 2011), 224.



of Barth's theology and not treated in their own right. It is also construed as a conglomeration of exegetical approaches subsumed under a single heading, whether it be narrative, typology, or dialectic. In the quotation above, Hill has suggested that the former (theology) does not dominate the latter (exegesis) despite popular opinion to the contrary, since Barth's "readings of Scripture deserve to be taken seriously as readings." While there is truth to this, I believe that this statement requires qualification.

How does Barth "let the Bible itself speak?" In this essay I will consider Barth's readings of Scripture in the context of his theological argumentation in *Church Dogmatics* (CD) II/2, sections §32-35, as sample of his mature theological argumentation.<sup>10</sup> My argument is twofold: first, that (1) Barth uses a diversity of legitimate forms of theological exegesis of Scripture in the argument of II/2. These are legitimate theological exegetical forms in that they seek to understand Scripture along the contours of Scripture, and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. The theological exegetical forms also suit Barth's broad theological argument, since they allow him to progress the different stages of his theological argument by means of Scripture; and the diversity of his theological exegetical method both affirms and denies some of the simplistic ways that his reading of Scripture has been understood in the past. In particular, Barth's theological exegesis in II/2 embraces four of the major categories descriptive of his method (narrative, juxtaposition, typology, and dialectic), but denies that any one of them forms comprehensive description of his reading of Scripture. Second, I will argue that although these forms are legitimate, (2) the power of Barth's argument depends heavily upon theological concepts, some of which derive from his theological hermeneutical commitments. Theological concepts do not necessarily undermine theological exegetical readings of Scripture, but

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<sup>10</sup> That CD II/2 is a distinct unit in Barth's eyes is clear from the alternative referencing system that he employs in which he refers to §§32-35 as 'chapter 7.' According to the common way that this section is referenced, in this essay I will simply refer to this text as 'II/2', even though I will not be considering the ethics component (§36) of what strictly belongs in vol. II/2.

they beg the question of how they avoid, as Hill put it, “impos[ing a] theological agenda upon the biblical texts.”

Before considering the variety of Barth’s theological exegetical methods in II/2, several key questions around method and scope that need to be addressed. I will argue first that (1) the basis of good interpretation lies in a morally responsible reading of Scripture, what I will refer to as *theological exegesis*. The principles drawn from this will lead me to argue, secondly, (2) that Barth’s writing in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 provides a good sample of theological exegesis for the consideration of Barth’s work. I will thirdly consider (3) the conditions that provide for a good analysis of Barth’s theological exegesis in II/2; and I will finally (4) propose four theological exegetical methods as the particular methods which Barth employs to theologically exegetically derive his argument in II/2, and which will form the substance of this essay.

## 1.1. Theological Exegesis

The phenomenon of *theological exegesis* represents a range of attempts to bring the theology of Scripture to bear upon the interpretation of Scripture.<sup>11</sup> It derives in its modern context from a desire to bring the process of interpretation away from the critical methods of the academy and back into the church where it is read in a confession of faith. It also derives from an appreciation of ancient pre-critical readings of Scripture and the role that the rule of faith played in the exegesis of the church fathers (notably Irenaeus and Tertullian).

The way that I use to the term *theological exegesis* here stems from an understanding of *interpretation as a moral activity*. Interpretation can be done well, or poorly;

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<sup>11</sup> A related term for a recent expression of theological exegesis is the theological interpretation of Scripture (TIS), and is associated with some of the following names: Kevin Vanhoozer, Stephen Fowl, Francis Watson, and Mark Bowald.

carefully, or haphazardly. It can fail even with the best of hermeneutical intentions, and it requires—much like any human interactions—patience and humility. Oliver O'Donovan elaborates:

“Good interpretation never struggles *against* the text, reading, as the fashion is, ‘against the grain’, deconstructing the textual surface and showing it up as a confidence trick. Good interpretation never tries to bargain with the text, forging a compromise between what it says and what we would like to hear from it. It never supplements the text, overlaying it with independent reflections that head off on their own devices, never invokes a higher wisdom to cover the text’s nakedness. Interpretation is the cheerful acceptance of the text’s offer to more than lies on its surface, its invitation to come inside, to attune ourselves to its resonances and its dynamics, its suggestions and its logic.”<sup>12</sup>

On this understanding, good interpretation could be understood as an extension of the command to love one’s neighbour, requiring care and attention, and hard work and sacrifice in the case of complex forms of literature, as well as humility, patience, a willingness and ability to provide attention, and to understand themes and concepts entrenched in foreign and obscured contexts. Good exegesis responsibly relates a part of the text to the whole, to its various levels of context, and in accordance with the text’s style and genre. A clause or sentence must be considered in the grammatical and semantic context of the language of its time, along with the broader literary context of the clause, both immediate (the connected clauses, sentences and paragraphs of the text) and remote (in common uses of the grammar and language). Good interpretation therefore brings together the one and the many and moves between them in a way that preserves the integrity of both.

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<sup>12</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking* (Eerdmans, 2014), 136.

But then the interpretation of Scripture requires another contextual step beyond the interpretative processes of ordinary texts since any attempt to understand Scripture apart from Scripture's own form and theological context is a failure to read it "along the grain." The distinction in theological hermeneutics between formal principles of theology (the interpretation of Scripture) and material principles of theology (the theological content of Scripture) assists this understanding. For theological exegesis, the two belong together because the relationship between the two is important. If the *formal principles* of theology tend to draw upon a general hermeneutical ethos applicable to any human document, it is because it remains a tenet of the *material principles* of theology. It is the theological conviction that Scripture is a human document (alongside its divine origin) that enables and requires it to be interpreted under the conditions of general hermeneutics, and in a way that is commensurate with an understanding of exegesis as an activity of human freedom. Then since Scripture is of *divine* origin, the distinction of formal and material forms of theology principles is blurred. Divine authorship provides Scripture with a unique flavour of interpretation that is set apart from general hermeneutics in some way.

The interpretation of Scripture therefore requires some kind of theological context to set it alongside principles of general hermeneutics, and so account for such things as Scripture's relationship to God's revelation, and its priority in the church. For example, John Webster describes Scriptures as *sanctified*, "creaturely realities set apart by the triune God to serve his self-presence."<sup>15</sup> It is a "sanctified space," which God has deemed to be divine speech, and an authoritative witness to himself and his purposes. Webster is accurate insofar as his reading of Scripture is a moral reading of Scripture read "along the grain." In this way, theological exegesis is both sensitive to the particular unity inherent to its diversity, in accordance with its divine origin,

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<sup>15</sup> John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21.

as well as the contours and context of Scripture's diversity, in accordance with its human origin.

The question of what this looks like fuels the debates, questions, and diversity of the theological exegetical movement, and explains some of the broad turns of biblical studies in the modern period. The tide of modernity in the fields of science, politics and philosophy, which has seen hermeneutics eschew metaphysics and meta-narratives, has corresponded to a tide of biblical studies that explores a scientific basis of historical-critical readings where, "the real events of history constitute an autonomous temporal framework of their own under God's providential design."<sup>14</sup> Historical investigation of Scripture was separated as a discipline from theological and ecclesial concerns, and, eventually, actively excluded from intellectual efforts concerning the Bible. This led to privatised expressions of faith in academic work, and to an eagerness to get behind the texts of Scripture to determine what really happened, on the same level as extra-biblical sources.

Theological exegesis—seen not least the work of Barth—explicitly seeks to address this imbalance, and resisting the naïve pursuit for neutrality evident in early modern scientific readings. The risk of any pendulum swing, of course, is that it over-reacts and historical readings of Scripture have no bearing at all on theological readings, and so the battle for theological exegesis persists. In light of urges to "grant priority to theological concerns,"<sup>15</sup> and, "keep theological concerns primary to all others,"<sup>16</sup> Francis Watson cautions that, "we may have been a little too eager to pit one interpretive priority against others, as though they were mutually exclusive."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (Yale University Press, 1974), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Wipf & Stock, 2009), 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>17</sup> Watson, 'Authors, Readers, Hermeneutics, in A. K. M. Adam et al., *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Baker Academic, 2006), 123.

Approaching theological exegesis as a moral activity places a healthy emphasis upon the proper emphases upon history versus mystery, since theology derives from the contours and emphases of Scripture itself. The scope of recent debates around theological exegesis therefore surround the shape of Scripture, whether it be the role of the interpretive community, the rule of faith in interpretation, the place of the Eucharist, the unity and diversity of the Biblical language of covenant, or the place of authorial intent. Each of these constitute a hermeneutical priority because they seek to provide a vision for a moral interpretation of Scripture. Mark Bowald's cartographic summary of the diverse phenomenon of theological exegesis places these readings on a tripartite spectrum representing the leanings or emphases of recent proponents: (1) the authority of *the text of Scripture* (Francis Watson and Kevin Vanhoozer); (2) the authority of *the reader*, ecclesiology and with a measure of postmodern thought (David Kelsey, Stephen Fowl, the later Hans Frei, and the Yale School); and (3) *the agency of God* in interpretation (Karl Barth). Bowald helpfully emphasises the unity of this diversity, as all proponents seek some kind of balance of all three of these components to rightly understand the message.

There is a positive and a negative lesson that to be learned from key exponents of theological exegesis, that form two emphases for our analysis to work between. The positive lesson draws from Francis Watson's attempt to derive theological contours of Scripture from Scripture itself—primarily driven from the observation that “truth is textually mediated.” More fully stated to capture the threefold balance of theological exegesis, “[t]he Spirit of truth bears witness to the grace and truth that are to be found in the enfleshed Word not directly but in and through the Christian community.”<sup>18</sup> The result of Watson's analysis is a theological hermeneutic that emphasises a literal reading of Scripture which does not overlook or simplify the diversity of Scripture and yet seeks an objective reading, discovered ultimately in the centre of the texts of Scripture—Jesus Christ. This is achieved by understanding the text

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<sup>18</sup> Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (T&T Clark, 1997), 1.

as both a divine and human speech-act, as so considers both what the author is saying and doing (the illocutionary and perlocutionary meanings). "The literal sense is the sense intended by the author insofar as this authorial intention is objectively embodied in the words of the text."<sup>19</sup> It is objective in the sense that its effects necessarily extend in space and time beyond the control of the author. In the context of Christian Scripture, such intentions are "subject to the criteria established by the speech-act at the centre of Christian scripture, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the enfleshment and the enactment of the divine Word."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the humanness of Christ requires a reading of Scripture "along the grain" to be read in the context of the intention of its authors, human as well as divine.

The negative lesson relates to Kevin Vanhoozer's adoption of pragmatism, and especially in relation to the use of theological concepts in theological exegetical argumentation. Vanhoozer admits that if theology is to play a fundamental role in interpretation, then a degree of speculation is required, along with the corresponding and unavoidable risk of ideological assertion. "Theologians cannot be so hamstrung over worries about ideology that we refuse to account for relatively stable concepts as one form of divine grace."<sup>21</sup> The modern shift toward historical-critical bases for biblical interpretation in order to eliminate ideology unwittingly exposed biblical interpretation to alien ideologies in the form of scientific and historical presuppositions. The suspicion of ideology and theological speculation has ironically driven forms of interpretation which dare to step behind the canonical text and form speculative historical reconstructions.

Theological exegesis therefore argues that the reading of Scripture "along the grain" requires a theological context, welcomes the use of appropriate language "beyond

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture* (InterVarsity, 2015), 187.

what is written” explicitly in Scripture, and provides appropriate theological controls.<sup>22</sup> Vanhoozer reframes the questions of exegetical practice to align less with the “truth-seeking” of the modern project and to align more with the “wisdom-seeking” evident in Richard Rorty’s pragmatic approach to epistemology.<sup>23</sup> Rorty essentially abandons the project of hermeneutics in the Kantian and Platonic traditions of philosophy, and calls for edifying rather than systematic philosophy. For Vanhoozer, the controls surrounding this shift in emphasis towards wisdom, and what mitigates the risk of ideology lies in the reality underlying theological concepts, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> This understanding of theological exegesis,

“understands doctrinal judgment as a practice, and hence doctrinal judgments as potential presuppositions and products of scriptural exegesis, for the sake of the eschatological and ethical aspiration to mirror Scripture. Through wise acquisition of conceptual habits shaped by the Spirit, we exercise God-given freedom to foster the canonical imagination, that the church may reflect the fullness of Christ’s image.”<sup>25</sup>

This broad understanding of theological exegesis will shape the remainder of my methodology and analysis in this essay. Interpretation as a moral activity requires that we give attention to each feature of context; the small and big picture, including the theological context. A moral reading of Scripture therefore does not immediately eschew theological concepts. It places an emphasis upon the priority of Scripture, searches for the theological contours of Scripture, and allows Scripture to interpret Scripture. It also builds upon this a theological emphasis, providing strategies of

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<sup>22</sup> Vanhoozer, ‘May We Go Beyond What is Written After All? The Pattern of Theological Authority and the Problem of Doctrinal Development, in ed., D. A. Carson, *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Eerdmans, 2016), 747.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 181; cf. Rorty’s work, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

<sup>24</sup> In Vanhoozer’s words, “highlighting pneumatological commitments, and ecclesiological concerns.” *Mirror*, 187.

<sup>25</sup> Vanhoozer, *Mirror*, 190.



exegesis that suit the mode of argumentation, venturing “beyond what is written” in its articulation of a moral reading of Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

## 1.2. The Suitability of *Church Dogmatics II/2*

While the credit that Karl Barth receives in contributing to theological exegesis is indisputable, the question of which of Barth’s writings to consider in this analysis is not simple, since no single piece of his writing sums up his thought in each of the stages of its development. According to McCormack, Barth’s thought is not best understood from any golden period, but in a “genetic historical” trajectory and so along the course of his development, tracing its roots in both ancient and modern thought.<sup>27</sup> Here I will briefly outline (a) the broad contours of Barth’s theological development, in order to outline (b) what makes II/2 a good representative sample of Barth’s writing.

### 1.2.1 Development in Barth’s Thought

Barth’s distinctive approach to Scripture derived from the discomfort he found in the context of German liberalism, especially its impotence in the crisis of war-torn Europe in 1915. The theological questions he posed to his context led to his famous conversion, and his corresponding discovery of “the strange new world of the Bible.” This signalled a significant change in his theological and hermeneutical priorities, and culminated in the publication of his commentary on Romans which Karl Adam famously described as “a bombshell dropped on the playground of the theologians.” *Romerbrief* bears little resemblance to the commentaries of his contemporaries, and its pejorative descriptions as pneumatic exegesis, or paraenesis fail to recognise that what Barth sought to do was challenge the very form that exegesis had taken in the

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<sup>26</sup> Vanhoozer, ‘May We Go Beyond What is Written After All?’, 747.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Clarendon, 1997), viii.

commentaries of his time. According to Burnett's thorough analysis, *Romerbrief* consisted of several key theological exegetical emphases: (a) that God is the subject matter (*Sache*) or content of the text, (b) that the reader necessarily participates in the meaning of the text, (c) that it is essential to read the text with attention and love (unlike the historical critical readings of Barth's day), and (d) that reading Scripture must be done "in accordance with the 'meaning of the Bible itself.'"<sup>28</sup> In Daniel Treier's words, "Barth kept the Bible's language and content together instead of using hermeneutics as a justification for moving behind the text or for translating its words into general rational principles held to be true on other grounds."<sup>29</sup>

The development of Barth's method from *Romerbrief* can be in part attributed to his changing interlocutors and influences. His relationship with his teachers and peers explains much of his tone, especially his eventual departure from his friends Rudolph Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten and Emil Brunner. Friedrich Schleiermacher also plays a complex role for Barth one with whom Barth sharply disagreed, and yet he was able to admit later in life, he also "never left."<sup>30</sup> A particularly important encounter for understanding Barth's writing in II/2 arises from his encounter with Pierre Maury in 1936, which would launch what has been labelled Barth's strong form of Christocentrism in volume II of *CD*. This marks what is commonly regarded to be Barth's mature theology, even if world wars, developments in philosophy and postmodernism, along with various interlocutors and the various subjects Barth found himself attending to in his teaching all ensured that his thought continued to develop subsequently.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Richard E. Burnett, *Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Romerbrief Period*. (Eerdmans, 2004), chs. 3-5; 221.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Baker Academic, 2008), 16.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, 'What Has Basel to Do with Berlin?', in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Baker Academic, 2008), 65.

The description of Barth's theology in volume II of *CD* as mature relates to his distinctively strong shift to Christocentrism, which shapes much of Barth's later writing. Van Balthasar's description of II/2 as "the heartbeat of Barth's theology" is confirmed in Douglas Sharp's study, where he states that,

"the doctrine of election [...] constitutes the structural as well as the hermeneutical key to the *Church Dogmatics*. [...] This is to say that the themes, emphases and method of analysis and construction that come to expression in the doctrine of election are in no small part the determining factors in the construction of the *Church Dogmatics*, and that without these factors the infrastructure and dogmatic development of the work would fall apart."<sup>51</sup>

Some have observed that Barth's Christocentric development in II/2 corresponds to a diminished role of the Holy Spirit, the consequences of which will become clearer in the detail of his argument.<sup>52</sup> While debate surrounds whether Barth's emphasis on the Spirit diminished or not (and there are hints that Barth recognised this neglect in his later writings), Barth's Christocentric emphasis would persist throughout Barth's later writing.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (Ignatius, 1992), 145; Douglas R. Sharp, *The Hermeneutics of Election*. (University Press of America, 1990), 1.

<sup>52</sup> This is represented strongly in the work of much recent scholarship: Colin Gunton, 'Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the *Imago Dei*', in Christoph Schwobel & Colin E. Gunton, eds., *Persons, Divine and Human* (T & T Clark, 1991), 58; Rowan Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God', in Stephen Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth, Studies of His Theological Method* (Clarendon, 1979), 182; Suzanne McDonald, *Re-Imaging Election* (Eerdmans, 2010); Paul D. Molnar, *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit*, (InterVarsity, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> McCormack, 'What has Basel to do with Berlin', 64-65. The scarcity of Barth's pneumatology has been associated with his aversion of Schleiermacher. As Barth's life drew to a close in the same year as the 200th anniversary of Schleiermacher's birth, some of Barth's last commemorative writings provide the hint that his shift away from Schleiermacher was not a simple departure, and that he speculated upon the possibility of a "theology of the third article," in which theology was understood from the reference point of the Holy Spirit. Unrealised potential for explaining this also lies in the eschatological emphasis of his unwritten *CD*, volume V (the doctrine of redemption). McCormack speculates about the way that this might have shifted the locus of his theological project away from Christocentrism, towards his more trinitarian theology at Gottingen.

The development of Barth's theology over such a large volume of work, over such a long period of time makes analysis of his work notoriously difficult, and no single text will adequately represent these developments, or Barth's wide range of influences. Even so, there are good reasons to consider II/2 as a good starting point.

### 1.2.2. The Suitability of II/2

The reason for considering II/2 as a sample of Barth's theology is that it represents a critical theological exegetical argument in the course of Barth's theological project in *CD*, and demonstrates Barth's clear priority of exegesis in his theological argument. This is evident in the preface for II/2 in which Barth expresses his anxiety in departing from the Reformed tradition in his doctrine of election in II/2, as well as the clear teaching of Scripture.

"To think of the contents of this volume gives me much pleasure, but even greater anxiety. The work has this peculiarity, that in it I have had to leave the framework of theological tradition to a far greater extent than in the first part on the doctrine of God. I would have preferred to follow Calvin's doctrine of predestination much more closely, instead of departing from it so radically. I would have preferred, too, to keep to the beaten tracks when considering the basis of ethics. But I could not and cannot do so. As I let the Bible itself speak to me on these matters, as I meditated upon what I seemed to hear, I was driven irresistibly to reconstruction."<sup>54</sup>

The weight of this stage is not insignificant, given the central place that election plays in the course of Barth's theological project. In addition to the prominence that II/2 plays in *CD*, and the explicitly stated importance of Scripture its argumentation, II/2 represents a unit which forms a single coherent theological argument. The length and detail of the entire argument presents a challenge for any single analysis,

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<sup>54</sup> II/2, x.

but capturing the shape and scope of the whole is important for properly understanding his theological exegetical argumentation. It has been a methodological shortcoming of previous attempts to understand portions of II/2 without consideration of the whole argument.<sup>55</sup>

The basis for considering II/2, therefore, is that it represents a central idea in *CD*, offered as a single coherent argument, and that Barth is here particularly consciously emphasising the place and the authority of Scripture in his theological argumentation.

### 1.3. The Conditions for Good Analysis of Barth's Argument

There are several methodological issues to address to ensure a good analysis of Barth's theological exegetical argument in II/2. These include a focus upon the agency of Scripture in Barth's argument, an understanding of Barth's hermeneutical presuppositions, and an understanding and representation reading of Barth's argument in II/2.

#### 1.3.1. Pursuing the Agency of Scripture

As already mentioned, the length of Barth's argument in II/2, along with its detail and the seemingly unstructured and symphonic style of writing makes it difficult to interpret. This difficulty is evident in the presumption of his early interpreters in projecting Barth's hermeneutical statements onto his actual exegesis, assuming that Barth's practice would be consistent with his theory.<sup>56</sup> In response to these presumptions (and what in some cases is a clear failure to read Barth's hermeneutical

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<sup>55</sup> David Gibson's otherwise excellent study is a key example of this. David Gibson, *Reading the Decree: Exegesis, Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth* (A&C Black, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 1-4. McCormack identifies the root of this tendency in Von Balthasar.

statements in their fullness), there has been a push back that places, “the priority of exegesis over hermeneutics in Barth.”<sup>57</sup>

What will distinguish this essay from some of the previous attempts to analyse Barth’s work, is a focus upon the mechanics of Barth’s exegesis—or as Hill articulated it, “the *mechanics* of how and why Barth chose to exegete specific biblical texts in the way he did.”<sup>58</sup> The first emphasis is to focus upon Scripture’s agency in relation to Barth’s theological argumentation. My analysis will seek to highlight the role of Scripture in Barth’s argument, and his exegetical argumentation will be conceived to be legitimate if his exegesis demonstrates that he is deriving meaning from Scripture for his theological argumentation.

### 1.3.2 Understanding Barth’s Hermeneutics and Exegetical Method

An important correlative of Barth’s exegesis is the context of his own writing, and particularly his hermeneutical commitments, and his theology of Scripture and revelation. Barth’s distinctive construal of Scripture and his doctrine of revelation and the Word of God in I/1 and I/2 of *CD* therefore provide essential context for understanding his argumentation in II/2.

Context important in any form of interpretation, but a fair reading of any theologian requires an understanding of his or her stated process for exegeting Scripture, which in turn derives from the complex entanglement of his construal of Scripture. David Kelsey has described this entanglement as inevitable to every, and any construal of Scripture in theological argumentation.

“Scripture’s bearing on theological proposals must [...] be analysed first in terms of its bearing on the imaginative vision that gives a position its peculiar shape as a ‘whole,’ and then on the way it is construed and used in each

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<sup>57</sup> Donald Wood, *Karl Barth’s Theology of Interpretation*, 175.

<sup>58</sup> Hill, ‘The Church as Israel’, 156.

of the proposals and clusters of proposals that comprise the various parts of the ‘whole.’”<sup>39</sup>

The most direct methodological self-reflection that Barth provides in II/2 occurs in his brief epistemological observation in §33.2, where, on the topic of election, he prefigures Kelsey’s observation about the puzzling way that different theologies derive from the same Scriptures.<sup>40</sup> Barth’s explanation of this is principled: “If we undertake to oppose this view, we do so because we believe that their exegesis in this matter was in line with a highly questionable general hermeneutical principle which we ourselves cannot follow.”<sup>41</sup> Here Barth’s interpretation of Scripture is guided by a hermeneutical principle in which Jesus Christ is, “the centre and *telos* of the divine work and of time.”<sup>42</sup> Understanding the doctrine of election along the grain of Scripture, then, is to read it in its theological context, with Jesus Christ properly understood to be the Word of God.

“Like all other passages, these must be read in the context of the whole Bible, and that means *with an understanding that the Word of God is the content of the Bible*. The exegesis of these passages depends upon whether or not we have determined that our exposition should be true to the context in which they stand and are intended to be read.”<sup>43</sup>

Here the content or subject matter (*Sache*) of the Bible is the living reality to which the Scriptures bear witness (the Word of God): the person of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This is clarified by his earlier writing on Scripture and revelation in I/1 and I/2 where he theologically determines to reframe Scripture’s relationship with divine revelation, such that Scripture itself is not understood to constitute revelation directly because properly comprehending the revelation of God is to experience the

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<sup>39</sup> David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1999), 206-207.

<sup>40</sup> II/2, 146-153.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 152. Emphasis added.

reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ. Unlike traditional construals for Barth Scripture is *indirectly* identified with God's revelation, functioning to *witness* to Jesus Christ, the Word of God proper, either in anticipation of Him (in the Old Testament) or in memory of Him (in the New Testament). In the same way that sinners know reconciliation with God through the gracious act of God in Jesus, so revelation is a gracious act of God who meets people in their sin so that they are forgiven and reconciled in their knowledge of God. Revelation is not merely the transferral of information about himself in this event, but a self-giving in that he makes his person to be present to men in something like an "I-thou encounter." Barth's doctrines of Scripture and revelation are therefore fundamentally shaped by the central Reformed doctrine of justification by faith.

The benefit of subordinating the Scriptures to Jesus as the Word of God is that it preserves a theologically relational priority of Scripture against a cerebral "biblicism," and against the tendency to construe Scripture as an artefact of history. The corresponding risk is that the relationship between Scripture and God's self-revelation is arbitrary and unpredictable. If Scripture functions in relational terms then it raises questions about how Barth Scripture functions authoritatively in exegetical argumentation. The *indirect identification* of Scripture with revelation of the Word of God seems to undermine its authority, and portrays an arbitrary and uncertain relationship with theological argumentation. David Kelsey suggests that for Barth, "[t]o say that scripture is 'inspired' is to say that God has promised that sometimes, at his gracious pleasure, the ordinary human words of the biblical texts will become the Word of God, the occasion for rendering an agent present to us in a Divine-human encounter."<sup>44</sup> Kelsey elaborates further:

"It is difficult to see how this way of construing scripture can be assessed. It can in principle be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed by historical-crit-

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<sup>44</sup> Kelsey, 47-48; *CD*, I/2, 514ff.



ical exegesis in scripture. For it does not claim that every passage of scripture is self-evidently part of one vast rendering of one agent. It certainly does not claim that the human authors of the several biblical books understood themselves to be engaged in such an enterprise. It only supposes that it is possible to look at or to take the canonical scriptures this way, without claiming that there is any historical evidence justifying such a construction.”<sup>45</sup>

Although Kelsey admits that his analysis of Barth may be simplistic, it represents a broader view that serves to undermine Barth’s exegetical argument and which can be addressed in a survey of Barth’s hermeneutics. Seemingly unbeknownst to Kelsey, Barth not only addresses the inspiration of the original authorship of the texts of Scripture, he also describes an interpretive process for exegetical engagement.<sup>46</sup>

Barth maintains that there are two inspirations of Scripture that corresponds to two types of history. The first relates to God’s work in the Biblical authors in their historical contexts, providing God’s assurance of the faithful perception of the original authors of the Biblical texts. This corresponds to what Barth calls *general historicity* (*Historie*), by which he means the concrete events that are accessible to historical investigation, analysis and judgement. It is “apprehensible by a neutral observer” and ensures that “[a]ll recorded events, including those described in the Bible as taking place between God and humanity, are subject to the tools of historical inquiry.” This legitimises the historical investigation, even if Barth remained reluctant to share historical observations in his own exegesis.

The second kind of historicity sits alongside the first and corresponds to a second moment of inspiration—*special historicity* (*Geschichte*). Here historical judgement

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<sup>45</sup> Kelsey, 49-50.

<sup>46</sup> Admittedly, toward the beginning of *Uses of Scripture*, Kelsey admits that he is not claiming to have thoroughly understood the theologians he studies. But even if his greater point is effectively illustrated, it does not remove the fact that Kelsey has misrepresented Barth’s theology.

gives way to the “judgement of faith,” which alone perceives God’s work in the general historical realm, and which recognises the activity of God with humanity in the history narrated in the Bible. It is also a judgement derived from God himself, who inspires the reader of Scripture to perceive God’s work in the original historical event, and more deeply understand it in the here and now. While access to the general history is available to all and forms a necessary component of Biblical interpretation, Barth insists that along with Scripture itself, such general history, is “in no case [...] revelation as such.”<sup>47</sup> Judgements about the Bible’s historicity therefore do not affect its special historicity; and an event judged by general historical criteria to be non-historical may still be recognised as a special historical event.

The question that this raises, along with the question central to Kelsey’s critique, lies in the difference between these two inspirations. Does this Scripture become in this second inspiration something that it is not in its first inspiration? In other words, does the miracle of special revelation overcome an inherent incoherence of the Scriptures? Barth’s position is that it is not an incoherence of Scripture in itself, but the inaccessibility of the subject matter by means of natural theology; the “infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity” through which it is impossible to breach with divine grace. The subject matter of Scripture is the self-revealing Lord Jesus who provides the coherence and understanding of Scripture in himself. Gibson confirms that,

“in designating the Bible as a witness Barth is not doing less than saying that the Bible becomes what it already is when it is read as it is meant to be read, when it is heard as it is meant to be heard, and when understanding does not simply stop at the witness itself but perceives the divine object witnessed, so that this object is seen and understood and believed.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> CD, I/1, 325.

<sup>48</sup> Gibson, ‘The Answering Speech of Men’, in Carson, ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, 273.

Scripture witnesses to Jesus Christ as the Word of God, and when Scripture is used by God as a medium for self-revelation to the present believer, the voice and activity of God are heard and perceived here and now such that the two moments of inspiration coincide in an event of special historicity, unperceived from the perspective of general historicity. “The neutral observer who understood the events recorded in it as revelation would cease thereby to be a neutral observer,”<sup>49</sup> and so access to this special history is denied to human agency without a monergistic work of God. Gibson criticises Barth’s doctrine of Scripture for its incapacity to account for the work of judgement that proclamation of the Word provides in the Scriptures. Although such arguments risk the weakness of all arguments from silence, the Scriptural omissions that Barth makes in his argument does deserve consideration, and will feature later in my argument as a weakness in Barth’s theology.<sup>50</sup>

The strongest indication that Barth believed that Scripture and the Word of God coincided derives from the human “freedom under the word,” which aligns special revelation with general hermeneutical principles because of the humanity of the Scriptural witness to Jesus. There is a need for general principles deriving from the humanity of the biblical witness, its human authorship, collation, and proclamation. The ambiguity and obscurity of language employed in theology demands that human concepts, images, and understandings must be subordinated to the biblical text as the authoritative human witness to revelation. The activity of interpretation of the

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<sup>49</sup> I/1, 325.

<sup>50</sup> David Gibson’s critique of Barth’s account of Scripture deserves longer consideration, but, this question will here be put it to one side, on the basis that his criticism: (a) is focussed entirely on a single narrow description of one of Barth’s hermeneutical accounts (in CD I/2, 503-6 and 514-526); (b) admits to the difficulty of determining whether this emphasis in Barth is merely rhetorical or actually substantial; and (c) ultimately is not fatal for the spirit of Barth’s argument, as he seeks ultimately to strengthen Barth’s view with a stronger account of pneumatology along the trajectory of Barth’s thought—especially in determining the alienating work of the Scriptures in the economy of God’s works (cf. Is. 6:9-10).

Word of God is only possible with the attitude of genuine hearing, and by subordinating other thoughts and ideas.

“To interpret God’s Word must and can now mean to interpret Holy Scripture. And because the interpretation of the Word of God can take place only through man’s subordination, this subordination now comes concretely to mean that we have to subordinate ourselves to the word of the prophets and apostles; not as one subordinates oneself to God, but rather as one subordinates oneself for the sake of God and in His love and fear to the witnesses and messengers which He Himself has constituted and empowered.”<sup>51</sup>

Following from this, Barth outlines his threefold process of biblical interpretation, involving three discrete phases, each of which requiring a form of *subordination* of the reader/hearer: *explicatio*, *meditatio*, and *applicatio*.<sup>52</sup> All three phases are facets of a single unified act, the integrity of which is undermined if one of them is considered as optional.

The first phase (*explicatio*) consists in the sense of the words in their original historical context and historical environment. This phase is common in the practice of what Barth describes as general hermeneutics. There must be a genuine hearing and attempt to understand the object referred to in the text, and care must be taken to represent the object that the text presents and to not impose an object upon the text. Subordination in this phase means that the possibilities of the text cannot be predetermined by the concepts provided in the text.

Against Kelsey’s view, and much other popular opinion, therefore, Barth’s hermeneutical method explicitly subordinates thoughts to what is essentially historical-critical interpretation. On this reading, Barth’s reticence to commend historical-

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<sup>51</sup> CD, I/2, 717.

<sup>52</sup> Barth’s full discussion of this is at CD I/2, 722-727.

critical exegesis elsewhere in his writings reflects his reaction against and opposition to forms of thought that he considers to have neglected essentially theological dimensions of Biblical interpretation.<sup>53</sup>

The third phase (*applicatio*) of interpretation consists in the appropriation and application of the meaning and understanding of the text. Examination achieves its telos in that the interpreter is enabled to assimilate its meaning into her life and conduct.

“How can we have heard it, and how can we be its hearers if and so long as we still distinguish our own concern from its concern? How can we have heard its Word if we do not feel compelled to speak it as our own word to ourselves and pass it on to others?”<sup>54</sup>

In between these two phases is the phase that is critical for understanding Barth’s theological exegesis. The second phase (*meditatio*) consists in reflection on the text vis-a-vis its object. The interpreter is here entitled to invoke a theological concept or scheme of thought to assist in the exposition and to provide a frame of reference for hearing and understanding the text subjectively.

Barth is otherwise careful to identify controls around the conceptual nature of exegesis. Five components which serve to limit the usage of any concept as a tool for biblical interpretation include: (1) The limitation of foreign imposition of any concept for explaining Scripture. (2) The provisional and hypothetical limitation of a concept. Whether it can and actually does aid in the explanation of the text and its referent is something ultimately determined by the Word of God and not the interpreter. (3) A concept can consequently never become an end in itself or claim an independent status over the text. (4) The provisional nature of concepts suggests that they cannot be easily pitched against one another in the task of interpretation.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Hunsinger, ‘Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation: Rudolf Smend on Karl Barth’, in George Hunsinger, *Thy Word Is Truth: Barth on Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2012), 29-48.

<sup>54</sup> *CD* I/2, 736.

(5) Concepts are finally also legitimate only to the extent that it is determined and governed by the text of Scripture and its subject matter—Jesus Christ.

Whether these caveats appropriately prevent such concepts from dominating Barth's exegesis—not least the matter of a misshapen Christology—is a matter for this essay to consider. Douglas Sharp is right to observe the risk of circular-reasoning and contradiction of his commitment to the submission of human thinking to Scripture, in relation to the *meditatio*, even if he does not consider this weakness to be fatal to Barth's argumentation.

“[H]ow can an interpreter subordinate a scheme of thought to the text when a scheme of thought is required for the understanding of the text? If a scheme of thought is a necessary ‘key’ to interpreting the text, what else can this mean except that in some sense the interpreter controls the means whereby the text is to be understood?”<sup>55</sup>

This risk aligns with Vanhoozer's abovementioned pragmatic composure before the threat of ideology, as well as his acceptance that theological truth lies beyond what is written. Barth's articulation of the doctrine of the trinity provides a historically sensible development of a valuable theological concept, but it could be extended to include a variety of the church's other key credal statements. Barth suggests that it clearly derives from Scripture, in that it “translates and exegetes the text,” but that it also “makes use of other concepts besides those in the original” and “it does not just repeat what is there.”<sup>56</sup>

In summary, since in Barth's writings revelation fundamentally consists in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, Scripture is indirectly identified with revelation such that Scripture remains God's special witness to revelation. Theologically understood, such revelation occurs in a personal encounter, or moment of

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<sup>55</sup> Douglas R. Sharp, *The Hermeneutics of Election: The Significance of the Doctrine in Barth's Church Dogmatics*. (University Press of America, 1990), 127-128.

<sup>56</sup> CD I/1, 308.

special inspiration, in which the reader ceases to be a neutral observer. While general hermeneutical principles will not achieve divine revelation, they form an important component of any good reading of Scripture, and sit within a threefold process of biblical interpretation, the second of which (*meditatio*) includes the important albeit precarious task of including theological concepts in the interpretation of Scripture.

### 1.3.3. Providing a Representative Reading of II/2

An exhaustive study of Barth's use of Scripture in II/2 is beyond the limits of this study. The argument is long, and the volume of Scriptural references too great for each to be considered. Here I propose a map that provides the theological contours of the argument of II/2, and which is sensitive to the way that Scripture relates to theological concepts.

A broad view of II/2 sees Barth's exegetical emphasis shifting in the course of his argument. The frequency and density of his readings of Scripture are scarce to begin with and grow steadily to assume more attention as the argument progresses. In inverse proportion, Barth's historical theological engagement diminishes in the second half of II/2, making way for more detailed exegesis. According to these trends, his use of Scripture observably shifts through different stages; from engaging with the tradition and methodology, to providing a christological framework for election, to demonstrating that other concepts and passages of Scripture can be read within this election framework.

Although Barth's argument will explore a variety of smaller tangential concerns, there are four observable stages in which the core of Barth's argument progresses, and in which Barth provides a different agency to Scripture in his theological argumentation. These four stages are outlined as follows:

#### Stage 1: Framework

As Barth's titles for this first stage in §32 suggest—the *orientation*, *foundation* and *place* of the doctrine of election—Barth provides the setting or *frame* of his argument about election. It begins with Barth's summary dogmatic proposition that will

shape his re-definition of elections a series of theological principles that will frame his discussion, most clearly setting election within his doctrine of God, and so emphasising that Scripture is authoritative for knowledge of God, and the key place of election in the self-revelation of God. Barth goes on to assert some of his theological and philosophical peculiarities that frame his argument, especially a move away from Aristotelian categories of epistemology, and towards a particularistic epistemology and a corresponding actualistic ontology. These assertions take expression in his emphasis upon the free grace of God—a theme strongly established in II/1.

More than the later stages, this first stage is dominated by his engagement with the tradition. He seeks to undermine and correct rival ideas by showing the inconsistency in their frameworks and by showing that they do not fit within his own given theological frame. Exegesis is surprisingly scarce, given the emphasis he places on biblical authority throughout; even if there are a few critical exegetical moments. Barth highlights key verses that will be contemplated later, and he asserts *prima facie* theological meaning from texts which Barth will consider foundational, and most likely considers them consensus readings. For example, he uses John 3:16 to assert the central place of love in our understanding of God's character. The key feature of Barth's exegesis that I intend to draw attention to is the narrative exegesis that substantiates certain theological principles that will frame his argument.

## **Stage 2: Re-definition**

The second stage of Barth's argument establishes his Christological re-definition of election, at the beginning at §33. Although his argument continues to engage with historical theological views, the place of exegesis is formal and more prominent than the first stage. The discussion moves from a consideration of Christ as the beginning of God's works in Jn. 1, to a contemplation of Christ as both the subject and object of election. The combination of these contribute to Barth's thesis that, "God's eternal



will is the election of Jesus Christ,” and that Jesus Christ is the election of God.<sup>57</sup> These ideas are developed, historically engaged, and further qualified to form the basis of what Sharp calls Barth’s “election hermeneutic.”<sup>58</sup> Barth is also clear that what is important in shaping this re-definition is his exegesis of several key NT texts that he interprets in relation to one another. I will therefore consider the way that these texts inter-relate—with special attention to his treatment of Jn. 1:1-2 and Eph. 1:4.

### **Stage 3: Extension**

The third stage of his argument extends to the rest of II/2, to include the extension of this Christological redefinition (or election hermeneutic) to the objects of election that find their election in relation to Christ. Barth’s conversation with historical theology diminishes, and his Scriptural exegesis dominates. In §34 his exegesis is solely dedicated to Romans 9-11, demonstrating that it accords with the framework that he has established. Later, in §35, Barth’s exegesis of the individual considers OT and NT individuals that derive their determination from the pattern of the three-fold work of Christ. Through this stage of Barth’s argument, then, Barth extends his Christological re-definition to the communities and individuals.

Here, the categories of *elect* and *rejected* both draw their meaning from Barth’s Christocentric definition of election in which Christ fundamentally embodies both the election and rejection of God. In the free grace of God and in the universal significance of Christ’s atoning work, an asymmetry persists in God’s decision of double predestination in Christ. Election extends to communities and individuals in a way that rejection does not because of God’s substitutionary rejection of himself in the death of Christ. While Israel and various individuals have manifestly rejected God in the Scriptures, Barth suggests that they do this in denial of God’s election in Christ. In all of this Barth leaves room for the mystery and freedom of God; able to

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<sup>57</sup> II/2, 146.

<sup>58</sup> Sharp, 117-139.

say that the rejected are somehow also chosen, and at the same time eschew a theology of *apokatastasis* (or universal salvation).

#### **Stage 4: Close**

The final stage of Barth's argument represents the closing of Barth's discussion. Given that the question of election in the tradition has historically concentrated on the election of the individual, Barth has deliberately shaped or framed his argument so that he would consider the question of the individual in light of what he considers the most fundamental aspects of election—the three previous stages: his doctrinal frame, Christological re-definition and its extension. This concluding stage admits that we have finally arrived at the question of God's attitude toward the reprobate, and the "terrible decree" of Reformed theology. This ensures clear priorities around what is known, and that what then remains unknown is respectfully placed in the mystery of God. In this way, Barth carefully transfers the mystery of God which was traditionally located in the *deus absconditus* of the absolute decree of God (*decretum absolutum*), and placing it in the freedom of God who has chosen to be "for us" in Christ. While his argument began with what is arguably a foundationalistic theological frame, the argument concludes in a way that is characteristically dialectical and reticent in drawing hard conclusions. This is evident especially in the final long exegesis dedicated to understanding the fate of the rejected individual in Judas Iscariot.

Each of these four stages plays an important role in Barth's argument in II/2, and in each case, Scripture is afforded agency in advancing this argument. This observation in itself suggests that the emphasis on Barth's construal of Scripture as narrative is too simplistic—particularly evident in the works of Frei, Ford, and Kelsey. "Barth's

exegesis is ultimately and irreducibly pluralistic [...and] a single category like narrative reading does not begin to comprehend and explain [it].”<sup>59</sup>

In moving forward, then, my identification of distinctive methods to Barth’s theological exegesis is not intended to be an objective analysis, but rather an attempt to show that there is diversity in Barth’s methods. The best way to understand the mechanics of Barth’s actual exegesis of the text is to avoid either assimilating Barth’s methods into a single method, but to see methodological diversity in his writing.

## 1.4. A Proposal: Four Theological Exegetical Forms

Corresponding to these four stages in Barth’s argument, and the various other methodological observations made in this chapter, I propose that there are four theological exegetical forms or tools that Barth employs to move between text and theology. These four are distinct and yet overlapping; and not intended to be exhaustive categories for understanding Barth’s theological exegesis, even in II/2. Understanding them separately provides important insights into both the study of Karl Barth, and the progress of TIS.

These four forms also correspond to the four stages of Barth’s argument and can be labelled as follows: (1) narrative exegesis, (2) juxtapositional exegesis, (3) typological exegesis, and (4) dialectical exegesis.

In the following four chapters (2–5), I will consider each of these forms in the context of Barth’s argument in II/2, and demonstrate that they display key features of morally virtuous theological interpretation; in particular, a sensitivity to the theological contours of Scripture, and a priority of Scripture’s own interpretation of

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<sup>59</sup> Paul McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth* (Scholars Press, 1991), 8. Although he draws from the Yale school himself, McGlasson suggests a complexity to Barth’s use of scripture, even if it too is simplistic, demonstrating two categories of narrative and concept (cf. pp. 117-118).

Scripture. It will show that these tools suit the stage of Barth's argument within which they fall, and correspond to some of the key ways that his exegesis has been generally characterised and categorised by the likes of Ford, Hunsinger, Cunningham, and McCormack. Finally, in mapping the virtue of Barth's theological exegesis, it will be important to consider his use of theological concepts in his argument.

As I consider the mechanics of these forms, I will also demonstrate that with each of these four forms of theological exegesis, the agency of Scripture is ultimately overwhelmed by his theology.

## Chapter 2 — Narrative

The first theological exegetical tool in my analysis is *narrative exegesis*, proved to be powerful in the areas of theology in which Barth's legacy has extended, even if this suggests one of a number of different things. In the so-called post-liberal theology of the Yale School, which borrows heavily from Barth, and considers the construal of Scripture as Barth's "dominant approach" to Scripture, narrative comes to mean a cluster of at least four things. First, (a) a priority and emphasis upon the narrative sections of Scripture, especially (although not restricted to) the Gospels. Second, (b) an application of generally accepted methods of literary analysis, setting itself apart from conventional methods of Biblical hermeneutics. According to David Ford, Barth's,

"procedure has much in common with literary criticism of the genre of realistic narrative. This parallel is appropriate because it throws light on Barth's distinctive insights, and helps explain both the nature of his appeal to Scripture and his virtual lack of theological concern about historical criticism."<sup>60</sup>

A third emphasis lies in (c) the way that the gospel story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, provides a typological-narrative role in the interpretation of other nar-

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<sup>60</sup> David F. Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', in S. W. Sykes, ed. *Karl Barth—Studies of his Theological Method*, (Clarendon Press, 1979), 56-57.

ratives—a feature that we will explore in chapter 4. There is, then, (d) a fourth component of Barth's narrative approach to Scripture that forms the focus of this chapter, and views the entire canon of Scripture as a single coherent narrative in which broad literary techniques apply. Here, exegesis consists of a series of texts, strung together in narrative unity, over the length of the entire narrative of Scripture, culminating in the message of Jesus Christ.

This fourth whole-of-Scripture form of narrative provides strong explanatory power for developing theological concepts. Identifying the theological emphasis of Scriptural concepts at the highest level relativises localised themes, and ensures that key theological concepts receive their appropriate emphasis. The narrative form also provides a natural context to ensure that Scripture interprets Scripture, describing major themes or concepts of Scripture in the language of Scripture, and so provides a strong basis for conceptual theological foundations. This therefore provides a powerful form of *theological exegesis* for the establishing of key theological themes, as Barth does at the beginning of his argument in II/2.

In this chapter I demonstrate that Barth employs this whole-of-Scripture theological exegetical form of narrative in the first stage of Barth's argument of II/2 to frame his argument and negotiate traditional teaching on election. He does this on least three occasions: (1) prioritising *particularity* in hermeneutics, (2) identifying divine favour in election in the Biblical concept of *covenant*, and (3) the outworking of *vocation* of the elect individual at the beginning of his argument in §35.

## 2.1. Particularity

In establishing a framework of particularity at the outset of II/2 in §32.2, Barth reverses the conventional Aristotelian hermeneutic which moves from understanding things from *generalities* to understanding them from their *particularities*. Here

he builds upon his argument in II/1, understanding generalities about God and humanity from their central and most particular form, manifest in Jesus Christ.<sup>61</sup> George Hunsinger observes that this not only means that Barth “strove to take his bearings strictly from the particularities of the biblical witness, especially its narrative portions,” but that it, “committed him to a strongly revisionist use of language.”<sup>62</sup> Particularism here implies that ordinary words take on a singular meaning in relation to the subject matter of Scripture such that Barth’s many theological concepts attempt to develop a Biblical meaning apart from general dictionary definitions. “God’s ‘loving’ is uniquely concerned with seeking and creating fellowship for its own sake, [...] God’s ‘fatherhood’ is a relationship of creative self-giving, and [...] God’s ‘lordship’ comes to its fullest expression in servanthood.”<sup>63</sup>

The importance of particularity for Barth lies in its power to protect theology from abstractions. In relation to election, Barth saw this as the chief reason that the tradition unwittingly developed a “tyrannical” picture of God, and that the true answer of who God is derives from the particularity of God revealed in Jesus Christ. “We should still not have learned to say ‘God’ correctly (i.e., as understood in the Christian Church on the basis of Holy Scripture) if we thought it enough to say simply ‘God.’”<sup>64</sup>

Importantly, Barth seeks to establish this theme of particularity from a large-scale narrative reading of the Scriptures, identifying supreme knowledge of theological concepts in their particulars. In §32, Barth briefly describes this in four basic epochs of Scripture’s broad narrative: (i) Adam to Jacob/Israel, (ii) Jacob/Israel to David, (iii) David to the exile, and (iv) exile to Jesus.<sup>65</sup> In Barth’s words: “[i]t is revealed

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<sup>61</sup> cf. II/1, 602.

<sup>62</sup> George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 33.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>64</sup> II/2, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 55-61.

that each of the special cases had its meaning only in the existence of a whole [...] not the individual as an individual, but of the many in the individual.”<sup>66</sup>

1. Adam is the first example of Biblical generality-in-particularity in that he represents both an individual and the whole human race, according to the widely accepted plenary reading of *adam* as both a common noun (the meaning of his name, ie. *human*) and a proper noun (his personal name). Importantly, Adam represents both in a certain order: “the object of the story is not universal history and its problems [...] we are led most firmly and definitively from the general to the particular.” Although he doesn't expand on this, what Barth means emerges from a literary reading in which the name Adam is filled with particular content as the narrative unfolds and so Adam provides a starting point of a narrative of particularity: “[t]he whole history from Adam onwards aims ultimately at the emergence of a particular man Jacob-Israel.” Adam is seen not as general man but “as *the* man in the Old and New Testaments, not because he is the father of the human race, but because he is the first of these special cases, the first in this succession of particular men.”<sup>67</sup>
2. The biblical narrative of particularity continues with a second example case in the history of Israel; the point at which the narrative story of the individual patriarchs gives way to a particular family or corporate identity. Jacob-Israel and his descendants are a people envisaged as a “specific people”—God’s covenant people.<sup>68</sup> As with Adam, Jacob represents both himself as an individual, and, as his change of name symbolises, the people of Israel. But another pattern emerges as Israel is representative of the whole of humanity, even as a particular group amongst other groups or nations. She deceives herself when her self-importance swells, thinking that she can realise humanity-in-general within itself. Throughout the Scriptural narrative a “vast retrogression” occurs within Israel; a return to the character of the nations instead of its particular calling

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 55.



to be a light to the nations. Israel existed as a sign of what was envisaged in Adam, but just as Adam points forward to the representation of Jacob-Israel, Jacob-Israel points forward to its fulfilment in the special individual of King David. Under this king they hope to possess the promised land, and are determined to assert their distinctiveness by way of a good and powerful ruler.

3. The third epoch existed from David to the exile and its particular feature was “[t]he dissolution of the historical existence of the people as such.”<sup>69</sup> The promises made to Israel were to be fulfilled in this king, “but now it became clear that the fulfilment was only a repetition of the promise.”<sup>70</sup> While David reigned, his failures showed that this fulfilment of the promises led to a new beginning in David’s greater son and while Solomon did represent the wisdom and glory of David’s promised son, he “could only act as another of His representatives.”<sup>71</sup> In Israel’s failure to fulfil her particular calling, and in rather becoming like the nations, her prophets foretold the dissolution of the kingdom. In the last king of Jerusalem, Jeconiah, God speaks (in Jer. 22:24-30) of the reversal of the messianic promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7. The Suffering Servant (cf. Is. 49ff.), is a representative son of David, penultimately fulfilled in the person of Jeconiah for the suffering and favour he experienced in Babylon.
4. A fourth OT period begins in exile. God would not allow Israel to fail and so he raised up Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin’s grandson, who would rebuild the temple as a symbol of God’s particular purposes for the nation. The shape of this rule depended upon God’s grace alongside Joshua the High Priest; “[d]id he not bear the highest political testimony to something which David and Solomon had also to attest, [...] something which the political rulers of the succeeding house of David had denied, namely, that God Himself is (both in word and deed) the King of his people and that his human representative is summoned only to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 56.

make good the destruction of His earthly sanctuary?"<sup>72</sup> This period ends with the coming "promised Son of David Himself, the one who in his own person was David and Solomon, Jeconiah and Zeruabbabel." None but God Himself could take the throne as David's Son, and so "[t]he Word—that Word which created Israel, and accompanied and directed it as prophetic judge and comforter—the Word itself became flesh."<sup>73</sup> This period of exile comes to a close as Israel, "face to face with its Messiah, the Son of David who was also the Son of God, Israel knew no better than to give Him up to the Gentiles to be put to death on the cross."<sup>74</sup> The theme of particularity becomes important for Barth's doctrine of election in this final epoch since God's certain promises find here their eventual fulfilment. "In the crucifixion of Jesus Christ the world was shown to be a co-partner in guilt with Israel, but only in order that it might be shown a co-partner in the promise with Israel."<sup>75</sup>

Stepping back, we can see that Barth is establishing particularity as a theological concept, or perhaps a meta-concept that functions at a hermeneutical level. He establishes this through a quick and yet powerfully resonant narrative description, divided into epochs which are themselves Scriptural, bearing strong similarity to the narrative summary of Matthew 1. It functions hermeneutically to resolve the theological exegetical tension evident in the relationship between one and the many in the narrative of Scripture. The diversity of scripture relates to its unity, for Barth, in the way its particularity represents its generality. Of course, the particularity expressing the unity of Scripture most clearly is Jesus Christ at the centre of God's self-revelatory narrative in Scripture.

"[I]n every way His government of the world is only the extension, the application and the development of His government in this one particular

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 57.

sphere. He does the general for the sake of the particular. Or to put it in another way, He does the general through the particular, and in and with it. That is God according to his self-revelation.”<sup>76</sup>

## 2.2. Covenant

Covenant is a second theme that Barth establishes at the beginning of II/2 by way of a broad natural narrative theme of Scripture. As a narrative concept it provides a powerful avenue to combine the theological concepts of divine freedom and divine favour. This is an ambitious project in itself, but at the outset of II/2 Barth does also combines these with the overlapping doctrines of God’s works *ad extra* and the doctrine of election, representing an ambitious project. Yet the importance and centrality of election to Barth’s theological project insists that these themes converge at this point, as complex as this might appear.

Barth attaches the broad contours of his theology of election to the Biblical concept of covenant quite early in II/2. Although it is a term richly used throughout the Scriptures, he begins by discussing its meaning conceptually, and biblical exegesis is scarce as he focusses upon historical theological discussion. He speaks of God’s works *ad extra* in connection to another, a “partner,” a “relationship”, the result of “the divine attitude.”<sup>77</sup> “[T]he divine attitude is not a matter of chance. It is not revocable or transitory. God lays upon us the obligation of this attitude because first of all He lays it upon Himself. In dealing with this attitude, we have to do with His free but definitive decision.”<sup>78</sup> What Barth means by “attitude” reaches back into the inner disposition of God in his eternal decision of election, and stretches out to include all his works in creation and redemption. “[T]he primal history which underlies and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 6.

is the goal of the whole history of His relationship *ad extra*, with the creation and man in general, is *the history of the covenant*.”<sup>79</sup>

The covenant becomes, for Barth, the time or place at which God chooses fellowship with the world and, “elects creation, man, the human race, as the sphere in which He will to be gracious.”<sup>80</sup> God’s decision to be gracious is his election, such that, “God elects that He shall be the covenant God.” But then this covenant decision is also determinative of God’s works *ad extra*, which Barth identifies very early in his argument, to be God’s decision to be “for us” in Jesus Christ.

“Jesus Christ is indeed God in His movement towards man, or, more exactly, in His movement towards the people represented in the one man Jesus of Nazareth, in His covenant with this people, in His being and activity amongst and towards this people. Jesus Christ is the decision of God in favour of this attitude or relation. He is himself the relation.”<sup>81</sup>

Barth’s conception of covenant, take a distinctive shape in its overlap and interaction with other doctrines. Christ represents in himself the covenant between man and God, perfectly manifesting the particularity of God and the particularity of humanity, and the corresponding shape the life of God’s covenant-partner. Not only is this covenant partnership asymmetrical because of its divine origin, but also because of the responsibilities and blessings that come with companionship with God. God graciously offers to His covenant-partner that He be the Lord of the covenant, since “there is no grace without the lordship and claim of grace. There is no dogmatics which is not also and necessarily ethics.”<sup>82</sup>

Compared to other Reformed conceptions of covenant, and because of the way that Barth has framed it, it is emphatically *singular*. The scarcity of Barth’s exegesis at

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 8-9, emphasis added.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 12.

this point means that Barth does not argue for this from Scripture so much as assert the singular covenant, although it does correspond to the framing of his argument for a singular conception of grace in God's perfections in II/1, marking a step away from the theology of Calvin. According to John Barclay's careful historical and biblical mapping of the concept of grace, "Calvin shows no tendency to perfect grace as singular, that is, as exclusive of judgment: God's predestination is double, following an equal (if inscrutable) distribution of justice, with a deliberately discriminate dispersal of grace."<sup>83</sup> Barth on the other hand, "sees no need to perfect the singularity of grace: God's grace is at the same time the revelation of God's judgment, even if the resurrection demonstrates God's irrevocable resolve that grace will triumph over human sin and unbelief."<sup>84</sup>

Corresponding to his departure from Calvin, Barth's emphasis on grace has drawn criticism from the Reformed, but even his more sympathetic readers question whether he can avoid the charge of universal salvation, or what Barth refers to as *apokatastasis*. Berkouwer is "impressed" by Barth's ability to maintain unresolved tensions, adhering to the singularity of grace while denying universal salvation, and developing a "triumphant and joyful doctrine of election."<sup>85</sup> Other interpreters suggest that his universalism is either a necessary by-product of Barth's doctrine of election, or at least something to be hoped for.<sup>86</sup>

What must be understood from the way that Barth's concept of covenant frames his argument, however Barth's denial of *apokatastasis* is understood, Barth understands God's character to be essentially gracious, and the message of Scripture in which the gospel is understood on balance to be good news. God's Yes towards creation is

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<sup>83</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Eerdmans, 2017), 128.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>85</sup> Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Paternoster, 1956), 121, 116, 89.

<sup>86</sup> Tom Greggs, *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation: Restoring Particularity* (OUP, 2009), 123-150; Bruce L. McCormack, 'So That He May Be Merciful to All: Karl Barth and the Problem of Universalism,' in Bruce L. McCormack, and Clifford B. Anderson, eds., *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 2011), 240, 248.

bigger than his No. In relation to election, it rules out a dispassionate or neutral picture of God, and rules out the God that Barth perceived in strands of Reformed thought, who makes arbitrary determinations over the fate of his creation in election.

“The basic demand by which any presentation of the doctrine must be measured, and to which we ourselves must also conform, is this: that (negatively) the doctrine must not speak of the divine election and rejection as though God’s electing and rejecting were not quite different, as though these divine dealings did not stand in a definite hierarchical relationship the one with the other; and that (positively) the supremacy of the one and subordination of the other must be brought out so radically that the Gospel enclosed and proclaimed even in this doctrine is introduced and revealed as the tenor of the whole, so that in some way or other the Word of the free grace of God stands out even at this point as the dominating theme and the specific meaning of the whole utterance. It is along these lines that it will be proved whether or not the doctrine is understood in conformity with the Bible and therefore with divine revelation.”<sup>87</sup>

Barth provides further corroborative evidence from Scripture by grounding his Christological redefinition of covenant in the particularity of the Scriptures. Following the lead of Dutch theologian, Johannes Coccejus, Barth cites a number of the key OT passages in which covenant is mentioned explicitly: Gen. 9:14; 17:7f; Is. 55:3; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26 and Jer. 50:5, although it is evident that Barth is not at all interested in exploring the different ways that the term covenant is used in these verses—nor even the potential for different covenants. Without saying so, Barth conforms his use of covenant, simply and without qualification, in a way that preserves Scripture’s own use of the concept and the unity of Scripture’s large-scale narrative.

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<sup>87</sup> II/2, 18.

“By its definition as *berith olam* this self-committal is characterised (no matter what time-concepts may be presupposed) as a relationship which is not haphazard and transitional, but which derives its necessity from God Himself.”<sup>88</sup>

Then covenant comes to represent the broader concept of God’s ancient and ongoing faithfulness and commitment to his people, and specifically in the foreordained work of Christ. Accordingly, his survey of Scripture includes a dense series of proof texts and biblical terms that do not mention covenant explicitly but reinforce the theme as he has defined it, grouped into four basic and formally unrelated groups.

A *first* set of verses is suggestive of God’s unchanging nature, and ancient messianic plans:

- God is “more steadfast than the hills” (Is. 54:10);
- “God has sworn it by himself” (Gen. 22:16; Exod. 32:13; Is. 45:23; 54:9; 62:8; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 6:13);
- [Of the Messiah] “his goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Mic. 5:2; Is. 9:7; Dan. 7:13f.);
- “[he] abideth forever” (Jn 12:34);
- “he is a priest forever,” “after the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16f.; Ps. 110:4);
- “[t]hrough the power of the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14); and
- before Abraham was, He was, and Abraham rejoiced to see his day (Jn. 8:56f.).

A *second* set of verses describe the ancient divine purpose and pleasure in pre-determining Christ according to some of Paul’s key verbs:

- Ἐυδόκησα (Mt. 3:17) “I am well pleased”;
- Ἐυδόκησεν (Col 1:19) “was pleased”;

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 102.

- διέθετο (Lk 22:29) “a kingdom just as the Father *conferred* on me”; and
- Προέθετο (Eph 1:9) “which *he purposed* in Christ.”

A *third* set is a closer look at God’s purposes “in Christ” in Ephesians, perhaps the longest and most detailed exegetical treatment of Ephesians to this point. Barth argues that in Ephesians 1:3-5, 9-11; 3:4 especially, there is a seamless connection between the general and particular of God’s election in Christ and that it is concretely in Christ that the blessing, will, purpose, and predestination occur, to be made known by means of the church (Eph 3:10).

The *fourth* and final set of references provides another array of proof texts with an emphasis upon God’s plan for Jesus’ crucifixion, since before the creation:

- the grace of God given in Christ before the beginning of time (2 Tim 1:9);
- the lamb chosen before the creation of the world (1 Pet 1:20);
- “the lamb slain before the world’s creation” (Rev. 13:8);
- “It was necessary” (ἔδει, Heb 9:26) ;
- Christ crucified according to the foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23);
- God acting in Christ according to whatever his hand and counsel determined (Acts 4:27f); and
- Jesus’ glory was to be according to the glory he had before the world was (John 17:5).

Barth’s intention for some of these references is not easily discernible, nor do the clusters of verses constitute a discernible argument in themselves. But then the force of these verses—moving as they do from the unchanging nature of God to the particularity of God’s eternal plans in Christ—seeks to trace the broad singular narrative of Scripture in the unchanging plans of God in protology, and the particularity of these plans in the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“What is certain is that in all the passages the reference is to the beginning of all God’s ways and works *ad extra*. And it is certain that all these passages describe this beginning under the name of Jesus Christ, whose person is



that of the executor within the universe and time of the primal decision of divine grace, the person itself being obviously the content of this decision.”<sup>89</sup>

To conclude “what is certain” from what amounts to a series of proof-texts barely constitutes an exegetical argument, even if sympathetic readers closer to Barth’s discourse would presumably derive greater meaning from them. It is interesting that for all of the potential that the theme of covenant has for a narrative theological frame that Barth does not commit more space or more elaborate arguments to establish the biblical theme as such. The Scriptural citations regarding the covenant barely engage with the narrative of Scripture even though the metaphor connoted by covenant—of two parties making a commitment, or a suzerain treaty—evokes an underlying narrative movement that is rich in the language of Scripture.

Although Barth has hinted at the narrative in its broad contours throughout, the force of the whole-of-Scripture narrative in establishing his theological concept of covenant is confirmed toward the end of his redefinition of election in §33.1. In the thick of Barth’s wrestling with infralapsarian thought, his conceptualised exposition of covenant is justified by a brief but explicit description of the narrative force of the theme of covenant.

*“According to the Bible, the framework and basis of all temporal occurrence is the history of the covenant between God and man, from Adam to Noah and Abraham, from Abraham and Jacob to David, from David to Jesus Christ and believers in Him. It is within this framework that the whole history of nature and the universe plays its specific role, and not the reverse. At this point the Supralapsarians had the courage to draw from the biblical picture of the universe and history the logical deduction in respect of the eternal divine decree. The Infralapsarians did maintain the sequence of the biblical picture in respect of the realisation of salvation, but they shrank*

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 103.

from the deduction. In respect of the eternal divine they maintained a supposedly more rational order.”<sup>90</sup>

Barth supports his “purified Supralapsarian” theological frame of God’s grace in interpreting the Scriptures above any rational order that might otherwise frame Scripture. In a way reminiscent of his argument for particularity, he spells out the history of the covenant “between God and man” in three basic phases which explicitly frame God’s gracious behaviour vis-a-vis world history. The particularity of God’s grace in “the history of the covenant” in the broader the narrative of Scripture provides an authoritative interpretative framework over any conceptual rational order, which might otherwise frame Scripture.

That Barth does not exploit this narrative description more fully elsewhere is puzzling, and one wonders whether Barth might have exegetically exploited this theme more substantially, and dedicated an exegetical explanation similar to the way that he did with the theme of particularity. Then, the question of why Barth did not write more generally is one that Barth addresses in his preface.<sup>91</sup> It is possible that in his desire to keep his expositions brief, the earlier sections of his exegesis were disproportionately trimmed and Barth presumed that his readers would infer the narrative value of covenant. His final example embedded in his long lapsarian discussion suggests strongly that a narrative description is something that he had implied along the way. Regardless, Barth’s survey of covenant represents a rich Biblical theme, and clearly frames his theological argument with a bias toward grace and divine favour in God’s purposes.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 136. Emphasis added.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., ix. “May it not be that I have been too short and not too long at some important points? The specific subject-matter of this half-volume made it necessary for me to set out more fully than in previous sections the exegetical background to the dogmatic exposition. [...] The disadvantages are obvious, but I had not option.”

## 2.3. Vocation

Vocation is a third theme that Barth establishes with his narrative frame. This is the fruit of the previous two broad Biblical Theological themes, and one that forms another critical contribution to the doctrine of election. Here Barth highlights the shape of life determined by God for the objects of his election in the greater sweep of the Bible's story in contrast to the traditional view of election that emphasises the status of salvation for the objects of election and rejection.

Barth's description of vocation finds a narrative description that frames his discussion at the beginning of §35. Unlike the previous two themes, vocation is not placed within the first stage of Barth's argument in §32, although it does play in a similar important framing role in the final section of Barth's argument. Barth concentrates his analysis in the narrative of Genesis and its pairs of what Barth identifies as elected and rejected individuals. It is first manifest in the narrative of Cain and Abel, where Abel is chosen by God and Cain is rejected. Barth observes that this election does not relate simply to the traditional categories of election in salvation and reprobation, although it is evident that there are forms of behaviour which God approves of and disapproves of. Cain is not rejected in a straightforward way, but rather counselled with words of encouragement and warning. The same pattern can be seen later in the Jacob/Esau narrative where the prophecy made to Rebekah indicates that Jacob is chosen and Esau is rejected where, again, Esau is rejected on the basis of his behaviour, but not without a final restoration with his brother. In this way, the God's rejection of an individual corresponds to a more complex relationship with God's purposes than damnation.

“The tradition could not be clearer as to the continually operative principle of the distinguishing choice; the freedom with which this choice cuts across and contradicts all distinctions that are humanly regulated or made; the fact that those who are cut off, who are not distinguished by actual choice, are not on that account utterly rejected, but do in their own way remain in a positive relation to the covenant of God. [...] it is clear throughout that those

who are first condemned are also blessed in their own way, and that in their situation on the left they, too, fulfil a divinely ordained destiny.”<sup>92</sup>

This pattern establishes for Barth a vocational conception of election. As he finally reaches the question that he had deliberately delayed—the question of individual election, Barth observes that the vocations of the elected and rejected both have a place that corresponds to Christ’s election. Christ chooses the elect to be his witnesses, and the rejected are similarly employed as witnesses to Christ’s rejection so that individuals in both cases are determined for a vocation, and employed in Christ’s service in different ways.

In adopting this vocational form of election Barth draws together the spheres of God’s sovereignty in creation and redemption, traditionally considered separably in *providence* and *election*. Vocation represents a providential form of election, in which elect and rejected provide witness to the election of Jesus Christ. Both in their own ways, “as considerable or inconsiderable, strong or weak members of His body, only as chastised or blessed, humiliated or exalted citizens of His community, only as in different ways His witnesses.”<sup>93</sup>

Barth’s purpose here likely relates to his opposition to the “terrible decree” of election in Reformed thought, expressed in the preface to II/2—God’s secret decision to save some and damn others. Barth doubts the abstract character of the *deus absconditus* in Reformed thought, more than once describing such a God as a tyrant, and conflicting with the gracious character of the covenant God revealed in Jesus Christ. His narrative theological framework of vocation provides a compelling answer to this difficulty: that the elect are chosen *for* the rejected. Just as Abraham was chosen to provide a blessing to the nations, and Israel was chose to be a light to the nations, so the elect are chosen to be for the reprobate. The purpose behind God’s decision to choose a particular group of people is for them to embrace their

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<sup>92</sup> II/2, 356.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 364.

vocation as witnesses of Jesus Christ. It is compelling, in part because the Scriptures strongly testify to a vocational view of election at the corporate level of Israel and the church in their witness to the nations.

“[...U]nder this name [Jesus Christ] God Himself realised in time, and therefore as an object of human perception, the self-giving of Himself as the Covenant-partner of the people determined by Him from and to all eternity. [...] What happened was this, that under this name God Himself established and equipped the people which bears the name to be ‘a light of the Gentiles,’ the hope, the promise, the invitation and the summoning of all peoples, and at the same time, of course, the question, the demand the judgment set over the whole of humanity and every individual man.”<sup>94</sup>

The power of the narrative form of Barth’s argument here is to push back on some of the neat categories of systematic theology in order to more truly read the texts about election “along the grain of Scripture.” Barth’s key aim in this appears to be the preservation of God’s gracious character in the doctrine of God, and the success of his criticism is evident in the work of a number of recent scholars appreciative of this emphasis. N. T. Wright agrees that “[t]he word ‘election’, as applied to Israel, usually carries a further connotation: not simply the divine choice of this people, but more specifically the divine choice of this people for a particular purpose.”<sup>95</sup> Leslie Newbigen is one of a long list of theologians who have fruitfully built upon Barth’s view of vocation in connection with election.

“Wherever the missionary character of the doctrine of election is forgotten; wherever it is forgotten that we are chosen in order to be sent; wherever the minds of believers are concerned more to probe backwards from their election into the reasons for it in the secret counsel of God, than to press forward from their election to the purpose of it, which is that they should

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>95</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Fortress Press, 2013), 775.

be Christ's ambassadors and witnesses to the ends of the earth, wherever men think that the purpose of election is their own salvation rather than the salvation of the world: then God's people have betrayed their trust.”<sup>96</sup>

Accompanying this, there are problems in the logic of Barth's vocational conception of election, in that it seems to confuse the elect with the reprobate, at some points identifying the elect for the reprobate, and at other times suggesting that the reprobate are also elect in their vocation. Afterall, if the elect and reprobate both witness to Christ, what real difference does their distinction represent? Suzanne McDonald's extension of Barth's vocational teaching on election addresses these weaknesses by reasoning that “the believing community alone can be described as elect in Christ,” and that God's particular chosen group of people *represent* God's truth to the universal group of people, and conversely also mediate the needs of the universal to God in prayer.<sup>97</sup> That Barth is unclear on what the reprobation of the individual consists of, and that he leaves it up to the freedom and mystery of God's purposes is evident in the closing pages of II/2 where Barth discusses the issue around the fate of Judas. This is given further consideration in our discussion of the fourth stage of Barth's argument in chapter 5.

## 2.4. Conclusion

In the first stage of his theological argumentation in II/2, Barth employs whole-of-Scripture narrative themes in Scripture to establish some of the most important and distinctive theological concepts that frame his argument. He outlines the particularity of the Scripture's narrative, establishing the particularity of Jesus Christ as the organising principle and content of the whole text of Scripture and God's revelation. Although the theme of covenant is less clearly argued by means of narrative, it does

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<sup>96</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (Wipf & Stock, 2008), 101.

<sup>97</sup> McDonald, *Re-imaging*, 114.

receive a brief explicit narrative description, and is arguably a theme that naturally evokes the narrative of Scripture. Although developed from the narrative of Scripture, Barth's theme of covenant is conceptualised to represent the gracious bias of all of God's works *ad extra*. The theme of vocation occurs much later in *CD* (§35), but Barth's narrative description again serves to frame the final component of his argument.

Barth's narrative framing is manifestly theological exegetical; *theological* in that it aims to develop theological concepts; and *exegetical* in that it develops these themes from a rich series Scriptural passages, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.

Barth's narrative framing in II/2 also indicates that his argument is essentially foundationalist (or *transfoundationalist*, as McCormack prefers) which challenges the reputation that Barth has developed.<sup>98</sup> While his circular or symphonic writing style suggests that his argument is non-linear, the narrative framing evident in the broad scope of his argument in which he builds upon fundamental theological themes indicates a foundationalist argument, developing from the well-known to the less known. Even if Barth can be verbose, and though he did rail against systems of theology, his argument in II/2 does not promote an arbitrary theological starting place as some postmodern readings of Barth have suggested.<sup>99</sup>

It is perhaps because of Barth's foundationalism that his exegesis at this first stage of his argument is surprisingly scarce. Fuller and clearer exegetical argumentation may be reserved for theological themes that are traditionally less accepted. Covenant is particular under-argued, on this account because Barth considers the theme of divine grace more readily accepted than particularity and vocation. This is to ne-

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<sup>98</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, 'Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective', in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Baker Academic, 2008), 35.

<sup>99</sup> McCormack, 'Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings for Barth: Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology', in *Orthodox and Modern*, 126.

glect that each of these points also bear the distinctives of their traditional conception. Because of the theological frame that these themes will have upon Barth's subsequent argumentation, it remains unclear why Barth concentrates his exegesis in the latter stages of his argument, and applies relatively little agency to Scripture in developing his theological framework. His framework appears under-developed, which is surprising given his stated aim to convince his readers of his position on the basis of his exegesis.

Another oddity of these theological foundations is the several theological omissions that would seem to be themes of Scripture. The frame of divine favour in the covenant seems to lack a place for the biblical emphasis upon divine judgment and anger—a clear feature of the narrative history of the covenant in the OT. The lack of judgement in this frame spills into further omissions in relation to the theme of vocation, under-emphasising Scriptural themes of both eschatology and pneumatology. While Barth employs a manifestly foundationalist argument, then, there are conceptual gaps that form central concerns in traditional doctrines of election.

These omissions evidently form the central point of criticism by modern evangelicals, who are concerned to see that all of Scripture is considered. Barth's narrative framing would otherwise seem to fit within a definition of Biblical Theology such as the following:

Stephen Williams' criticism of Barth at this point is valid insofar as Barth's narrative does not meet the standard of narrative framing in the Biblical Theology of modern evangelicalism, which,

“seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of all the biblical texts taken together, resorting primarily to the categories of those texts themselves, [...]



including synthetic assertions about the nature, will, and plan of God in creation and redemption, including therefore also the nature, purpose, and ‘story’ of humanity.”<sup>100</sup>

For Williams, “the path from biblical exegesis to dogmatic theology needs to run more transparently or more straightforwardly through the wide grove of biblical theology so that Scripture can govern dogmatics more strictly.”<sup>101</sup> Although concerns about omissions of Scripture are valid, his criticism ultimately amounts to an argument from silence, and the gaps in Barth’s narrative framing make it difficult to know if these omissions were calculated or not. Barth’s intention in the preface and throughout §32 certainly suggest his intention to uncover the meaning of Scripture transparently, and foundation-laying demands that higher level concerns remain unaddressed in the first instance. Barth’s own concern is to resist making “a dogmatic out of the totality of the biblical text,” which derives from his rejection of natural theology, includes a reliance upon historical-critical methods, including data analysis as a means of theological formation. Barth appears to be in favour of framing his theology so long as textual synthesis is not equated with theology. Afterall, the centrepiece of Christian theology is not a synthesis of ideas but the particularity of Jesus Christ. Barth’s framing remains consistent with evangelical forms of Biblical Theology so long as the latter remain penultimate to theology. As Goldsworthy argues, Biblical Theology is “not concerned to state the final doctrines which go to make up the content of Christian belief, but rather to the process by which revelation unfolds and moves toward the goal which is God’s final revelation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> D. A. Carson, ‘Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology’, in T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 56.

<sup>101</sup> Stephen Williams, *Election of Grace*, 198-199.

<sup>102</sup> Goldsworthy, *Gospel & Kingdom*, The Goldsworthy Trilogy (2000), 45-46.

The critical distinctive for understanding Barth's method in this first stage of his argument is that he is applying a narrative form of theological exegesis. What distinguishes Barth's narrative frame from this form of Biblical Theology in the first stage of his argument, and what also provides a more satisfying account of what Barth is doing by providing scarce references to Scripture in his narrative foundations is that he is filling his foundations with historical theological content. Barth's piecemeal references to Scripture are insufficient in themselves, but are presented in combination with historical theological engagement. His piecemeal use of Scripture could be understood to affirm the theological foundations already established in received thought such that he provides explicit reference to Scripture at points of disagreement rather than key points of agreement with tradition. Barth's argument is therefore not foundational in his exegetical argument so much as his *theological exegetical* argumentation.

## Chapter 3 — Juxtaposition

A second feature of Barth's exegesis relates to the lower level form of exegesis in juxtaposition. Here he reads non-contiguous texts of Scripture together, making critical interpretive decisions on one passage of Scripture because of his interpretation of another passage that is not local to the original context.

Mary Kathleen Cunningham describes juxtaposition as, "Barth's most crucial exegetical tactic"<sup>103</sup> because of the way that it contrasts with the methods of his contemporaries. Rudolph Bultmann's historical critical scholarship, for example, differs significantly with the internal logic of Barth's approach to these texts at this point. "Instead of committing him to the pursuit of extra-biblical sources and textual reconstruction as a means of interpreting biblical concepts, [Barth's] hermeneutical principles tie him to the linguistic world of the Bible itself."<sup>104</sup> Juxtaposition in Barth's writing therefore consists in a commitment to, "treating texts in their final form, juxtaposing widely separated texts, and appealing to passages in close proximity to the text under consideration."<sup>105</sup>

Arbitrarily reading texts into the meaning of other texts could lead to confusion or circular reasoning, or mask the imposition of a foreign ideology. But if Barth's "as-

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<sup>103</sup> Mary Kathleen Cunningham, *What Is Theological Exegesis?: Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election* (Trinity Press, 1995), 50.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 83.

sumption” about Scripture is appropriate—that Scripture presents a single theological witness to Jesus Christ—then some connection must exist between disparate texts, and it is a matter of accurately determining the nature of the connection. On this understanding, then, juxtaposition is understood as a theological exegetical tool—presupposing Scripture’s unity and clarity a priority of Scripture’s interpretation of Scripture. At its best, then, juxtaposition preserves the integrity of disparate texts of Scripture and expresses their natural theological relationship.

The key example that forms the subject of this chapter (and also formed the subject of Cunningham’s study), is Barth’s juxtaposition of Ephesians 1:4 and John 1:1-2 which occurs in a series of episodes in section §§32-33 in which Barth establishes his Christological re-definition of election, and the second stage of his argument in II/2. The “unified witness” of these texts forms what Sharp describes as Barth’s “election hermeneutic,” and will be used to shape and redefine his doctrine of election.

“The juxtaposition of texts is essential for Barth’s argument, for it is at the very least not apparent either that John 1:1f. deals with election or that Ephesians 1:4f. refers to Jesus Christ as electing God and electing human. By assuming that these texts offer a unified witness to election and hence reading them in tandem, Barth advances an interpretation that would not emerge if the passages were simply examined in isolation from one another.”<sup>106</sup>

Barth employs a three-step juxtaposition in which he (1) highlights an initial exegesis of Eph 1:4 in §32.3; followed by (2) a concentrated treatment of Jn. 1:1-2 (at which point the theme of Eph. 1:4 is not explicitly mentioned but is implied) in §33.1; which is then followed by (3) another treatment of Eph. 1:4 in §33.1, where he combines the meaning of the two texts into a definition of the Pauline “in him” in Eph. 1:4.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 21.

This chapter demonstrates that Barth's juxtaposition is a form of theological exegesis, and that Barth uses it to establish an election hermeneutic as a key component of his Christological redefinition of election. I will argue (a) first, that Barth's exegesis of Jn. 1:1-2 is a standard exegetical argument that spearheads his constructive argument at the beginning of §33, even if it demonstrates weaknesses at points. This will then be followed by (b) an account of Barth's exegetical treatments of Eph. 1:4, which are juxtaposed with his exegesis of Jn. 1:1-2. Two key moments of mutual interpretation establish his new hermeneutic at the hub of his Christologically redefined doctrine of election.

### **3.1. John 1:1-2**

Barth's exegesis of John's prologue at the beginning of §33 presents as the first significant dedicated exegetical treatment of any single passage to this point in his argument in II/2. Its relative length (5-6 pages) and prominent stand-alone position at the beginning of Barth's constructive work and subsequent citations of Jn. 1:1-2 mark a shorthand reference to this argument, and a synecdoche of the argument that follows.

Its shape and tone is tight, economical, and deliberate; especially when compared to some of Barth's later exegesis (cf. Rom. 9-11 spanning the entirety of §34), suggesting that its description as "a short exegesis" is accurate even if it's observably the longest exegesis in the first half of II/2. His full reproduction of the Greek text at the beginning signals his exegetical seriousness, and its literary reading resembles his previously published Biblical commentaries in that he examines the text one clause at a time, and unpacks the logic of John's prologue. What distinguishes his writing from his dedicated commentaries is his narrow focus and discipline in remaining close to the theological points that he intends to elucidate.

Perhaps most striking is that it makes no mention of election—which reflects the fact that Jn. 1:1-2 itself is not a classic text to discuss in relation to election. The

reason for this will become clearer as we explore the way that Barth juxtaposes Jn. 1:1-2 with Eph. 1:4.

His first step is to search for the text's emphasis, discovering that it does not fall upon *the logos*, therefore eschewing the common tendency to concentrate on the term's meaning. Despite the threefold repetition of *logos*, Barth argues that the emphasis of the opening clause falls upon "in the beginning", then on "with God", and then "was God," rather than "the word." This means, firstly, that *the logos* exists in protology precisely because "the Word was *with God*", against Augustine's reading of "*for God*." Similarly, *the logos* only exists in protology "*with God*" because the Word "*was God*".

Barth's exegesis corroborates orthodox Christology by observing, "the fact that there is no article before 'God' does not mean that deity is not ascribed to the Word in the strictest and most proper sense."<sup>107</sup> If Barth was aware of the classic authoritative defence of his exegetical interpretation—the rule of E. C. Colwell, formed in 1933, and known in biblical scholarship in the years prior to II/2 as Colwell's rule—he doesn't mention it. He affirms orthodox theology from Scripture and the more ancient doctrine of the *homoousion*, suggesting that orthodox Christology explicitly shapes the meaning of the passage in a way that biblical scholarship does not. "It must be conceded that read in this way, after the manner of so-called orthodoxy, the verse is at any rate meaningful within itself, each word being intelligible in its own place."<sup>108</sup>

Barth's theological engagement does not distract him from the canonical text of Scripture, but nor is he distracted by text-critical issues. In contrast with Bultmann's source critical concern to understand that the puzzle of the meaning of *the logos*, "is quickly answered when one sees that there lies at the basis of the Prologue a

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<sup>107</sup> II/2, 96.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 96.

source document to which the Evangelist has added his own comments."<sup>109</sup> Although Barth had given attention to these and similar comments in his commentary on John, there is no place for source critical speculation in *CD*, and his attention is given strictly to the received text of John's Gospel.<sup>110</sup>

The lack of emphasis on *the logos* actually provides for Barth the key insight into the unfolding nature of God's self-revelation, and it remains a long-held distinctive of Barth's reading of John's prologue. Despite the common tendency to concentrate upon the meaning of *logos*, Barth suggests, "it will probably always be a waste of time to look for that unknown quantity, the source used by the writer of the Fourth Gospel." It is "more than axiomatic" to suggest that the meaning of *logos* is not as important as its reference, the implication being that whatever the meaning of *logos*, it is here best understood as a literary stop-gap or placeholder, which is revealed to be Jesus Christ in v14. "It is a preliminary indication of the place where later something or someone quite different will be disclosed,"<sup>111</sup> not unlike a variable in a mathematical formula, or a puzzle anticipating a solution. *Logos* is not meant to be understood from the concept itself; "it is something which we can read but not comprehend."<sup>112</sup> Barth reinforces this view with "the only other" reference to the similar literary feature in Revelation 19:13.<sup>113</sup> The same hiddenness of the name of Jesus is suggestive to Barth. "Such is the Johannine Logos so far as we can define it at all apart from the recognition that the Logos is Jesus. It is the principle, the intrinsically divine basis of God's revelation, God's supernatural communication to man."<sup>114</sup> David

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<sup>109</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A commentary* (Blackwell, 1971), 16.

<sup>110</sup> Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1* (Wipf & Stock, 2003).

<sup>111</sup> II/2. 96.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 97.

Gibson observes Barth's care to protect his reading of Scripture from imposed theology, and describes this passage as, "essentially an argument for hermeneutical restraint and exegetical patience."<sup>115</sup>

For all this care, however, Barth makes no explicit mention of the prologue's commonly observed allusion to protology in Genesis 1—"in the beginning." Contrary to Philo's use of "in the beginning", for whom the phrase refers vaguely to that which precedes all being and time, and is set apart from all created realities, Barth cites Proverbs 8:22 and Colossians 1:15 which are particularly under-rated as textual influences in the formation of Barth's election Christology, and again form a strong feature of patristic Christology. But then since Barth openly admits that "in the beginning" is a clear reference to protology, and that "a cosmogenic function" is ascribed to the Word in 1:3 and 1:10,<sup>116</sup> it is puzzling that he makes no reference to Genesis or other important inter-textual biblical allusions (e.g. Ps. 33:6), and prefers to consider the text in isolation.

Barth's reticence to invest *the logos* with meaning corresponds to his desire to place Christ at the centre of all God's works. Barth's constructive argument for this draws from his observation of the personal pronoun in 1:2. Against the "quite unconvincing"<sup>117</sup> conventional view that οὗτος points *backward* to recapitulate the words of v1, which he suggests is unnecessary, since v1 does not require further elucidation. Barth's interpretation points οὗτος *forward* in anticipation of the name of Jesus, arguably similar to the way that οὗτος points forwards in v15 in the witness of John the Baptist, and in line with the credible Biblical scholar in Adolf Schlatter. This underscores his theological point, emphasising the stop-gap role that *the logos* plays in John's prologue and God's revelation in the particularity of Jesus Christ. "[W]e have no need to project anything into eternity, for at this point eternity is time, i.e., the eternal name has become a temporal name, and the divine name a human. It is

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 98.



this name that we speak.” Subsequent references to Jn. 1:1-2 will represent shorthand references to this theological assertion: that God in eternity—from the beginning of all his works and ways—is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Although Jn. 1:1-2 is the feature of this small-text exegesis, Barth concludes by corroborating this with other NT passages to fill out the theological picture he has begun. First, with Colossians 1:17, and then 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; and Eph. 3:9, Barth emphasises that it is the concrete human, Jesus Christ—the one in whom the fullness of the deity was pleased to take up form and residence (Col. 1:19; 2:19)—who is “before all things”, and in whom “all things consist.” It is striking that Barth does not mention Eph. 1:4 in this list for the purposes of establishing his juxtaposition.

What Jn. 1:1-2 provides for Barth here is nothing short of his key theological assertion in his redefinition of election, framed around the being and self-revelation of God: “Jesus Christ is the eternal will of God, the eternal decree of God and the eternal beginning of God.”<sup>118</sup> The implications for this are significant and continue to spark debate. Cunningham’s suggestion that “Barth launches an exegetical assault on the concept of the *logos asarkos*” captures part of Barth’s concern in that he seeks to address an area of Reformed thought that is given to theological speculation, but it doesn’t capture the positive force of Barth’s argument.<sup>119</sup> McCormack interprets Barth as positing God’s decision to be for humanity in Jesus as a moment of God’s triune self-constitution, such that God “assigns to himself the being he will have for all eternity.”<sup>120</sup> While McCormack’s interpretation continues to spark debate, a more moderate interpretation is that election consists in God’s decision to be for humanity in Christ in his works *ad extra*, without constituting God’s eternal being, but preserving God’s free decision, and avoiding the failure making humanity

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>119</sup> Cunningham, 12.

<sup>120</sup> McCormack, ‘Grace and Being’, in Webster, John, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 98.

(and thereby creation) somehow essential to God's ontology. Although McCormack's may prevent this error by suggesting that God's determination in election is an "eternal decision" it is difficult to conceive of a way that this does not render God contingent upon his creation.<sup>121</sup>

### 3.1.1. Evaluating Barth's Exegesis of Jn. 1:1-2

While Barth's exegesis here is not a conventional exegetical argument, it is "much more obviously attentive to 'the way the words go' than Barth's previous exegesis."<sup>122</sup> Richard Bauckham provides several critical comments on Barth's exegesis of John's prologue which demonstrate a failure to attend to the text in Barth's argumentation.<sup>123</sup>

A first critique demonstrates a flaw in Barth's argument. Although Bauckham recognises that Barth's interpretation of v2 has an advocate in NT scholar Adolf Schlatter, Bauckham rejects his argument. Οὗτος simply cannot point to a forward referent since "no precedent use of οὗτος can be found." Οὗτος always points backward such that "Barth's interpretation of this text seems to me is linguistically impossible, or at least very unlikely."<sup>124</sup> If Barth was relying upon this to make his theological claim about the identity of Jesus Christ in protology, then this deals a significant blow to Barth's argument.

To add to this, Bauckham observes Barth's failure to consider the manner in which the prologue adumbrates the Father-Son role for the rest of the Gospel. It is not the merely the name Jesus Christ that is emphasised by John after v14 but that Jesus is

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<sup>121</sup> Further discussion around this debate is collected in Michael T. Dempsey, ed., *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology*, (Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>122</sup> Wesley Hill, 'John's Prologue' in Martin Westerholm and Ben Rhodes, eds. *Freedom under the Word: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis* (Baker Academic, 2019), 122.

<sup>123</sup> Richard Bauckham, 'Revelatory Word or Beloved Son: Barth on the Johannine Prologue', in Migliore L Daniel, ed., *Reading the Gospels with Karl Barth* (Eerdmans, 2017), 28. I have complemented this work with citations from the lecture from which this material is drawn—the Annual Barth conference at Princeton, no longer available online.

<sup>124</sup> Bauckham, lecture material.

the only begotten Son of the Father. If a placeholder argument is to be made from *the logos* in John's prologue, Bauckham suggests that its referent lies in John's expansion upon Jesus' identity as Son. As Jesus fills out the creative and revelatory vision of *the logos* as the narrative of John progresses, "[t]his is why Jesus is never called 'the Word' in John's Gospel after this sentence. From now on he is not only audible but also visible[, s]urpassing the divine words of the Sinai covenant."<sup>125</sup>

Thirdly, Barth not only fails to look forward, but also fails to look backwards to the Old Testament witness to Christ. Bauckham observes Barth's failure to acknowledge the prologue's significant intertextual allusion to the opening words of Genesis. Not only is "obvious to any reader familiar with the NT," but there is the strong and compelling theme of God's *logos* that might have been embraced alongside Genesis (e.g., Ps. 33:6).<sup>126</sup>

Although these criticisms are not fatal to Barth's exegesis, and show that Barth is a product of his time, Bauckham's evaluation demonstrates that Barth's analysis of John's Prologue is shallow and loaded. Hill observes similarly that rather than exegesis, Barth's treatment of Jn. 1 represents, "a powerful theological conceptuality that has seized upon certain features of the Johannine text without noticing or caring to explore those features' integration within a larger literary and theological design."<sup>127</sup> This corroborates Barth's stated intention at the introduction of the small text section to "elucidate these statements by a short exegesis of the passage Jn. 1:1-2,"<sup>128</sup> confirming that Barth's purpose here is not exploratory, as you might expect in commentary. Barth exegesis of Jn. 1:1-2 clarifies the conceptual links between Christology and election so that its purpose is ultimately theological, and "elucidates" Barth's statement that, "[o]ver and against all that is really outside God, Jesus

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<sup>125</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Baker Academic, 2015), 50-51.

<sup>126</sup> Bauckham, lecture material; Hill, 123-124

<sup>127</sup> Hill, 125.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Christ is the eternal will of God, the eternal decree of God and the eternal beginning of God.”<sup>129</sup>

According to Cunningham the inspiration for this exegesis lies primarily in the first juxtaposition of the text with Eph. 1:4. “His reading, as we have seen, depends on the juxtaposition of this Johannine text with Ephesians 1:4f. Only by pairing these passages is he able to associate the Johannine material with the theme of election.”<sup>130</sup> What is at stake in Barth’s exegesis of Jn. 1:1-2 is the Scriptural basis for his theological claims. His reading of the text is a careful and deliberate literary reading at points, but his curious failure to properly emphasise the triune nature of God’s self-disclosure in John’s prologue suggests that his argument leans heavily upon his theological presuppositions.

### 3.2. Ephesians 1:4

As we turn to consider Barth’s exegesis of Eph. 1:4, we turn from considering a tight and standard exegetical argument, to a disparate series of brief exegetical observations that both precede and follow Barth’s exegesis of Jn. 1:1-2.

Barth cites Eph. 1:4 for the first time in *CD* in a survey of key passages on election at the opening of II/2, suggesting that it is “[c]hief among the utterances” of the church in relation to Christ and election. He maintains this emphasis throughout II/2 to his final comment in which he says that apart from First Peter, it is “perhaps the strongest presentation of predestination in the New Testament.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> II/2, 99.

<sup>130</sup> Cunningham, 61.

<sup>131</sup> II/2, 16, 429.

### 3.2.1. First Juxtaposition

Barth's first juxtaposition consists in his reading Jn. 1:1-2 in light of his exegesis of Eph. 1:4. Barth's first exegetical treatment of Eph 1:4 occurs at the beginning of an extended historical conversation in which Barth understands the doctrine of election in terms of Christ in §32.2, *particularising* election against a tendency in the tradition to generalise election with abstract divine determinism.<sup>152</sup>

As with Jn. 1, Barth's first exegesis Eph. 1:4 begins by reproducing portions of the Greek text, but unlike Jn.1, it is light, simply stated with minimal commentary, and contained to the theological idea at hand. He provides a series of NT passages to corroborate the theme of Christ's particularity (Eph. 1:11, 3:10; Rom. 8:29f., and Col. 1:15), underlining his concern for theology above conventional exegesis. The only explicit interpretive comment confirms that he uses these texts to provide together a foundation for his theme:

“all these statements show us quite plainly that when we have to do with the reality indicated by the concept of election or predestination we are not outside the sphere of the name of Jesus Christ but within it and within the sphere of the unity of very God and very man indicated by this name.”<sup>153</sup>

Similar to the way he refers to Jn. 1:1-2, Barth will later refer to Eph. 1:4 as a shorthand reference to his theological concept of particularity, and the argument that follows outlines this position against his interlocutors, collecting various aspects of the conversation that fill out precisely what he means. Accordingly Barth suggests that any theological investigation of election should, “*follow[s] the thought of Eph. 1:4*” precisely in the way that it, “*aim[s] at a proper introduction, substantiation and*

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 46, 60ff.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 60.

effective application of Christology, [...] giving precedence to the doctrine of election over every other doctrine except Christology itself.”<sup>154</sup>

The theological emphasis of Barth’s discussion “following the thought of Eph. 1,” is then dominated by historical theological discussion on the theme of particularity in election. Barth embraces Calvin’s emphasis upon divine favour and participation in Christ for personal assurance in salvation. He consequently affirms Calvin’s conception of Christ as the *speculum electionis* (mirror of election), “in which it is right to contemplate our election, and we do so quite rightly.”<sup>155</sup> This draws the assurance of salvation away from ourselves, or man in general, and places the focus of election upon the particular man, Jesus; emphasising the freedom and grace of God. “It is the work of this other person: a work which comes to man and comes upon man from without; a work which is quite different from anything that he himself is or does. Man and his election follow the decision which is already made before him, without him and against him.”<sup>156</sup> Calvin’s *speculum electionis*, therefore, “emphasises in most drastic fashion the singularity of the election, and of the freedom in which God as Elector stands over against the elect. The elect must look always to Jesus Christ in matters of the election because whoever is elected is elected in Christ and only in Christ.”<sup>157</sup>

Barth first explicit juxtaposition the Eph. 1:4 and Jn. 1:1-2 texts at the beginning of §33 in the opening paragraphs that introduce the exposition of Jn. 1:1-2 is by now predictably theological in its emphasis. Barth makes heavy reference to Paul’s “in him” language, which likely derives from Eph. 1:4 given that it was contemplated in section immediately prior. Cunningham correctly observe that, “[w]hile Barth does not explicitly cite Ephesians 1:4 [...] the reader is reminded of his concern for an

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 88. Emphasis added.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 62; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Hendrickson, 2008), III, 24.5.

<sup>156</sup> II/2, 62.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 62.

adequate treatment of the *en auto* of Ephesians 1:4 by his frequent repetition of the phrase.”<sup>158</sup> Since Jn. 1:1-2 contains no *prima facie* connection to a doctrine of election, the “in him” derived from his discussion on particularity provides the important context and connection Jn. 1:1-2. Barth’s first juxtaposition, then, consists in the Christological particularity of election (in Eph. 1:4) legitimising his use of another Christological passage (in Jn. 1:1-2) in connection with election. It is in this way that Jn 1:1-2 “elucidates” Eph. 1:4.

If it is the texts of Eph. 1:4 and Jn. 1:1-2 that Barth is interested in juxtaposing, it is odd that Barth does not make this juxtaposition more explicit. He might have cited Eph. 1:4 in the relation to his repeated reference to “in him” in the opening statements but he seems to make multiple other significant scriptural connections. If Barth had not made such an extended reference to Eph. in §32.2 just prior to these words, one might assume that Barth was juxtaposing Jn. 1:1-2 with Colossians 1:15-19. Barth similarly corroborates his interpretation of Jn. 1:1-2 immediately after its exposition with a variety of other NT passages (Eph. 1:10, 1:23, 3:10, and Col. 1; also 2 Cor. 4, Heb. 1, Phil. 2, Acts 4), and, surprisingly, Eph. 1:4 is neither cited nor alluded to. It may be simpler to suggest that Barth juxtaposes the ideas represented by these texts. By sinking the roots of his election hermeneutic in an argument for the particularity of God’s self-disclosure represented by Eph. 1:4, Barth provides the foundation for his particularistic reinterpretation of election in the theology represented by Jn. 1:1-2.

### 3.2.2. Second Juxtaposition

If the first juxtaposition consisted in Eph. 1:4 provides the cause for considering Jn. 1:1-2 in the context of election, the second juxtaposition moves in the reverse direction. Further reflection upon Jn. 1:1-2 moves the discussion beyond Christ’s place in

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<sup>158</sup> Cunningham, 21-22.

election might be considered in relation to God's words *ad extra*, culminating in a theologically refined definition of the "in him" of Eph. 1:4.

Barth suggests that the questions raised about the subject and predicate of election, "lead us to the sphere where God is with Himself, the sphere of his free will and pleasure."<sup>139</sup> The temptation in the tradition has been to think of this sphere of God's freedom as "at once empty and undetermined" and God as "merely Subject which can and does elect" without any responsibility "to any other being for the nature of direction of this election." In Barth's mind, the influential teaching of *decretum absolutum* succumbed to this temptation, and must be resisted, primarily because of Jn. 1:1-2.

God in his free grace places himself under an obligation to be "for us" in Jesus Christ. In this way, Barth embraces Johannes Coccejus' alignment of "the concept of predestination to the biblical concept of the covenant."<sup>140</sup> The two expressions of God's will expressed in the Scriptures are laid beside one another: God's will expressed *generally*, and God's will expressed *concretely* in the covenant, and most concretely in Jesus Christ.

"In Eph. 1:3-5 the one follows directly on the other: there is a general mention of the blessing with which we have been blessed 'in the heavenly places' in Christ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ... ἐν Χριστῷ, and then there is the particular statement: ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου ... προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν."<sup>141</sup>

Although it is not clear from Barth's examples precisely what constitutes the difference between the general and the concrete in his examples, the obscurity only reinforces his point that they belong together. God's sovereign engagement with the world is demonstrated in his covenant relations with the world, and Jesus Christ in

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<sup>139</sup> II/2, 99-100.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 102.



his particularity stands at the centre of that covenant. The broad and general purposes of God take concrete form in the history of the covenant in Scripture, fulfilled in Christ. Barth takes care to emphasise in Eph. 1:4 the particularity of Christ as the concrete goal of all God's plans in antiquity, citing other corroborating NT passages (2 Tim. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8, Heb. 9:26, Acts 2:23).

“What is certain is that in all the passages the reference is to the beginning of all God's ways and works *ad extra*. And it is also certain that all these passages describe this beginning under the name of Jesus Christ, whose person is that of the executor within the universe and time of the primal decision of divine grace, the person itself being obviously the content of this decision.”<sup>142</sup>

Barth's second juxtaposition therefore emerges from the influence of Jn. 1:1-2 upon this theme of the covenant developed in Eph. 1:4. As Barth argues for Christ as the subject of election (not *absolutum* but *concretum*), Barth “hold[s] fast by Jn. 1:1-2,”<sup>143</sup> implying that the “in him” of Eph. 1:4 must also place Christ in the place of subject of election.

“They [Thomas and the Reformed] missed the fact that this basis is quite insufficient to explain the *en auto* of Eph. 1:4. [...] If in regard to the decisive factor, the election itself, or the electing God, we cannot fix our gaze and keep it fixed on Jesus Christ, because the electing God is not identical with Christ but behind and above Him, because in the beginning with God we have to reckon with someone or something other than the *houtos* of Jn. 1:2, a decision of the divine good-pleasure quite unrelated to and not determined by Him, what useful purpose can such an answer serve?”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 110.

This juxtaposition finally yields a definition of “in him” in Eph. 1:4 that resembles the election Christology from Jn. 1:1-2. From the beginning of §33—in fact, even earlier in his exploration of particularity from §33.2<sup>145</sup>—Barth has been drawing out a definition of the “in him” that sits at the centre of Barth’s connection between Christology and election and therefore his Christocentric basis of election. Barth’s second juxtaposition culminates in a definition that is critical for understanding the meaning of the Pauline “in him.” Traditional readings have yielded passive definitions due to a passive and instrumentalist Christology (“for Him” or “alongside Him” or spatially “in him”), but Barth’s full Christology (with Christ as subject as well as object of God’s election) yields a different definition.

“From the very beginning (from eternity itself), there are no other elect together with or apart from Him, but, as Eph. 1:4 tells us, only ‘in’ Him. ‘In Him’ does not simply mean with Him, together with Him, in His company. Nor does it mean only through Him, by means of that which He as elected man can be and do for them. ‘In Him’ means in His person, in His will, in His own divine choice, in the basic decision of God which He fulfils over against every man. What singles Him out from the rest of the elect, and yet also, and for the first time, unites Him with them, is the fact that as elected man He is also the electing God, electing them in His own humanity. In that He (as God) wills Himself (a man), He also wills them. And so they are elect ‘in Him,’ in and with His own election.”<sup>146</sup>

Since Barth’s definition lacks any distinctive reference to Ephesians apart from “in him” and the connection to election, Eph. 1:4 appears to represent a broad theological concept. Barth has corroborated this theme with other passages, having cited

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<sup>145</sup> Evidence for this is corroborated by Barth’s reference to historical theological discussion which spans the argument of §32-33. A significant argument by Augustine, which he references but delays in §32.2 (II/2, 60), is only picked up later in §33.1 (II/2, 108) with a second significant contribution on the topic described in §33.2 (II/2, 118).

<sup>146</sup> II/2, 116-117.

other Pauline texts, and especially Colossians 1. Peter O'Brien observes an issue with Barth's emphasis in Ephesians, since, "the object of God's choice here in Eph. 1:4 is ἡμᾶς ('us'), who are in Christ, not Χριστόν."<sup>147</sup> But in the same context O'Brien endorses Barth's theology, describing Christ as, "the Chosen One par excellence" and endorses F. F. Bruce's description of Christ as, "[the] foundation, origin, and executor: all that is involved in election and its fruits depends on him," thereby supporting Barth's theological position, even if he rejects Barth's reading of "in him."<sup>148</sup> The weight of Barth's theology therefore renders his inattention to the details of Ephesians theologically inconsequential.

Barth arguably also provides an under-developed interest in the relationship between the story of Israel's election and the church of Ephesus and Barth's primary dependence upon Reformed theology. "Ephesians is so redolent of Old Testament allusions that it is striking that Barth never cross-references or notes a single Old Testament text in his discussion of Eph. 1:4-5."<sup>149</sup> Similarly, Fowl identifies that the pastoral concern that has shaped Barth's redevelopment in §33 is provided direct theological meaning in Ephesians by the Holy Spirit. Yet, "the pneumatological component of election [...] seems largely absent."<sup>150</sup> As already noted, Barth's under-emphasis on the Spirit may represent an oversight in Barth's strong push to centralise his Christology. But given that the absence of the Spirit is easily be confused with the reticence of the Spirit, it important to balance Fowl's and others observations against those who suggest that Barth maintains a robust pneumatology.

A stronger emphases upon core themes in Ephesians might have reinforced Barth's theology; for example, the unity of believers,<sup>151</sup> or the narrative substructure of the

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<sup>147</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Alban Books, 1999), 99, fn. 53.

<sup>148</sup> O'Brien, 100; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1984), 254-255.

<sup>149</sup> Stephen Fowl, "Karl Barth on Ephesians 1:4" in *Freedom Under the Word*, 135.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>151</sup> That is, the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Christ's body (2:11-22) as constitutive the mystery of the gospel (3:2-6); and that this is the centrepiece of his eternal purposes

story of Israel traced by the blessings that Paul mentions in 1:3-10—creation, adoption, redemption, forgiveness of sins. The apostle’s emphasis upon these provides a rich description of union with Christ and may well have improved his election hermeneutic. While he loses the benefits of a fuller description of the text, by restricting his exegesis to aspects of the text that relate directly to his theological argument, he gains a tighter and more focussed argument. This definition of “in him” clearly prioritises theology over exegesis, as the focus of Barth’s analysis of Eph. 1:4 both derives from and leads to the theological context established by his discussion of Jn. 1:1-2.

Barth’s definition is not unique, as he finds a historical companion in Coccejus, who, like Barth, keeps together the eternal election of grace and the eternal decree of salvation in election. For Coccejus, the “in him” of Eph. 1:4, “must be understood in a twofold sense,” corresponding to Christ’s double reference: as Object of Election (“with Christ as the one who is forsaken”) and as Subject of Election (“through Christ and with Christ as the electing one: because he is the one who promises”).<sup>152</sup> Barth similarly rejects an understanding of union with Christ relative to a passive conception of election of Christ (alongside Christ), or an instrumental conception (through or by Christ). He binds together the double reference of election in Eph. 1 in his definition of union with Christ.

Corresponding to this, Barth’s definition of “in him” shapes Barth’s election hermeneutic in two key ways. First, it means that Jesus is the Lord of the Elect and therefore both the subject and object of election. For Barth it is only in virtue of the fact that Jesus is the subject of election that we can speak of him as object of election in corporate representative terms. Such a position is otherwise too exalted a position

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in Christ (3:10-11). This is further corroborated by Paul’s subsequent call for unity (4:1-4); the interpersonal support inherent to the church (4:9-16); the need for godly corporate behaviour (4:17-5:20); and the analogy of marriage for Christ and the church (5:25-33).

<sup>152</sup> II/2, 114.

for a creature to hold but because Jesus is the election of the one who elects. He is the unique, "original and all-inclusive" election, Jesus is to be recognised as "the Lord and Head of the elect, the revelation and reflection of their election," and in this way, "the type of all election."<sup>153</sup> Second, the life of Jesus' recording in the Gospels shapes the lives of those that participate "in him." Three emphases constitute this shape of Jesus' election each of which will prove to be crucial to Barth's election hermeneutic, and determinative for the rest of Barth's argument in II/2: (a) Jesus himself was chosen by grace—as man had nothing to commend himself with, except that he was graciously chosen by God. (b) Jesus' election is an election to suffering. "The election of the man Jesus means, then, that a wrath is kindled, a sentence pronounced and finally executed, a rejection actualised," as Satan, sin and evil is defeated in Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>154</sup> (c) Finally, Jesus' election is the shape of our own election as Jesus himself demonstrated attributes that are communicable with his disciples and so, by faith, they participate in the shape of Jesus' election. This takes expression in the disciples' call to suffering, the same life-shape as the suffering servant in Isaiah, and in the vocation of each individual to be glorified in his or her vocation as witnesses to Christ.<sup>155</sup> Barth's interpretation of Eph. 1:4 and the definition of Paul's "in him" has, from here, a significant role in influencing on Barth's subsequent argument, through his persistent Christocentrism, to the ethical considerations of §36 and his subsequent writing.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>154</sup> That Barth does not here provide space for God's wrath outside of Christ at this point will be significant as Barth extends his election hermeneutic, as we will see in ch. 4.

<sup>155</sup> Barth suggests that the more fundamental determination of the individual is to witness to God's glory. "[H]e is made serviceable to the Lord of the Church, and therefore, in the omnipotent loving-kindness of God realised and revealed in Him to the rest of the world. That is to say, the Church as such, and every individual in the Church in his own place and manner, becomes a bearer and proclaimer of this name and this fact. [...] Those glorified by Him may and must glorify Him again. This is the true scope of their own glorification." (II/2, 428-429).

### 3.3. Conclusion

Barth uses juxtaposition as a theological exegetical tool to combine the meaning of disparate texts in the formation of his election hermeneutic in II/2. In particular, his interpretation of Eph. 1:4 and Jn. 1:1-2 develops in two juxtapositional moments in which they mutually interpret one another. In the *first* juxtaposition, Eph. 1:4 establishes the particularity of Christ in election, providing both the grounds and a key component of the interpretation of Jn. 1:1-2 in relation to election. In the *second* juxtaposition, Jn. 1:1-2 sharpens the particularity of Eph. 1:4 by suggesting a *decretum concretum* in God's eternal being, and God's covenant work.

Juxtaposition is a form of theological exegesis in its interplay between the text of Scripture and its theology. Any commitment to a unified witness in Scripture to Jesus Christ demands that there is some way of articulating the relationship between disparate texts and their theological meaning to bear upon one another. Here Barth describes the very centre of Scripture's witness in election—Jesus Christ. The shallow engagement of Eph. 1:4 and the selective engagement with Jn. 1:1-2 do not issue in an unprincipled juxtaposition so much as a theological exegetical argument with a strong theological flavour. His exegetical comments serve Barth's Christology that he establishes as an election hermeneutic in this second stage of his argument in II/2.

Juxtaposition is similar to the narrative form of theological exegesis in that Scripture has agency in framing theological discussion, and concepts of theology have agency in interpreting Scripture. Barth is concerned to see that his theology is scripturally informed, and that disparate and remote texts of Scripture interpret one another. What authorises Barth to say this is his earlier hermeneutical position, expressing the unity of Scripture's message in Christ. As Sharp puts it, "Barth is able to do this by [...] accessing the textual witness to the Word of God by means of the

structures and symbols of election as these are reflected in the text.”<sup>156</sup> Such a hermeneutic is biblical, even insofar as it is theological exegetical.

If there is a risk of juxtaposing disparate texts of Scripture, it is that the particular concepts drawn from each text are foreign to the texts. Barth could have identified an idea in both texts which is present in one text and not the other—or even neither text—resulting in co-dependent readings, synthesised or circular readings foreign to Scripture’s witness. Barth has earlier indicated that legitimate theological concepts exist that are not fully evident in any one place of Scripture, and is evident in the doctrine of the Trinity. This does not preclude the risk is that the concept amounts to eisegesis—a reading of the concept into Scripture and theology. Once again, the appetite that Barth’s interpretative method provides for theological concepts makes it difficult to determine whether his juxtaposition of Eph. 1:4 and Jn. 1:2 falls into this category difficult to determine. Once again, at such a critical moment of establishing a theological hermeneutic at the centre of his Christology, Barth might have applied a stronger treatment of Scripture.

Barth’s juxtaposition of these two texts does not appear to be as clear-cut as Cunningham makes it out to be. Barth cites a range of other verses and ignores clear opportunities to make such an argument clearer. The texts themselves in each case do not contribute much beyond the theological point that Barth is establishing at this point. Much like the first stage of the argument, Barth remains heavily engaged in historical theological positioning. The weakness of Barth’s approach lies in trying to convince his readers from Scripture about this significant stage of his argument, as the Preface had communicated this intention.

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<sup>156</sup> Sharp, 158.

## Chapter 4 — Typology

To this point we have considered the way that Barth drawn a broad narrative through the length of Scripture to frame his argument, and then built a Christocentric election hermeneutic by juxtaposing remote texts of Scripture. In the third stage of his argument, Barth begins to extend his election hermeneutic from Christ to the other objects of his election (the community (§34), and the individual (§35)). A key theological exegetical tool that he uses to do this is typology. Since some consider Barth's typology to come "at the very high cost of doing damage to the biblical text itself," the Christological weight of typological fulfilment presents as another moral dilemma in theological exegesis, and a point that requires close examination in Barth's work.<sup>157</sup>

I will first (1) locate Barth's broad use of typology in exegesis, and then consider his use of typology at two levels: (2) a lower-level typological reading of Scripture in Leviticus in which Barth makes his method clear and to a high standard; followed by, (3) a higher-level Christocentric structuring of his argument in the latter sections of II/2. In this way I demonstrate that typology displays the features of a theological exegetical form with Barth uses to read Scripture along the grain in service of his theological argument.

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<sup>157</sup> Paul E. Capetz, "The Old Testament as a Witness to Jesus Christ: Historical Criticism and Theological Exegesis of the Bible According to Karl Barth", *The Journal of Religion* 90.4 (2010), 479.



## 4.1. Understanding Typology

Typology belongs as a standard category of Biblical interpretation for good reasons. Various Old Testament characters and prophecies clearly prefigure the work of Christ, Paul describes Adam as a type (τύπος) of Jesus (Rom. 5:14), and Jesus explained to his disciples, “what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Lk. 24:27), and described himself as “the key that unlocks the Scriptures” (Jn. 2:13-22).<sup>158</sup>

But what constitutes legitimate typology remains disputed since, as Daniel Treier warns, “[d]ecisions about the definition and propriety of ‘typological’ exegesis have decisive consequences for theological hermeneutics.”<sup>159</sup> A generally acceptable definition surrounds the divine ordering of the texts beyond the agency of the human author: “[relating] the past to the present in terms of a historical correspondence and escalation in which the divinely ordered prefigurement finds a complement in the subsequent and greater event.”<sup>160</sup> On this understanding typology consists in a series of controls to prevent ideological invasion; an ordered and unfolding nature of revelation, preceding (or escalating towards) the greater event of Christ incarnate. Typology is here limited to Old Testament prefigurations of Christ's work such that backward references to Christ in the New Testament are not understood so much as typological but a participation in Christ. Richard Longenecker's views form extreme version of this view that accepts the centrality of Christ in the Scriptures, along with the explicitly stated NT examples of typology, but refuses typology as a

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<sup>158</sup> Hays, ‘Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection’, in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2003), 224.

<sup>159</sup> Treier, ‘Typology’, in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Baker Academic, 2005), 823.

<sup>160</sup> Ellis, cited in Treier, ‘Typology’, 106.

legitimate category of biblical interpretation.<sup>161</sup> Needless to say, others view Longenecker's rule of thumb as overly proscriptive.<sup>162</sup>

Barth's use of typology diverges from this definition, making Christological fulfillment available for "virtually any biblical passage, whether in the Old Testament or the New."<sup>163</sup> Jesus is "the mysterious centre, the hidden subject matter, the concealed referent at stake in biblical passages whose surface content obviously has nothing to do with him."<sup>164</sup> Barth includes NT examples that point backward to Christ, along with OT examples that point forward to Christ stretches the common definition of typology, and raises questions of how this term from Biblical studies translates to theology.

The underlying question is what weight can be afforded to typological speculations beyond those examples endorsed in the NT, and what controls can be put in place to prevent ideological insertion? There are NT examples that no doubt witness to Christ and resemble him in their lives, but do these constitute a type? What is lost in typological discussions by excluding NT examples? Semantic issues like these sometimes represent the safeguarding of legitimate exegetical argumentation. Some have created rule-based assessments to identify legitimate types, requiring that it is historical (to differentiate typology from allegory), bears a sense of correspondence (to avoid arbitrary connections), and involves a degree of escalation (to allow for the progressive nature of God's revelation culminating in Christ). Others again suggest that escalation is unnecessary, or that Christ is the only Scriptural anti-type.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, 'Who Is the Prophet Talking About? Some Reflections on the New Testament Use of the Old', *Themelios* 13.1 (1987). 4–8.

<sup>162</sup> Stanley N. Gundry, 'Typology as a Means of Interpretation: Past and Present', *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (1969), 236.

<sup>163</sup> Hunsinger, *Thy Word*, xi.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>165</sup> David L. Baker, 'Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29.2 (1976): 137–157.

Advocates of theological exegesis generally discern speculation in these assessments, and prefer to embrace theological controls. A broader definition of typology is provided by Ford:

“The mark of typology is that the literal meaning or historical reality *both* is itself *and* at the same time points to another event or person of fuller meaning. In biblical exegesis its fundamental presupposition is the providence of God: that God does have a design, that the correspondences between various stages of the biblical history are not random but providential, and that God has the freedom to use the account of one event or person or history to point to the meaning of another.”<sup>166</sup>

While this definition might spell compromise by the standards of historical methods, it spells a higher standard of exegesis by the standards of theological exegesis. As with the other theological exegetical tools, Barth’s exegetical arguments are littered with theological concepts, raising questions around the veracity of his argument. For Barth’s purposes, it provides theological exegetical tool that plays a role as central as Christology is to Barth’s theology.

## 4.2. Lower Level Typology: Leviticus 14, 16

An important lower level example of Barth’s typological extension to the individual is his exegesis of Leviticus 14 and 16 in §35, which Barth considers to be exemplary in two ways: first, Barth deliberately breaks down his process to demonstrate the stages of his two-step process for typological exegesis, roughly corresponding to the first two stages of exegesis (*explicatio* and *meditatio*) that he previously described;

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<sup>166</sup> David F. Ford, ‘Barth’s Interpretation of the Bible’, in Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method* (1979), 64.

and secondly also, Barth demonstrates his confidence in the veracity of his exegesis by posing a challenge to his readers to improve upon his typological reading:

“Those who think they must reject this as the final word in exegesis of Lev. 14 and 16 must either undertake to prove another and better final word in explanation of these passages, or they must admit that they do not know of any, therefore that ultimately they do not know to what or to whom these passages refer. The same has necessarily to be said about the election stories on which these passages are simply a commentary.”<sup>167</sup>

I here consider the moral reading of Barth’s two stage theological exegesis of Lev. 14 and 16 in conversation with Matthias Grebe, who has taken up Barth’s particular challenge to improve upon his argument.

#### **4.2.1. *Explicatio***

At a lower level of exegesis, Lev. 14, 16 consists of two ritual sacrifices, the first (Lev. 14) the ceremonial cleansing of skin diseases, and the second (Lev. 16) the national day of atonement (Yom Kippur).

In Lev. 14:1-7, Yahweh stipulates that once a skin-disease is healed, the priest is to conduct a cleansing ritual involving two live clean birds along with cedar-wood, scarlet and hyssop. The priest orders that one of the birds is killed over fresh water, and that the other is dipped in the blood-water of the first, along with the other materials described. The leper is sprinkled seven times with this blood-water and then pronounced clean. After this point, the priest will release into the wild the remaining bird which was dipped in blood of the dead bird.

The second ceremony in Lev. 16:5-22 is a more elaborate description that Yahweh requires Aaron to administer Israel’s annual national day of atonement. Having sacrificed a sin offering for his own household, he is to present the two goats before the

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<sup>167</sup> II/2, 366.

Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting. In v8, Aaron is to cast lots, one for Yahweh and one for the scapegoat who is destined for the desert (Azazel).

“He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat (Lev. 16:8-10).”<sup>168</sup>

The first goat (designated for Yahweh) is to be offered as a sin offering and is used for cleansing the holy place and instruments. Its blood is to be sprinkled on the atonement cover (ἱλαστήριον) and in front of it and then on the tent of meeting, in order to make atonement for the Most Holy Place and the Tent of Meeting, explicitly because of the sins of the Israelites. The second goat is presented alive before Yahweh and used for making atonement for the entire nation of Israel by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

“He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness. (Lev. 16:21-22)”<sup>169</sup>

The first stage of Barth’s ten pages of exegesis demonstrates his sensitivity to the details of the text of Scripture, couched in the narrative framework of a double election motif.<sup>170</sup> The roots of his argument reach deeply into his preceding argument and are particularly sensitive to its literary form. As observed in chapter 2, Barth observes a pattern of binary choices/rejections in Genesis which is representative

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 357-366.

of God's election and rejection, and which, describes not the eternal state of individuals being at stake but the various vocations of chosen and rejected individuals. Here the rejected individuals (Cain, Ishmael, Esau) also experience a place in God's purposes. It is clear that Barth intends this to be an extensive description of the biblical narrative since what begins in Genesis is observed in subsequent pairings. In particular, Barth considers three substantial representative examples: the David/Saul narrative in 1 Samuel outlining the form of kingship in Israel, the synecdochical parable of the two prophets in 1 Kings 13, and finally, the atoning sacrifices in Leviticus 14-16, representing the work of Israel's priests. No doubt, the three examples provided anticipate a Christological fulfilment in the threefold office of Christ.

In his observation of this narrative context, Barth suggests that in Leviticus we are "confronted by an unusually eloquent reminiscence of the conspicuously differing choices of Genesis." The ritual cleansing (Lev. 14) and Yom Kippur (Lev. 16) are "very different but obviously related" since they both consist in instructions for ritual sacrifices that contain both a chosen and a rejected creature which accord with this motif.<sup>171</sup> In each case there are two animals, one animal loses its life, and the other is set free on the basis that the other has died. Similarly, each contains an inscrutable binary divine decision, and both the chosen and rejected serve the greater purpose of God in purifying and atoning for Israel's sin.

Jacob Milgrom's *Anchor* commentary explores source critical methods to compare Lev. 14 and 16 outside of the narrative unity of the Torah, and outside of the unity with one another. In a similar vein to other source critical readings, Milgrom identifies broad themes of holiness and impurity, life and death in the book of Leviticus and uses the connection of these themes to shape his exegesis. Similarities between Leviticus and Ancient Near Eastern documents, highlight for Milgrom that the key

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 357.

distinctive of Leviticus is Israel's monotheism and the "priestly doctrine of collectiveness."<sup>172</sup> Consequently, chapters 11-15 of Leviticus are considered to be an editorial insert, separating out ch. 14 from ch. 16 and any of the connections that might have been observed between the two. The result of Milgrom's analysis is that Yom Kipper in ch. 16 becomes more prominent in the book of Leviticus and chs. 14-15 which belong to the *Priestly source* (P), demonstrate that Moses is the true prophet over Aaron's priesthood.

If Milgrom's emphasis is source-critical, Robert Alter's interpretation is a literary reading of the Hebrew narrative, concerned primarily with the rhetorical features of the canonical text. In contrast to Milgrom, Alter gives primary attention to translating the canonical form of the text, and providing commentary only in the footnotes to his translation. It is rich in highlighting the poetic and low-level literary features of the text, as well as identifying themes in the broader narrative. Alter's commentary is thin, but by concentrating on his translation, he aims to emphasise, "the rich literary experience of the Hebrew more accessible to readers of English."<sup>173</sup> In saying this, however, as different as Alter's literary approach is to Milgrom's text-critical approach, his narrative approach appears superficial at points. For example, in understanding the significance of Yom Kipper, Alter ignores the literary unity of Leviticus, and unreflectively reverts to critical framework as Milgrom.

In contrast to the cultic and sociological emphasis of Milgrom and the poetic and literary emphasis of Alter, Barth suggests that Lev. 14 and 16 corroborate to illustrate purification to onlooking Israelites. According to the literary context Barth suggests that both animals are placed before Yahweh and that the rejected goat is as indispensable as the chosen goat, just as Cain is as indispensable as Abel, and

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<sup>172</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Yale University Press, 1998), 167.

<sup>173</sup> Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (W. W. Norton, 2008), xlv.

Ishmael as Isaac. “[T]he death of the one, which is, in fact, full of grace and salvation, is accompanied by the life of the other, which is, in fact, the essence of desolation.”<sup>174</sup> This derives on the one hand from the passive nature common to the two passages; namely, that key beneficiaries of the rituals are spectators and witnesses of the work that God has stipulated. The rituals do not complete purification so much as illustrate it, so that God is properly the one who atones for sins of his chosen ones. “[These rites] confirm for him, as simple pictures, that he is himself, with his pictorially explained history, called and intended to be a witness to that which will become true and benefit him, not as his own work, but in the objectivity or the mighty acts of God.”<sup>175</sup>

Then the two passages also witness to divine grace in their differences. The important component for the Lev. 14 purification rite lies not in the bird that dies but in the bird that is set free. While it is necessary for man to die and his blood shed, the picture that this rite creates for the Israelite is that for the new life of purification. Leviticus 16, “runs in exactly the opposite direction,”<sup>176</sup> suggesting that God makes the sin of Israel his own concern, and takes atonement into himself. “The one looks back from the saving death to the lost life which is annulled by it, the other forward from the same death to the new life created and won by it.”<sup>177</sup>

At the lower level of exegesis in Barth’s *explicatio*, then, his reading stands out as both attentive to the details of the text, and sensitive to the literary form of Leviticus, in the context of the Pentateuch, and attentive to the details around his theological concern: ritual atonement in the Israel cult.

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<sup>174</sup> II/2, 359.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 363.



#### 4.2.2. *Meditatio*

While Barth has sought to identify the clear message of the images in Lev. 14, 16, he hints at something inscrutable at the heart of the text that suggests a greater typological fulfilment. “[T]heir destiny too obviously points beyond itself to a reality which is in no way fulfilled by the elect or rejected persons as such or in themselves. [...] It can be addressed to man only in the form of a picture. [...] — as a word of truth, as a revelation of the reality hidden from him.”<sup>178</sup> These pictures, “show us again how the matter attested transcends the reality known to us” without the crucial step of comprehending the atoning work of Christ.<sup>179</sup> The risk is that Barth's analysis suggests precisely what he sought to avoid: an inscrutable puzzle awaiting a solution—rather than providing a rich narrative background typologically anticipating Christ. Barth has otherwise shown restraint in considering the text of Leviticus in isolation from its fulfilment in Christ. He has deliberately and artificially pulled apart the *explicatio* and *meditatio* stages—what was earlier described as a single activity of exegesis—to illustrate the way that *meditation* is developed. What Barth now concedes is that this is not possible since the true interpretation of Lev. 14, 16 is a mystery that searches for a solution and greater reality in the atoning work of Christ. This understanding, “is to be distinguished from exegesis,” but also “inescapably posed by it; and in the answer to this question, whatever it may be, exegesis is forced [...] to speak its final word.”<sup>180</sup>

The distinctive feature of Barth's exegesis at this point, in contrast to the conventional exegesis of both Milgrom and Alter, is the interpretive context of Christian faith. Barth's readings derive from the broad context of Scripture, not only as a canonical whole that points to Jesus, but in the context of humble faith and submission to God's Word. That Milgrom and Alter do not share this confession is clear from

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 363-364.

their readings of Leviticus as ancient literature. Barth makes a point of deliberately aligning himself with what he calls “the older exegesis,” the figurative and broadly typological readings of the early church fathers,<sup>181</sup> by which probably means Origen, but possibly also Calvin, whose commentary on Leviticus he quotes positively nearby.<sup>182</sup> In any case, Barth embraces faith as a theological necessity against the habits of conventional exegesis in discerning the text’s “true subject” in an otherwise unresolvable mystery.

“[W]e cannot say that these passages are prophecies of Jesus Christ merely because we are left with an enigma and we happen to know about Jesus Christ, who, according to the New Testament witness, is precisely that which is so puzzling here, the riddle itself, and in His being its solution. [...] It is] only the positive decision of faith in Jesus Christ [...] that] excludes unbelief.”<sup>185</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Grebe’s Critique

While our analysis has so far described the virtues of Barth’s reading of Lev. 14, 16 as theological exegesis, Matthias Grebe’s recent critique highlights a key challenge to Barth’s typology as a moral reading of Scripture. Grebe takes up Barth’s challenge to better interpret Lev. 14 and 16 and provides a multi-faceted critique “from the inside.” Unlike source-critical interpreters of Leviticus, Grebe shares Barth’s basic typological framework and embraces many of Barth’s theological concerns and pastoral questions, and eagerly to imitates the way “he uses Scripture to support his systematic theological reflection.”<sup>184</sup> Yet Grebe seeks to correct Barth at the level of theological exegesis; tweaking both Barth’s reading of Lev. 14, 16 and his consequent

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>182</sup> Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “‘A Type of the One to Come’: Leviticus 14 and 16 in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*,” in Hunsinger, ed., *Thy Word is Truth*, (Eerdmans, 2012), 73.

<sup>183</sup> II/2, 364.

<sup>184</sup> Matthias Grebe, *Election, Atonement, and the Holy Spirit: Through and beyond Barth’s Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (James Clarke & Co, 2015), 62.

atonement theology through a re-examination of the day of atonement in Leviticus 16, particularly the neatness with which Barth reaches for a forensic theology of atonement.

Grebe channels Ford's critique, that Barth "uses typology as a way that obscures the literal realistic sense,"<sup>185</sup> and so he seeks to provide "a closer and more detailed look at the texts."<sup>186</sup> In Lev. 14, 16, he questions Barth's analysis of Jesus representation of all four animals. In other words, he questions the shape of Barth's Christology in its typological fulfilment—"whether Jesus is the elect as well as the rejected."<sup>187</sup>

Grebe asserts that Barth "completely overlooks" various features of the text.<sup>188</sup> Like Barth, Grebe draws on the broader literary context of Leviticus (Lev. 17; Ex. 30:11-16; Deut. 12:23; Gen. 9:3-6) to see that blood, "was a symbol of the surrender of the worshipper's own life to the sanctuary and thus to YHWH himself,"<sup>189</sup> meaning that if blood is given its symbolic meaning by Yahweh, then "the sacrifice in the Old Testament was not a human payment to appease God." The priestly atonement took place only because God had made possible a way of maintaining covenant fellowship, not an act of deity-appeasement. Or again, Barth ignores that the ritual laying on of hands of the scapegoat is a component also of the sin-offering outlined in earlier in Leviticus (4:15, 24, 29, 33) and therefore enacted with respect to both the scapegoat and the goat sacrificed as a sin offering at Yom Kippur.<sup>190</sup> Or again, the literary context of Leviticus demonstrates that the laying on of hands ritual "should be seen in the same context as the appointment of a successor (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9) or the consecration of the Levites (Num 8:10)—an 'authorization' or 'ordination,' a

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<sup>185</sup> Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', 86.

<sup>186</sup> Grebe, 67.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 75.

dedication to YHWH.”<sup>191</sup> It is symbolic in that the offerer identifies his or her soul with the soul for the animal.

Closer analysis also shows that Lev. 16 contains two rites in itself, corresponding to God’s Yes and No: the “elimination-rite” of Azazel, and the “substitution rite” of the sin offering; the negative sin offering towards the holy-of-holies, and the positive scape-goat rite towards the wilderness which represents the “home of chaos” and the “habitat of demons.” The result of this observation is that, negatively, the sanctuary is cleansed with blood so that God could dwell amongst Israel, and, positively, Israel was brought into the sanctuary where it came into contact with holiness.”<sup>192</sup> Lev 14 and 16 therefore do not “run in exactly the opposite direction” but in the same direction—that of restoring covenant fellowship. A fuller picture of atonement in Lev. 16 is “not simply a negative act removing sin, but a sanctifying act.” The concept of sin bearing then is not an act of purging or of divine appeasement, but a ceremony of covenant commitment and divine forgiveness; “a renewal of right relationship between God and the person bringing the offering.”<sup>193</sup> Grebe consequently questions whether Barth is consistent in seeing all four animals as typologically fulfilled in Christ. Grebe’s account suggests that “Jesus Christ should be seen as the sacrificial animal, giving his life for the sinner,”<sup>194</sup> such that Jesus is only the elect of God, not the rejected.

Grebe ultimate criticism of Barth’s twofold analyses in the OT amounts to Barth’s “misuse of typology which spoils the realism of the literal story for the sake of trying to know more of God’s purpose than can properly be elicited.”<sup>195</sup> Scripture testifies to a real rejection of the individual in these pairs such that where Cain, like the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>195</sup> Grebe, 99; quoting David F. Ford, *Barth and God’s Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Wipf & Stock, 2008), 91.

Azazel goat, is “trapped in sin and sent away from the presence of God, becoming a restless wanderer.”<sup>196</sup> This resonates too with the NT which divide the elected and rejected (Matt. 25), and in which Cain is “an example of how not to be (1 John 3:12) and whose footsteps one should avoid at all costs (Jude 11).”<sup>197</sup> Amidst the detail analysis of the complex Levitical rites, what really determines Barth’s typological conclusion is the theology that the interpreter brings to the text.

Then Grebe is not unaware that his challenge to Barth’s exegesis is also theologically entrenched. His compelling reading brings features of Barth’s exegesis into question, and suggests that key features of Barth’s election hermeneutic damage the realism of Scripture. Beyond his analysis of the Lev. 14, 16 rites, he also addresses Barth’s theology of atonement, and the work of the Spirit in preserving divine and human freedom. In turn, Grebe addresses not only Barth’s exegesis but his trajectory towards universalism, and the observable under-emphasis upon the Spirit in II/2. In this way, Grebe’s account demonstrates the lengths required to challenge the theological exegetical argumentation of an argument as elaborate as Barth’s theological exegesis, ranging from low-level textual commentary, to questioning the orthodoxy of Barth’s account of the hypostatic union, and in revitalising Barth’s pneumatology. Although impressive, Grebe’s critique suffers from its wide scope, stretching his argument thin at points. Nevertheless, a moral reading of Lev. 14, 16, requires a careful reading of the text that is sensitive to its inscrutable aspects, but which also applies a form of typological Christology that fits with the grain of Scripture. Grebe highlights issues at the lower level of Barth’s typological exegesis, as well as the difficulty involved in providing a careful theological exegetical reading.

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<sup>196</sup> Grebe, 99.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 99.

### 4.3. Higher Level Typology

Having considered issues that Barth's typological exegesis exhibits at a lower level, the larger scale typological role of his Christology is prevalent in the third stage of his argument as he extends his Christocentric election hermeneutic to both the community (§34) and the individual (§35). An instructive example of this lies in Barth's conclusion to his exegesis of the four rites in Lev. 14 and 16, where he suggests that Christ fulfils each component of the OT individual, and that each OT individual provides an important witness to Christ.

““We proceed, then, on this presupposition. The elect individual in the Old Testament, so impressively and yet in so many different ways distinguished, set apart and differentiated in the Old Testament stories and pictures, is always a witness to Jesus Christ, and is indeed a type of Christ Himself. It is He, Jesus Christ, who is originally and properly the elect individual. All others can be this only as types of Him, only as His prototypes or copies, only as those who belong to Him, only as considerable or inconsiderable, strong or weak members of His body, only as chastised or blessed, humiliated or exalted citizens of His community, only as in different ways His witnesses.”<sup>198</sup>

Or again,

“None of the types gives quite the same witness as the others. None simply repeats the witness of the others. The historical multiformity of individual elect and non-elect, of those placed on the right and those on the left, cannot be ignored, and no sound exegesis can afford to ignore it. It cannot be glossed over. It cannot be reduced to a formula.”<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> II/2, 364.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 366.

In principle, then, Barth's Christology developed in §33 is corroborated with an essential witness in each individual witness in Scripture. As Hunsinger observes, Barth's Christological fulfilment is available in "virtually any biblical passage, whether in the Old Testament or the New."<sup>200</sup> This is not to reduce Christology to a synthesis or mosaic amalgam of Scriptural examples, but to highlight that Scripture consists in a persistent and complex witnesses to the risen Christ, which corresponds neatly with Barth's construal of Scripture. Christ is not as a puzzle to be solved so much as the Lord who is to be believed and worshipped. This underlines, again, the importance for Barth that typological application of this election hermeneutic is a step of faith, outside of the bounds of natural theology, and historical critical methods.

David Gibson describes the distinctiveness of Barth's Christology in contrast to Calvin's Christology and the way that this impacts his interpretation of Scripture. In both cases, Christ functions as a type and the centre of Scripture's message, but differences emerge from the distinctives of their respective Christologies and approaches to Scripture.

"Calvin's doctrine of election reveals a doctrine of election which may be described as christocentric (if by this we understand Christ to be central to salvation-*history* and the effecting of redemption within the economy). Allied to this, I suggest that Calvin's exegesis of election is explained by a hermeneutical approach to Scripture which is extensively christocentric—his reading of the whole of the biblical narrative is shaped by his understanding of how Christology functions within that narrative. Conversely, it is suggested that Barth's exegesis of election reveals a doctrine of election which, when carefully nuanced, may be described as christocentric in a methodologically principal way. This exegesis is best understood in tandem with Barth's theology of interpretation which is intensively christological—

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<sup>200</sup> Hunsinger, *Thy Word*, xi.

his reading of the Bible privileges the name of Jesus Christ in ways which go significantly beyond Calvin's understanding of how Christology functions in exegesis."<sup>201</sup>

Barth's theological emphasis differs from Calvin's emphasis upon the unfolding nature of salvation history. Calvin maintained a theological emphasis upon reading Scripture; in fact, "Calvin viewed his *Institutes* as a hermeneutical lens" in his reading of Scripture.<sup>202</sup> The difference in Barth's reading seems to be that Calvin had a stronger emphasis upon the subservience of Christ's role to God's plan in salvation history, whereas Barth's view of salvation history was subservient to God's self-determination in Christ.

Hunsinger provides further insight into what he calls Barth's "master typological motif," which can be applied to OT and NT individuals as well as events and allusions.<sup>203</sup> Barth considers the shape of Christ's ministry, suffering, and glory as operative in the Pauline pattern for how believers participate in Christ's life, suffering and glory, which provides a typological pattern for various elements of the OT narrative. "[A] deep structure that might be described as 'affirmation,' 'negation,' and 'negation of the negation.'"<sup>204</sup> Seemingly inconsequential OT characters find their "deepening or correction or their healing" in such a typological reading; "somehow reconfigured, restored, and surpassed in Christ."<sup>205</sup> Hunsinger explains further,

"Since these grammatical elements were essentially formal, their presence could also be discerned in other biblical stories. Insofar as the stories displayed some elements of the same pattern, they could be read as pointing to Christ at the center. They could be taken as attesting the uniqueness of

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<sup>201</sup> Gibson, *Reading the Decree*, 27.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>203</sup> Sharp, 161.

<sup>204</sup> Hunsinger, *Thy Word*, xi.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., xii



Christ without losing their essential distinction from him. [...] Their ultimate significance could only emerge when the type was juxtaposed to Christ as the antitype. Interpretation of this kind required a reading that took place on two different levels at the same time: the one straightforward, the other christological, if the type was not simply to be overpowered by the antitype. [...] They could be interpreted in light of a hidden christological center that was secretly but ultimately their subject.”<sup>206</sup>

#### 4.3.1. Typology as a Structure of Argumentation

Barth’s distinct Christocentric reading of Scripture translates to a series of high-level typological structures that shape Barth’s argument. A relatively benign example of this is his frequent use of the *munus triplex*. That is, the threefold leadership roles in Israel—prophet, priest and king. Barth provides no exegetical foundation for this teaching, though he applies it in ways that significantly structure his descriptions of the work of Christ throughout *CD*. For example, it shapes his selection of OT individuals who clearly foreshadow of the classic three-fold work of Christ in §35.1: as priest (Leviticus 14-16), king (1-2 Samuel) and prophet (1 Kings 13). A parallel three-fold pattern follows in Barth’s discussion of the lives of the disciples as they replicate the threefold work of Christ as elect NT individuals in §35.2. Barth merely asserts its place in theology, and provides no exegetical foundation for this use. Yet this use conforms to a common ancient practice in theology, with Eusebius presumed to be the first,<sup>207</sup> and Calvin popularised its use in the Reformed tradition.<sup>208</sup> The *munus triplex* can be considered benign because, from the perspective of theology, it is commonly assumed to be biblical, and its distinctions rarely cause controversy.

A less benign example of Barth’s high-level typology in II/2 is his Christological extension of the two-fold work of Christ in relation to double predestination. This is not benign both because it substantially influences the shape of the third stage of

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>207</sup> Eusebius (of Caesarea), *The Ecclesiastical History* (Heinemann, 1980), 1.3.8.

<sup>208</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II. xv. 1.

Barth's argument in II/2; and because it frames much of Barth's subsequent exegesis. While he uses the label "double predestination" to identify with the Reformed tradition, his Christological concentration in double predestination differs significantly from Calvin's, and its asymmetry remains under-substantiated. As his election hermeneutic consisted of the double reference to Christ as both the Elect and Reprobate, and since what is true in election is by extension true derivatively for those "in him," Barth's argument in II/2 anticipates the extension of both election and reprobation.

Barth's unspoken assumption in his doctrine of double predestination is that the rejection of Christ in his death exhausts the work of God in rejecting. The basis of this lies in an argument from silence in his exegesis of two key atonement passages in Philippians 2:6-11 and Matt 4:1-11. Each passage explores the necessity of Jesus' suffering and dying, the confrontation of Satan's power, and his resurrection in triumph over evil and sin, and the shape of Jesus' election in suffering and dying is reproduced in the lives of Jesus' disciples such that Jesus is the archetypal elect individual. Phil. 2 strongly describes the shape of Jesus' election for disciples, but not rejection in either case. Barth's description of God's rejection is consequently under-argued, and limited to the statement, "[t]hat the elected man Jesus had to suffer and die means no more and no less than that in becoming man God makes Himself responsible for man who became His enemy, and that He takes upon Himself at the consequence of man's action—his rejection and his death."<sup>209</sup>

Barth's argument appears to draw from a selective reading that neglects a host of scriptural passages that anticipate God's judgement of the wicked. The passages that Barth considers in this argument lack the symmetry that is evident elsewhere in Scripture; that Christ's role as the archetypal Reprobate, extends also to God's re-

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<sup>209</sup> II/2, 124.

jection of individuals. Douglas Sharp has noticed this gap, and Barth's lack of exegetical substantiation at this point and described it as the one "possible weak link" is his notion of double predestination, "which is not grounded directly on exegesis."<sup>210</sup> In fact, "when [Barth] addresses directly the notion of double predestination, there is no exegesis whatsoever."<sup>211</sup>

Much like the *munus triplex*, double predestination is a feature of Reformed theology that does not receive an exegetical defence in *CD*, and it similarly provides a metatypological structure which significantly shapes the broad categories of thought for the majority of Barth's exegesis in II/2; all of §34 and his exegesis of Rom. 9-11, and his wide-ranging argumentation in §35. Unlike the *munus triplex*, Barth's decisions in his under-argued extension of double predestination do not derive from a long theology legacy, and do provide significant shape to his forthcoming argumentation. The asymmetry in this double reference has provided an observable bias in Barth's reading of Lev. 14 and 16, as Grebe demonstrated; and, as Gibson observes, similar tensions appear in Barth's imposition of his election hermeneutic upon its extension to the community in Romans 9-11 in §34:

"[I]n his effort to correct the Reformed tradition, Barth reads Romans 9–11 in concert with a Christologically redefined concept of double predestination in such a way that in key places the text begins to warp under the Christological weight it is made to bear. The result is by turns brilliant and complex, but also ultimately unsuccessful."<sup>212</sup>

Readers of Barth at this point are faced with a dilemma of Barth's imposition of his theology upon the text of Scripture, and have responded in a variety of ways. Those that reject it do so on the basis that Barth's theological imposition "does damage" to

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<sup>210</sup> Sharp, 138.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 136, fn. 36.

<sup>212</sup> David Gibson, "The Day of God's mercy: Romans 9-11 in Barth's doctrine of election" in David Gibson & Daniel Strange, eds., *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* (Bloomsbury, 2009), 138.

the text of Scripture. Those that accept it, recognise that Barth's high-level typology forms a theological exegetical argument, in which theological concepts play a role in Scriptural interpretation.

Others again have sought to address a theological shortcoming in Barth, and notably a diminished pneumatology. In this case, the radical concentration of Barth's Christocentric typology corresponds to a weakened emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the divine economy, which potentially explains other earlier-mentioned theological tensions evident in II/2, including the extension of God's gracious covenant in §§32-33, as well as the meaning of participation "in him" in §33. Some have suggested that Barth's pneumatology is consistent throughout his writings, while others that his early pneumatology disappears in II/2.

The challenge of any pneumatology lies in the placing emphasis on the Spirit that accounts for the reticence appropriate to the mystery of the Spirit's work. Grebe's attempt to strike a balance in this is evident in placing greater emphasis than Barth on the Spirit's work in election, while emphasising the reticence of the Spirit's work in aspects of atonement theology in the typology of Lev. 14. 16. Ford explores this at the level of Barth's Gospel metanarrative, suggesting that Barth may have ignored the work of the Spirit in his mature theology. While Barth's threefold account of Barth's typological narrative is summarised by incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, Ford's recommendation of including Pentecost in this formulation might alleviated this issue: Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Pentecost. Barth may well have neglected the work of the Spirit in II/2, but precisely how the Spirit gains greater theological emphasis at Pentecost than the resurrection is not made clear, as the Spirit and Christ are theologically significant in both events.

McDonald similarly seeks to improve Barth's position, arguing that, "the elect believing community is to be distinguished functionally but not ontologically, and

pneumatologically but not Christologically, from the rest of humanity.”<sup>215</sup> Such an account describes a universal atonement in Christ which is worked-out in the particularity of people’s lives by the Spirit. While McDonald’s pneumatology is attractive for its explanatory power, and for its alignment with other modern pneumatologies, it arguably undoes the distinctive singularity of God’s purposes and triune being in Barth’s theology. It is not surprising that McDonald’s theology of the Spirit is missing in II/2; and it is not surprising that Barth’s pneumatology is unclear in an argument focussed upon the election of Christ.

Against these criticisms, it is interesting to observe the silence of two prominent Barth scholars. George Hunsinger describes Barth’s pneumatology as consistent throughout *CD* without any reference to its development in II/2.<sup>214</sup> Bruce McCormack similarly observes that while Barth’s theology becomes more strongly Christocentric in II/2 than his hermeneutical statements in *Gottingen Dogmatics* and *CD* I/1 and I/2, Barth does so in a way that “does not in the least set aside that method.”<sup>215</sup> Barth simply strengthened his position of God’s triune work as *actus purus* by adding *et singularis*, which, according to McCormack, served to make the work of both the Spirit and Christ more consistently and Christologically ordered.

“The dialectic of veiling and unveiling would henceforth be understood by Barth to be a ‘teleologically ordered dialectic.’ (II/1, 236) [...] The hint of divine arbitrariness which still surrounded the doctrine of predestination in the Gottingen Dogmatics has been swept away.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> McDonald, ‘Evangelical Questioning of Election’, in Bruce L. McCormack & Clifford B. Anderson, eds., *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 2011), 261.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. George Hunsinger, ‘The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit’, in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Eerdmans, 2000), 148-185.

<sup>215</sup> McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 454.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 459-460.

The reticence characteristic of the Spirit's work reinforces McCormack's argument, in that the Spirit's work and Christ's work are the same thing. Barth's under-emphasis on the Spirit's work in II/2 does not necessarily translate to an opacity in the hanging eschatological tension that persists throughout II/2. Rather, it corresponds to Barth's emphasis upon Christology, and a resistance to reducing the Spirit's work to subjective experiences, most acutely exposed in Barth's brief consideration of the pastoral issue of personal assurance of salvation. Barth's relative silence on the Spirit at this point serves to emphasise the decision of God in Christ, and represents his own reluctance to rationalise the work of God in the lives of individuals. In Torrance's words, the Spirit prevents "rationalist" patterns, which "substitute a logical relation for the activity of the Holy Spirit."<sup>217</sup>

#### 4.4. Conclusion

From the very beginning of II/2, Barth has sought to remain faithful to his calling to provide a Christological reading of Scripture by way of typological exegesis. In the opening pages of II/2, Barth writes,

"So long as we remained true to the witness of Holy Scripture there was no alternative but to follow this line and to hold fast by it. For witnessing to God, the Old and New Testament Scriptures also witness to *this name*, and to the fulness of God which it encloses and represents, which cannot be separated from it, which cannot precede or follow it, but in it begins and continues and ends."<sup>218</sup>

In the third stage of Barth's argument, "this name" provides the centre of God's self-revelation in Scripture, connecting Barth's election hermeneutic of election in

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<sup>217</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Helmets & Howard, 1992), xiii.

<sup>218</sup> II/2, 5. Emphasis added.

Christ to the derivative objects of God's election in the community and the individual. The risen and living Jesus constitutes, "the real centre—not the systematic, but the actual centre of dogmatics and church proclamation."<sup>219</sup>

The example of Barth's typology of Lev. 14, 16 considered in this chapter is *exegetical* in that the details of the text anticipate a Christological fulfilment, and it is also *theological* in that Christ provides the key to the passage's interpretation by way a step of faith. Barth's emphasis on typology is therefore similar to the other theological exegetical forms in that his exegetical arguments are littered with theological concepts, which potentially "do damage" to the text of Scripture.

But while Barth's typology is similar to these other theological exegetical tools—and particularly similar to *narrative*—it should also be distinguished from them. The Christology at the centre of any Biblical theological narrative can easily be confused with typology, and indeed there are similarities, and more or less, depending upon the definition of typology. The key distinction between narrative and typology in this analysis lies in its function at different stages of the argument; narrative plays a valuable role in framing theological argumentation for Barth's hermeneutic, and typology plays the role of extending this hermeneutic. These two issues remain difficult to separate in Barth's writings as long as Barth's doctrine of Scripture reads Scripture in the context of its narrative form, and strongly identifies its centre in Christ.

It is also evident that the strength of Barth's Christocentrism puts pressure upon his exegesis at the risk of overwhelming the text. In particular, Barth's failure to provide adequate exegesis to develop a typological of double predestination risks theological speculation rather than developing a reticent description of God's mystery, and does not provide a strong basis upon which to extend his argument. Barth's

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<sup>219</sup> I/2, 882.

typological extensions experience the tensions common to the other theological exegesis in their attempt to provide a moral reading of the text of Scripture. Whether closer attention might have been paid to a pneumatological component of Christology in II/2, or, as Grebe suggests, alternative atonement theories, remains a matter of debate. Once again, any shortcomings in Barth's theological exegesis can be seen to confirm the value of the form in its ideal form.

The temptation for Biblical scholars is to seek a tighter definition of typology to ensure that theology is not employed inappropriately. Then, a more restrictive typology, such as Longenecker's restriction of typology to only NT examples, would preclude significant Christological readings of Scriptural types, such as Yom Kippur in Lev. 16, which surely finds typological fulfilment in Christ. Typology requires latitude for identifying Christ fulfilling OT types, while also seeking key controls to ensure that the concept does not overwhelm Scripture. Lev. 14, 16 is particularly vulnerable because it represents a clear Christological type, and yet the inner logic and details of the rites carry little interpretative consensus. Although the allusion to Christ is clear, the mechanics of the text remain allusive to interpreters; certainly requiring faith that Scripture points to Christ, and arguably requiring a degree of theological speculation.



## Chapter 5 — Dialectic

Alongside the other tools outlined, Barth employs dialectic as a fourth theological exegetical tool. Dialectic itself can be understood in a variety of ways in which ideas or texts contrast and interplay, but for our purposes an argument progresses dialectically in “the back-and-forth debate between opposing sides produc[ing] a kind of linear progression or evolution in philosophical views or positions.”<sup>220</sup>

Barth’s use of dialectic places his work in the category of a modern theologian, and opens him to suspicion in some quarters. For pre-modern Protestant theologians, dialectic represents unacceptable trends in modern epistemology since it appears to threaten law of non-contradiction, and its logic resists clear formal expressions.<sup>221</sup> Analytical philosophy’s distaste for Hegelian dialectics provides an analogue for the popular distaste for Barth, for whom contradictions provide an opportunity for moderate speculation rather than a threat.

“Dialectically generated contradictions are therefore not a defect to be reigned in by the understanding, as Kant had said, but invitations for reason

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<sup>220</sup> Julie E. Maybee, “Hegel’s Dialectics” (2016), Online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/hegel-dialectics>.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Sebastian Rehnman, ‘Does it matter if Christian doctrine is contradictory? Barth on logic and theology’, in Gibson & Strange, eds., *Engaging with Barth* (Apollos, 2009), 55-83.

to “speculate”, that is, for reason to generate precisely the sort of increasingly comprehensive and universal concepts and forms that Kant had said reason aims to develop.”<sup>222</sup>

The modern use of dialectic is not inconsistent with a moral reading of Scripture. For McCormack, Barth modern distinctives rescue him from the pejorative category of neo-orthodoxy, even as he remains committed to engaging heavily with ancient forms of Christian orthodoxy.<sup>223</sup> But more broadly, dialectic functions in Barth as a moral reading of Scripture at a variety of points in his writing, and largely because of its capacity to provide subtlety in theological assertions. First, dialectic provides an opportunity for speculation of new possibilities in theological discourse, which is permissible so long as it accompanied with honest and humble recognition of its limitations, and is also more common than often admitted. A second feature of dialectic for theology derives from the other end of the spectrum of uncertainty to speculation in its capacity to for reticence in accounting for the mysteries of God’s nature. Depending upon the context or stage of theological argumentation, dialectic is a tool that can function to provocatively suggest and speculate, and at other times carefully understate the contours and mysteries of God’s revelation.

As with the previous three forms of theological exegesis, Barth’s theology has been summarily described as dialectic, even if he himself sometimes eschewed the term. Barth withdrew from the description due to the personal tensions he experienced with Friedrich Gogarten, and the negative associations of the dialectic movement of the 1920s setting mainstream Protestantism against Schleiermacher.<sup>224</sup> Apart from this, however, Barth embraced *dialectic* and its associated concepts and terms (*thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis*) from the early stages of his own writing. He took the

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<sup>222</sup> Julie E. Maybee, ‘Hegel’s Dialectics’ (2016), Online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/hegel-dialectics>.

<sup>223</sup> McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 466.

<sup>224</sup> Dietrich Korsch, ‘Dialectical Theology’, in Richard E. Burnett, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 52.

concepts derived from Hegel's dialectic, but deliberately opposed its use of *God* to speak of the total combined and coherence of all reality, and *Spirit* to speak of our awareness, "of the relation that surpasses the simple structure of 'subject' and 'object.'" <sup>225</sup> Barth also eschewed the synthesis expressed between humanity and God, described by some as a "negative dialectic" where "[i]n place of synthesis we find mere actuality." <sup>226</sup> Instead, Barth viewed revelation as an act outside of human control, and effected by the sovereign action of divine freedom. God is infinitely removed from the grasp of humanity in both its createdness and sin, and inaccessible by means of religion or natural theology. McCormack argues that this aspect of Barth's dialectic is the "red thread that runs throughout the whole" of his development, even if it undergoes development in the course of Barth's writing. <sup>227</sup> Barth's *Realdialektik* expressed in *Romberbrief* can be described as "the 'infinite qualitative difference' between time and eternity; in keeping that difference constantly in view in both its negative and positive significance. 'God is in heaven and you are on earth.'" <sup>228</sup> Ten years after *Romberbrief*, in *CD I/1*, this *Realdialektik* becomes essential to Barth's doctrine of revelation as a dialectic of God's "veiling and unveiling" wherein God unveils himself by veiling himself in human language. Here *Realdialektik* demonstrates humanity as dependent upon God's gracious self-disclosure such that it is, in the words of Torrance, "a correlate of justification by grace alone, in its epistemological reference." <sup>229</sup>

Another way that Barth used the term dialectic—and the way that I will understand Barth's dialectic method moving forward—lies in his noetic dialectical structuring of theological thought and speech (*Denkform*). Barth first set this out in a 1922 lecture as a dialectical method, in which "every theological statement [is] to be placed

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>227</sup> McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 464.

<sup>228</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford University Press, 1953), xiii

<sup>229</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Introduction to Early Theology* (A&C Black, 2004), 88.

over against a counter-statement, without allowing the dialectical tension between the two to be resolved in a higher synthesis.”<sup>250</sup> This *Denkform* is “preceded by and has its ground in a *Realdialektik*—a dialectic in objectively real relations”<sup>251</sup> but translates this to a method that is applicable at the level of Barth’s exegesis and this theology. It is “a dialectic of humility;”<sup>252</sup> and it is “a thinking by man not from a centre in himself but from a centre in God, and yet never seeks to usurp God’s own standpoint.”<sup>253</sup> In contrast to Hegel’s dialectic, Barth’s,

“does not seek to achieve a synthesis, but on the contrary attacks the synthesis forged by man, out of a proper respect for the synthesis which God in his grace throws over all our contradictions in order to bind us to himself. [...] Hence theological doctrines or formulations are essentially contingent; they do not claim to have the truth in themselves for by their very nature they point beyond themselves to the Truth in God.”<sup>254</sup>

In this way, Barth’s dialectic represents a thoughtful adaptation of Hegel, and a sophisticated theological exegetical tool, despite its critics. Since the dialectic of Barth’s doctrine of revelation consists in an event (or “actuality”), it forms the locus of Cornelius van Til’s criticism of Karl Barth. For van Til, the actuality of revelation is, “a transcendent concept which exists quite prior to and independent of us in the here and now.”<sup>255</sup> Horton picks up where van Til left off, suggesting that Barth’s Christology “finally yields to synthesis,” even if the weight of Horton’s critique lies in a matter of theological emphases; that Barth has a “weak pneumatology,” and, “all of the stress falls on the incarnation and atonement.”<sup>256</sup> As already mentioned at

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<sup>250</sup> McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 11.

<sup>251</sup> Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 83.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 83, 88.

<sup>255</sup> Cited in Michael S. Horton, ‘Covenant, Election, and Incarnation: Evaluating Barth’s Actualist Christology’, in Bruce L. McCormack & Clifford B. Anderson, eds., *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*, (Eerdmans, 2011), 235.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

various points in this essay, an under-developed pneumatology is a feature of Barth's argument II/2 which does not derive straightforwardly from Barth's dialectic. While there might be cause to criticise Barth's theology at various points, these criticisms do not suggest that dialectic itself is not a valuable theological exegetical tool.

George Hunsinger suggests that Barth's use of this dialectical method can be further defined by three different forms at work in Barth's argumentation. The *first* is the "dialectical unity" of judgement and grace, "ultimately inseparable in Christ".<sup>237</sup> Although these seem to be antithetical to one another, they find a narrative unity in Christ's death and resurrection. Hunsinger suggests that for Barth, every Biblical act of grace and judgement "stereoscopically" finds its centre and subject in Christ's narrative. The *second* form of dialectic is an anthropological species of the first, essentially the dialectical unity of Luther's famous message, *simil justus et peccator*. The unity of Christ's death and resurrection in the first corollary is extended to those who participate in Christ and who experience in their lives the contradictions of Christ's death and resurrection, judgement and grace. The *third* form of dialectic outlines Barth's attitude toward seemingly contradictory texts of Scripture. A forced resolution, harmonisation, or "a rationally accessible synthesis" would misconstrue Scripture's meaning. Barth sees that the value of these tensions lay in the pathway of dialectical thought; "a hermeneutic of dialectical inclusion [...] moving back and forth without synthesis between the two trains of thought on the supposition that the two were compatible without being able to show how."<sup>238</sup>

What I will argue in this chapter is that Barth's employs the dialectical method (*Denkform*) described as a legitimate form of theological exegesis in II/2. In particular, I will consider two ways that Barth uses it in the final stages of his theological argument to bring together the loose threads of his theological argument. Following the pattern of previous chapters, I will consider (a) a lower-level example of Barth's

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<sup>237</sup> Hunsinger, *Thy Word*, xii.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., xvi.

use in §35 concerning the conflicting accounts of the death of Judas in Matthew 27 and Acts 1, which corresponds to Hunsinger's third category of dialectical method. This will be followed by (b) a higher level example of dialectic between Judas' life and the broader theological context of Scripture both in a narrative form and in a conceptual form, which corresponds to Hunsinger's first and second categories. In each case, Barth uses dialectic to explore the tensions in the context of Barth's closing statements on the topic of election in II/2.

## 5.1. Low Level Dialectic

The first example of Barth's dialectical exegesis navigates contrasting texts of scripture. This occurs in the context of the extended small-text exegesis section in §35.4 where Barth considers the rejected individual "concentrated and developed" in Judas Iscariot—"the great sinner of the New Testament."<sup>239</sup>

In considering the Gospel's narrative of Judas, Barth pauses to consider the seemingly contradictory historical details of Judas' death in Matthew 27 and Acts 1. The details of Judas' death in these accounts certainly differ, even if Barth calls it a "partial contradiction"; Judas shows remorse and takes his life in Matthew 27 while his motives are less clear and the cause of death different in Acts 1. Barth's response is to use his dialectical method to uphold the integrity of each text—"we certainly cannot seek to remove by harmonising the contradiction between the two stories on this point."<sup>240</sup> Barth respects the integrity of each text, allowing them to make contrasting historical claims, and seeks out a common theological meaning by way of dialectical analysis. This is evident in his three-fold repeated to-and-fro consideration of the two passages, explored in the following six parts.

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<sup>239</sup> II/2, 461.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 465, 467.

1. Barth begins by considering the distinctives of Matthew's account in Judas' repentance. He identifies in Judas the key elements of repentance—contrition of the heart, and mouth, and action—which compares favourably with the contrition of Peter in the previous chapter. Yet, for Barth, Judas' remorse is “left an open question which is not met or heard or answered by a promise of grace.”<sup>241</sup> This leads to a deeper theological connection between the stories of Judas and Israel, and so broadens the simple question of the rejected individual to a figurative description of national Israel: “We have seen that Judas was not opposed to Jesus, just as the people of Israel was never absolutely against *Yahweh*.”<sup>242</sup>

Broader still, and especially in contrast with the attitude of the other disciples (and especially Mary), Barth shows that Judas, “had refused to accept Jesus unreservedly as his Lord,” and with this reservation “it was also impossible for him to make restitution for this deed.”<sup>243</sup> The corporate significance of Judas, then, is that, “it was in *his* act that Israel finally showed itself to be the people of God which would not wholly serve its God, and would not therefore serve him at all.”<sup>244</sup>

2. Barth turns from Matthew to briefly consider Acts 1, which he suggests, demonstrates deeper reservations about Judas. This explains why Acts 1 does not mention of Judas' repentance or any form of remorse. Acts only records the tragic waste of Judas' reward; a “gloomy parallel” of Judas' personal fate. What is emphasised in Acts is Judas' forsaking of his apostleship and his share in the future of the kingdom (contrasted to Mary in the account of John 13).
3. Barth returns to Matthew to further mine the corporate significance of Judas and Israel by investigating the Old Testament reference to Zechariah 11 in his

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 465. Emphasis original.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 466.

reward of 30 pieces of silver where. The comparison of Judas with Israel receives significant legitimacy in this OT allusion but, strikingly, in Zechariah it is God in who is paid for his work of shepherding Israel. The injustice is that God receives a paltry sum for his work of faithfully shepherding Israel. Placing Judas in parallel to Yahweh in receiving 30 pieces of silver payment provides for Matthew a strong condemnation of Jewish leadership that accompanies Judas' condemnation as Zech. 11:17 suggests: "Woe to the useless shepherd that leaveth the flock!"

The fact that Matthew attributes the quote to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah is not a cause for doubting Matthew's historicity so much as an opportunity to explore another interesting possibility. It demonstrates Barth's remarkable ease in negotiating the difficult historical issues of the text as he suggests that Matthew's attribution of the Zechariah quote to Jeremiah draws out the readings of Jeremiah 18 and 32 in relation to Judas. He remarks, "[w]e have here another example of how even in its misunderstandings and confusions the Bible is usually more instructive than other books in their accuracy."<sup>245</sup>

4. Acts 1, again in contrast, shows Judas grasping for control of his circumstances by buying the field—and not the Jewish leadership. Barth interprets Judas' suicide in Acts, then, as a form of self-condemnation. Again, Barth sees this contrast as an opportunity to explore the theological unity of the accounts. The two Psalms quoted by Peter place Judas as the enemy of the Messiah (Pss. 69:25, 109:8), and it is a matter of messianic fulfilment that Judas loses both what he foolishly earned (the field), and what Jesus had given him (the apostolate). Much like Matthew, Barth sees Acts develop a corporate significance in Judas' actions: "We must refer both passages both to Judas and to the people of Israel, as does the Acts of the Apostles." He does not set the more sympathetic account of Matthew against Acts, nor does he synthesise the accounts, so much

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 468.



as identify their common theological centre. “We can see at once how this account coincides with that of Matthew, not perhaps in externals, but certainly in material content. Both accounts of what happened to the reward of Judas confirm the fact that both Judas and Judah—Judas as the embodiment of Judah, and Judah as embodied in Judas—have, in fact, no future as such in and for themselves.”<sup>246</sup>

5. Barth returns to Mt. 27 where Judas, recognising his lack of any possible future for himself, “went out and hanged himself.” Here Barth draws out a literary similarity of the death of 2 Sam. 17:23 which other biblical scholars have observed is, “undoubtedly a reminiscence” of the former friend and counsellor of David.”<sup>247</sup> Ahithophel faced similar circumstances, the utter nothingness of what he had gained, and willed to take, “even the judgment of God into his own hands, and himself executes it upon himself.”<sup>248</sup> The parallel serves to draw out for Matthew again the representative role of Judas; his self-condemnation corresponding to a national form of suicide in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
6. Barth finally considers Acts 1 one last time where he suggests that, although Acts does not make explicit Judas’ suicide, it could point to Jesus’ own terrible death. It was a form of self-condemnation in that his *σπλάγχνα* is revealed (meaning that his inmost being is revealed). For Barth the parallel elaborates the other side of the national self-condemnation of Israel in the self-condemnation of its Messiah.

This commitment to low-level exegetical dialectical analysis provides an important insight into Barth’s understanding of theological exegesis. While it does not progress according to the logic of conventional exegesis, it does follow a trajectory that

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 469

<sup>247</sup> II/2, 469; Jesse E. Robertson, *The Death of Judas: The Characterization of Judas Iscariot in Three Early Christian Accounts of His Death* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 70.

<sup>248</sup> II/2, 470.

moves from sympathy for Judas toward theological reflection upon the weight of Israel's rejection of its Messiah. Barth does not question the final form of the text, as a text critical reading might. Nor does he seek to harmonise the texts if by this we mean imposing the meaning of one text upon the other. Neither does he seek to exaggerate the similarities or differences, nor consider the characters as different Judases, as a purely literary reading might. His dialectic carefully highlights the emphases of both texts, and identifies their common theological ground. As he puts it, "the material agreement and mutual affirmation of the two accounts is much greater than the formal discrepancy would at first seem to suggest."<sup>249</sup>

Jessie Robertson's *The Death of Judas* provides a comparable analysis of the historical accounts of Matt 27 and Acts 1, bringing the distinctives of Barth's exegesis into further relief. Robertson provides a historical comparison of the two texts with rhetorical analysis of Greco-Roman death accounts, and alongside the non-biblical account of Judas' death in Papias.<sup>250</sup> Although Robertson writes in the context of Christian faith, and aspires to contribute theological implications,<sup>251</sup> his scope is narrowly historical. Core to his method is comparison and contrast between the various texts and other motifs of death in ancient literature. Although he admits that "the church chose some [texts] as canonical, while excluding others,"<sup>252</sup> his analysis does not provide the canon of Scripture any priority in his analysis, placing Papias' account of Judas on equal footing with Mt. 27 and Acts 1. Similarly, after identifying "the pastoral concern of Matthew" in "his interest in the ability of forgiveness to weak and faulty disciples," Robertson identifies that the avenue to such an exploration "calls for more thorough exposition" although it is not clear how more exposition of the kind that he provides will address this pastoral concern.<sup>253</sup> Although he

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 471.

<sup>250</sup> It is interesting that although it is common for scholars to dismiss Barth's exegesis of Judas, there are few extended discussions around his argument.

<sup>251</sup> Robertson, 3.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 146.

makes similar observations about the distinctives of the texts, a clear difference in Barth's analysis is his search for the theological emphases of the texts. Unlike his analysis of Jn. 1:1-2 and Eph. 1:4, Barth's reflections here are remarkably rich in theological connections to the broader story of Israel.<sup>254</sup>

Unlike Robertson, Catherine Sider Hamilton's rich literary reading of Judas picks up on Matthew's intertextual link between Judas and Israel albeit seemingly unaware of Barth's argument.<sup>255</sup> Hamilton considers both the final form of the text and the legitimacy of tracing out a parallel between Judas and Jerusalem, drawing similar conclusions to Barth about the scriptural allusions in Matthew's to Jeremiah, and between Judas' actions and the actions of Israel's leadership. Hamilton even extends Barth's observations to see the tragic reversal of God's promise in Jeremiah represented in Matthew, that the land of Jerusalem will be used for graves, rather than the life-giving temple.

Barth moves beyond the historical approaches of both Robertson and Hamilton in his strong analogy of Judas with the apostle Paul. He identifies a symmetry in their NT roles; each considered the chief of sinners, and each appointed to be apostles who experience a significant upheaval in their allegiance to Christ. There is a neat converse relationship between the two, which corroborates conveniently with Barth's extended election hermeneutic. While Judas represents Israel as God's accepted people who are rejected, Paul's conversion and mission to the Gentiles represents God's rejected people who are accepted. Even though Matthias is the successor to Judas in the narrative of Acts 1, Barth argues that the broader narrative of Acts and the NT theologically places Paul as Judas' natural successor. This provides Barth with greater theological impetus to speculate about the place of Judas in God's

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<sup>254</sup> Although this is potentially because it appears after his consideration of Israel and the elect community (§34) prior to his discussion about Judas (§35).

<sup>255</sup> Catherine Sider Hamilton, 'The Death of Judas in Matthew: Matthew 27:9 Reconsidered', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137.2 (2018), 419.

plans of election, and places him within a satisfying narrative arc of redemption, which, in turn, provides a kind of redemption for Judas.

What is clear is that Barth's treatment of Judas and Paul is an example of the speculative nature of Barth's dialectical method, which is similar to Barth's other theological exegetical tools. Mark Wallace portrays Barth as playing with the text like a literary critic, "highlight[ing] the imaginative literary dynamics that carry the meaning of the Bible's central characters and incidents."<sup>256</sup> Barth readily admits that this sits at odds with the intention of the author in relation to the apostleship of Paul in Acts: "We can hardly deny that it is really Paul who took over Judas' and the work abandoned by him, yet whether the Acts of the Apostles really intended to say this implicitly is another question."<sup>257</sup> While ignoring authorial intent in some hermeneutics constitutes a breach of a key control of biblical interpretation, Barth's emphasis on encountering Christ in revelation by the witness of the Scriptures provides a space for such a theological interpretation. Along with the other theological exegetical tools, it is difficult to identify the kind of controls that would prevent speculative observations from becoming mis-readings of Scripture. On the flipside, the opportunity that Barth exploits is to draw theological meaning from Scripture more than historical description. What he risks in theological over-statement, he gains in overcoming the cautious under-statements of historical readings of Scripture. As Wallace suggests further, Barth is less conc "Barth's concern is less with what the text might have meant authorially and originally and more with what it can mean in the present as a work of theological art."<sup>258</sup>

In this view, theological exegesis is not a science that leads to synthesis and assertion, but an art that leads to suggestion. The dialectic that Barth employs in this final stage of his argument allows his argument to move like a patchwork of taste-and-see

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<sup>256</sup> Mark I. Wallace, 'Karl Barth's Hermeneutic: A Way beyond the Impasse', *The Journal of Religion* 68.3 (1988): 404.

<sup>257</sup> II/2, 478.

<sup>258</sup> Wallace, 404.

observations where observations are not required to do work. This suits this final stage of his argument as he attempts to soften his conclusions around the points of controversy and hint at possibilities; sometimes explicitly, but more often by expressing contrasting positions. This use of dialectic amounts to a moral reading of Scripture, then, because it gives permission an author to both speculate in his argumentation, and be reticent in his conclusions.

The point at which dialectic appears morally dubious is when Barth's speculative ideas become load-bearing for Barth's subsequent argument. At this point, the looseness of dialectic betrays the care that Barth insisted on in I/2 to ensure that theological concepts do not overwhelm the text of scripture does not appear to have been provided at this point. Barth's suggestion that the apostleship of Judas passes over to Paul, is not stated in isolation, but as Barth's argument draws to a close in §35, it hardly establishes Barth's subsequent argumentation.

Perhaps the other moral concern at this point is that, Ford suggests, "Barth presses the typology of Judas and Paul so as to support the possibility of an ultimately favourable verdict on Judas."<sup>259</sup> Here the gracious disposition of God toward humanity in the covenant, which Barth used to frame his argument at the beginning of II/2 presses against the teaching of Scripture which presents no real hope of redemption. While dialectic provides a fitting tool for areas of uncertainty, it is not clear that Barth's speculation around the fate of Judas, so much as a reticent shrug the uncertainties of God's purposes for Judas. This leads us to consider more closely the closure of Barth's broad theological argument in II/2.

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<sup>259</sup> Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation', 85.

## 5.2. High Level Dialectic

A second higher-level example of Barth's use of dialectic is drawn from §35.4, in Barth's attempt to bring together the major tensions of his argument in II/2. This occurs at the very end of §35, following the narrative description of Judas' life, considered above, in an unusual recapitulation of his theological ideas in the form of a conceptual analysis of the word "handing over" (παράδιδωμι). Here Barth considers Biblical uses of the word παράδιδωμι grouped together by key characters in the Gospel narrative with result that II/2 concludes with a theological conceptual discussion of Judas' defining act; representing a creative exegetical move, shifting observations from his narrative treatment of Judas to a conceptual treatment.

Barth provides no comment or explanation for this, but it appears to represent a broad attempt to bring theological concepts in tension in Barth's argument to a dialectical conclusion.

The key theological loose ends in question derive from the question of God's determination of the rejected individual, a key tension of Barth's argument in II/2. He has shown restraint in delaying the question of individual election in order to carefully draw out the implications of his election hermeneutic as Scripture required of him.<sup>260</sup> Having established his Christocentric foundations for election along with its extension to both the community and the individual, he is left with the question that the tradition had (in Barth's view) hastily addressed in the "terrible decree": God's determination of the rejected individual.<sup>261</sup> "It is the situation which involves the contrast between the irresistible divine grace of Jesus Christ and a hostility of man

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<sup>260</sup> II/2, 306.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., Preface, x.

towards this grace.”<sup>262</sup> Barth has rejected both extremes of universal salvation (*apokatastasis*) and the “terrible decree” of Reformed thought from the outset and has sought a more satisfying theological position throughout II/2.<sup>263</sup>

“The Church will not then preach an *apokatastasis*, nor will it preach a powerless grace of Jesus Christ or a wickedness of men which is too powerful for it. But without any weakening of the contrast, and also without any arbitrary dualism, it will preach the overwhelming power of grace and the weakness of human wickedness in face of it.”<sup>264</sup>

Barth’s broad dialectic between these two concepts finds its theological exegetical locus at the end of II/2 in the person of Judas Iscariot. On one level, Judas is the clearest Scriptural example of a rejected individual, given the strong language that Jesus uses to present him as condemned—“It would be better for him if he had not been born” (Mk. 14:21). Yet Barth has recognised several complexities from the account of his life and context. The narrative analysis begins by noting “the remarkable calm” with which the NT speaks of Judas, a tone that offsets the popular condemnation of Judas. Similarly, Barth considers the paltriness of the reward and the short prosaic descriptions of Judas’ role of betrayal, against the terrible sin and fate that befell him. Judas is presented in solidarity with the other 11 disciples who like Judas are “chosen” by Jesus. The variety in this description of Judas leaves Barth in tension. “The New Testament gives us no direct information about the outcome of this extraordinary ‘for and against.’ Really none! [...] It emphasises the unambiguous contrast on both sides.”<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 477.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 477.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 476.

Barth's interest towards Judas despite the strong words of Jesus condemning him raises questions about Barth's optimism toward the rejected individual.<sup>266</sup> Then the concentration upon the NT text's description of Judas emphasise Barth's intention to read Scripture along the grain.<sup>267</sup> The following analysis will seek to consider whether this conceptual analysis consists in a moral reading.

The concept of παραδίδωμι relates primarily and initially to the key act of Judas in God's elective purposes—Jesus' betrayal. "[T]he apostle Judas Iscariot is the special agent and exponent of this handing-over as it was decreed to be necessary in the counsel of God."<sup>268</sup> For Barth, this language of "handing over" or "betraying" (both legitimate translations of παραδίδωμι), "stands over the whole being and behaviour of Judas [...],"<sup>269</sup> and becomes a key point of analysis for Barth in analysing the import of Judas in theological terms.

This analysis is not a semantic word study so much as a theological conceptual study of key characters in the gospel narrative as the word παραδίδωμι happens to occur in proximity to them. It is used not only for Judas (Mt. 27:3) but also for the apostolate whose calling was to "hand down" the message (1 Cor. 15:3); God who "hands over" sinners over to judgement (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28); and Jesus, who was "handed over" (Rom. 4:25) and "hands over" himself (Gal. 2:20) at the cross. Barth's analysis then shows the way that Judas' act is participated in by each of these players, and so forms part of God's greater election purposes. In what is an already unusual form of exegetical interpretation, Barth chooses to convey this conceptual word study in the form of a chiasm, as follows.

A - Judas

B - The apostolate

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<sup>266</sup> Cf. Ford, *Barth's Interpretation*, 85-86.

<sup>267</sup> Long-form treatments of Barth's exegesis of Judas among secondary literature are scarce.

<sup>268</sup> II/2, 461.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 460.



C - God's judgement

D - Jesus

C' - God's judgement

B' - The apostolate

A' - Judas

This provides a dialectical flavour to the concepts that Barth discusses, and especially in relation to the central themes that Barth has argued in II/2 to this point. The repetition of the key ideas in a chiasm represents a structured form of theological dialectic, and the customary climactic central point, provides yet another counterpoint. That God's giving of Jesus and Jesus' self-giving form the central component of this chiasm, highlights the central theological concept of Jesus' own handing over that serves to reintroduce Barth's reconstructed subject and object of election. In this way, this conceptual analysis provides a fitting conclusion to his argument in II/2.

I will here analyse this chiasm from the inside out such that the implications for Judas are considered first, and the central emphasis of Jesus Christ in the chiasm is considered last.

#### A. Judas

Judas' rejection is to be seen as one of a broad range of rejections. Judas executed his apostleship in precisely the opposite way that it was intended that is rightly understood as satanic, and yet Judas was chosen (elected) as one of the twelve and played a crucial role in God's ultimate plan to defeat sin at Golgotha. The tension between God's grace and Judas' rejection is ultimately resolved in the narrative of Scripture in which the divine Yes has priority over the human No. This does not lessen the severity of the No, or seek to resolve the eternal destination of Judas Iscariot, but does inform its final meaning overall. It shows that God is good, and that God desires that all his

elect should hear the gospel and believe. God's determination or design for the rejected individual is "a rejected man elected."<sup>270</sup>

### B. The Apostolate

Judas' rejection is then viewed from the intersection of two different groups both of whom are preoccupied with preserving God's witness: the Jewish leadership who "handed down" the traditional teaching of the Law, and the apostolate who "handed down" the message of the crucified and risen Jesus. Since Barth has previously connected Paul as the mirror-image of Judas as an apostle, he reiterates this point and the narrative fulfilment that he will assert in the second half of the chiasm—that somehow in the narrative of God's good purposes Judas is justified in the apostle Paul. At this point, the connection with Paul enables Barth to suggest that Judas represents the preservation of God's rebellious people. This marks a point at which Judas is considered as representative and abstracted from his own personal fate. "[W]e are not asked to answer the question of Judas' personal justification in relation to any ideas or intentions of his own. On the contrary, we are asked to leave this question as one which can be answered only by the Judge who is competent on the matter."<sup>271</sup> Such preservation draws its authority and success from God himself, an idea that Barth extends to include the infallibility of divine witness in the "handing down" of the Scriptures. Issues relating to human agency and historical quandaries are relativised, since, "to make man powerless is the whole point of the act of apostolic tradition."<sup>272</sup> The death of Jesus seals the revelation of God in the traditions of Scripture, and renders futile the failed efforts of Judas' apostleship and in the Jewish leadership.

### C. God's Judgement

Another use of παραδίδωμι evident in Scripture relates to the "handing over" in judgement; both the divine handing over of sinners (in Rom. 1), and the Church's handing over of unrepentant sinners to Satan (in 1 Cor. 5). It appears in each of these cases

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<sup>270</sup> II/2, 506.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 484.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 501.

that the purifying element in these punitive activities lie in the sins themselves such that “handing over” involves surrendering sinners to their sin, and restoration of the sinner as the aim of the disciplinary action. Barth’s privative view of sin and judgement allows him to emphasise the asymmetry of God’s love and judgement. God’s Yes is greater than his No, and “the power of Satan is limited by the power of God.” On the other side of the chiasm in light of Jesus, it is clear that the fate of anyone “handed over” in judgement is never worse than that of Jesus’ experience of God’s judgement, and the restorative nature of Jesus’ work suggest to Barth that we cannot conclude that anyone is ultimately rejected: “In faith in Jesus Christ we cannot consider any of those who are handed over by God as lost. We know of none whom God has wholly and exclusively abandoned to himself. We know only of One who was abandoned in this way, only of One who was lost. This One is Jesus Christ.”<sup>273</sup>

#### D. Jesus

The section dedicated to Jesus is understandably the longest, since he forms the central component and pivot-point of the chiasm and the key emphasis of Barth’s argument in II/2. Everything is understood in its light, and its emphasis resembles the typology of Barth’s strong Christocentrism. “It is impossible to interpret it apart from its connexion with this event.”<sup>274</sup> Three particular passages place the essential use of παραδίδωμι in Jesus’ free offering up of himself: Romans 8:29-39, Gal. 2:20 and then Eph. 5:1, 25, demonstrating again an exegetical emphasis of his conceptual analysis. “The real and original handing-over of Jesus is clearly the fact that the Word became flesh,” such that, “[h]e wills His own handing-over. He deals with Himself as Judas dealt with Jesus.”<sup>275</sup> Unsurprisingly, the theme that Barth develops from these three passages is the theme of God’s love. God acts divinely in his love aimed at man whose life is opposed to him. God who is both the offended and the accuser, employs this freedom according to His good-pleasure in such a way that he suffered that which man ought to

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 496.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 489, 491.

have suffered. “Everything positive that Christ does for man, so that it is a reality for man in Him, and effective by faith in Him, is rooted and grounded in the fact that Christ first gave Himself for man, or, as in Rom. 8, was handed over by God for man.”<sup>276</sup> In this way, the dialectic of divine grace finds its resolution in the act of God in Jesus Christ.

The form of Barth’s conceptual argument around παραδίδωμι is, without a doubt, unusual. McGlasson remarks, “[t]o my knowledge, no other expositor, ancient or modern, has used this word and concept to make the exegetical points that Barth makes.”<sup>277</sup> While the argument’s purpose is clear in drawing major themes of II/2 back into play, its content significantly overlaps with the theologically engaged Scriptural narrative of Judas that Barth has just presented. It is not quite a word-study, nor a thematic study, but leverages the coincidental co-location of the word παραδίδωμι with themes that Barth seeks to discuss. Although he does not reflect upon how this represents a legitimate reading of Scripture, it is clear that Barth considers it a divinely intended, and with no regard for human authorial intent. But although unusual, it is also a form of argument that is clearly theological exegetical as it attempts to draw together theological concepts with the text of Scripture.

The priority that Barth here provides to the theme of divine favour raises questions about the inevitability of *apokatastasis* in II/2, and suggests to some that Barth’s dialectic ultimately yields a synthesis, despite Barth’s explicit rejection of the theological position. McCormack admits, “it is hard to imagine a more solid basis for a final reconciliation of all things than the one Barth has laid in his doctrine of election and reprobation.”<sup>278</sup> McCormack also asserts that Barth’s explicit rejection of the *apokatastasis* must be taken seriously as “not merely rhetorical,” and as a statement

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>277</sup> McGlasson, 143.

<sup>278</sup> McCormack, B.L., 2011. ‘So That He May Be Merciful to All: Karl Barth and the Problem of Universalism’, McCormack, Bruce L., ed., in *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 246.

about the reality of Jesus. “[U]niversal salvation is something for which we ought to hope and pray but it is not something we can teach.”<sup>279</sup>

However one accepts Barth’s denial of *apokatastasis*, his clear purpose has been to preserve the integrity of God’s freedom in its dialectical relationship with human freedom. Barth’s concluding words in II/2 and God’s determination for the rejected individual further emphasise this point:

“The answer can only be as follows. He wills that he too should hear the Gospel, and with it the promise of his election. He wills, then, that this Gospel should be proclaimed to him. He wills that he should appropriate and live by the hope which is given him in the Gospel. He wills that the rejected should believe, and that as a believer he should become a rejected man elected. The rejected as such has no independent existence in the presence of God. He is not determined by God merely to be rejected. He is determined to hear and say that he is a rejected man elected.”<sup>280</sup>

That Barth lands on this note demonstrates a reticence in his theological dialectic. He affirms God’s determination of the gospel truth for all individuals and he affirms what is true about the elect of the NT—that they are “rejected men elected.” He is also careful to sit loose to the final judgement of God such that what “God determines” for the individual is “the divine will and intention”—God’s intention of desire rather than his plan. On this logic it is not contradictory to place the theological coherence of God’s gracious purposes in Christ against the particular betrayal of his disciple. Or in terms of Barth’s *Realdialektik*, “a function of the tension between

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 247, 248.

<sup>280</sup> II/2, 506

history and eschatology, between time and eternity, between certitudes and mysteries, between what may be said with great definiteness and what must finally be left open-ended and unresolved.<sup>281</sup>

Although Barth's dialectical method (*Denkform*) has demonstrated a sensitivity to the text, a criticism derives from those texts that Barth's analysis omits. "[D]oes [Barth] not owe it to us to inform us that there is a clear collision, rather than attempting a coherent theological interpretation of Scripture that skips over texts that say something different from what he says in his own constructive theology?"<sup>282</sup> Williams has in mind here the Scripture's narrow definition of election in Acts 14:38, which stands at odds with Barth's argument, but it could also extend to a variety of Scriptural themes of God's eschatological judgement that ostensibly stand at odds with Barth's bias.<sup>283</sup>

This criticism could extend to Barth's one-sided exegesis of Judas. It is striking that Barth can say that there is nothing condemning Judas in light of Jesus' direct statement to the contrary. "The two grim New Testament versions of Judas' death clearly make no attempt to remove in this way the sting of finality from Judas' fate."<sup>284</sup> Although Barth articulates his consciousness that his argument is already too long, the omissions of counter-balancing NT texts serves to undermine his exegesis, present a one-sided argument, and suggest to his critics that he, "tries to know more of God's purposes than can be elicited from the story," and so, "does violence to [Scripture's] realism."<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> McCormack, 'So That He May Be Merciful to All', 229-230.

<sup>282</sup> Stephen N. Williams, *The Election of Grace: A Riddle without a Resolution?* (Eerdmans, 2015), 200.

<sup>283</sup> E.g. Jn. 5:28-29; 2 Thess. 1:8-10; Lk. 16:26.

<sup>284</sup> Ford, *Barth's Interpretation*, 85.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

### 5.3. Conclusion

That Barth employs a dialectical form of theological exegesis is appropriate for drawing theological conclusions to key tensions in Scripture with reticence (appropriate to the mystery of God) and speculation (appropriately qualified). It is similarly not inappropriate for Barth's conclusion to remain uncertain in order to preserve the mystery of God's freedom. In this sense, dialectic is a consummate theological exegetical tool because it seeks to treat the text of Scripture carefully while at the same time search for the theological contextual meaning.

But while Barth's conclusion to his argument in II/2 contains elements of dialectic's reticence and speculation, the various contrary Scriptures that he omits, and his abstraction from the particularity of Scripture is misleading and risks damaging the text of Scripture. It is particularly striking that Barth commits so much space to speculation around the fate of Judas, when his foundational themes in §§32-33 received comparatively little exegetical consideration. Perhaps the greatest risk of Barth's speculation is that it amounts to an obstinate refusal to accept what Scripture has stated plainly. Although Barth has shown a sensitivity to Scripture, his consideration of Judas ventures into a speculation that is difficult to square with a moral reading of Scripture.

Much like juxtaposition, dialectic is a theological exegetical tool in that it engages the meaning of texts of Scripture in the conviction (or theology) that scripture interprets scripture and in that its aim is to draw scripture in relation to theology. That Barth's juxtaposition of Eph. 1:4 and John 1:1-2 might have been described as a form of dialectic suggests that there is arguably little difference between the two. For the purposes of this study, however, what sets them apart is the place and function that they perform in Barth's argument. He used dialectic not to construct a theological foundation, so much as taper off a theological conclusion. If the goal of juxtaposition is establishing fundamentals, the goal of dialectic is admitting uncertainty. However, one does wonder what principle enabled Barth to juxtapose one set of passages, and employ a sensitive dialectic to another.

## Chapter 6

What I have argued in this dissertation is that each of the four forms considered are legitimate theological exegetical tools that Barth employs for providing moral readings along the grain of Scripture. Barth employs these tools to progress his theological argumentation in II/2 on the basis of Scripture, even if the mechanics of his exegetical argumentation raises questions about the imposition of various concepts in his theological exegesis.

The diversity of these tools presents a challenge to those interpreters of Barth in the habit of assimilating Barth's exegetical method into a single construal of Scripture. David Ford and others in the Yale School prefer the language of *narrative* for Barth's construal of Scripture, awkwardly enveloping Barth's dialectical method. Conversely, Bruce McCormack's fundamental description of Barth's theology as dialectical emphasises Barth's use of *narrative*. It is evident from this study that too quickly assimilating these tools together, whether dialectic is subsumed or subordinated to narrative or typology, or vice versa, risks misconstruing Barth's use of Scripture. A more complex reading of II/2 Barth suggests that he seems to employ different theological exegetical tools to suit the various stages of his argument.

A broad foundationalism and logic to Barth's argument evident in these different stages contradicts the common sentiment that Barth's writing is disorganised, haphazard (sermonic or symphonic) in nature, even if this may remain true at certain points of his lower level argumentation. Barth's argument is not driven by a system—



“not a system but a Name”<sup>286</sup>—but this is not to say that it lacks a basic logic. His argument progresses by means of the various forms of theological exegetical argumentation, selected to suit the stage of his argument. Barth’s *narrative* exegesis assists in his theological framing of his discussion, his *juxtapositional* exegesis assists in the development of his election hermeneutic that God’s decision simply is Jesus Christ. His *typological* exegesis enabled Barth to extend his Christology to the subsidiary objects of election (the community and the individual). Finally, Barth’s argument drew to a close with the sensitivity and creativity of his *dialectical* method.

While these forms are distinct, they also interrelate and overlap in the course of the entire argument in II/2. For example, there are similarities between juxtaposition and dialectic which are both suited to the logic and propositions of the epistles and discourse-heavy text. Typology and narrative are also similar given that they both derive from the broad narrative of Scripture that finds its centre in Christ. Then while Barth’s use of narrative has clear typological components, since Jesus sits at the centre of the narrative, not every instance of typology derives from a narrative. Similarly, while juxtaposition and dialectic alternate logically between different texts, Barth juxtaposes texts together for theological construction, while he dialectically opposes texts and ideas to ensure that the texts are not synthesised so that the meaning of the text is preserved.

What makes each of these tools legitimate is that they anticipate a shape of Scripture, which is informed by theology so that theology is derived from Scripture. At its most morally upright, Barth’s theological exegesis searches for the greater theological context of Scripture, both relation to the canonical *context* of the Word of God, and the *content* of the Word of God—Jesus Christ. It exhibits a willingness and determination to interpret Scripture with Scripture before other forms of authority. It is not unaware of other contextual authorities, and these need not be rivals in providing context (tradition, pragmatics, philosophical and theological systems of

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<sup>286</sup> Hunsinger, *Thy Word*, xix.

thought). Theological concepts form an important component of Barth's theological exegesis, as there is no alternative if Scripture is to be read in the context of a relationally understood faith-engaged theology. To read Scripture in context of the broad contours of Scripture is to read Scripture "along the grain."

It is also evident from our analysis that these tools left Barth at some risk of imposing a foreign theology onto the text. A reading of Scripture along the grain must also consider its theological context, and such a risk is therefore inevitable. Of course, an alternative risks lie in the (often unrecognised) speculative elements of philosophy, or textual, literary, source, or historical-critical methods. If any such speculation is denied, it amounts to self-deceit, but a speculation is properly embraced, it is does so with the hope that true objectivity is found there. "For those who would follow Barth, [...] true objectivity comes in God's gift of Christian freedom, which crosses Lessing's famous 'ugly, wide ditch' of historical distance and enables the interpreter to enter lovingly into the text's subject matter."<sup>287</sup> The form of Karl Barth's argument in II/2 demonstrates that he is Reformed at heart in his insistence in the priority of Scripture, and that Scripture then interprets Scripture.

As I have also shown here, there are points at which it is unclear that the theological concepts that Barth employs properly arise from the theological context of Scripture. The analysis has not been comprehensive enough to be conclusive, but it has hinted that, at various points, the power of Barth's argument in II/2 questionably derives from his exegesis of Scripture so much as Barth's own hermeneutical frame, or the frame of his theological argumentation. In the first stage of his argument, his exegesis is thin and under-argued. In the second stage, in the critical formation of his Christocentric election hermeneutic, his argumentation is circular, and relies upon the text of Scripture minimally. In the third stage of his argument, the weakness of his Christocentric conception of double predestination is apparent in the way that Scripture bends under its application. Finally, in the closing stage of his

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<sup>287</sup> Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 20.

argument, Barth appears to downplay the strength of Scripture's witness to God's judgement outside of Christ. The result of this analysis is that while *CD II/2* consists in valid forms of theological exegesis, and contains many valuable theological insights, it also risks theological assumptions and forced conclusions.

His use of theological concepts may be forced at points but this does not in itself constitute a failure to read Scripture along the grain. Although the agency that Barth provides to Scripture in *II/2* is difficult to quantify, it is not nothing. If *II/2* consisted in simple restatement of his theological presuppositions and hermeneutical assumptions, then *II/2* would not be considered the place at which his mature Christology is established. Barth's insistence to "let the Bible itself speak" in *II/2* developed the Christology that would remain a hallmark of his theology. The mechanics of Barth's theological exegesis extend beyond his citation of Scripture, and if his exegesis appears under-argued from Scripture, it is because his own conceptual imagination for biblical interpretation combined with a host historical theologians, ancient and modern.

Barth therefore presents a form of theological exegetical argumentation in *II/2* in which he "lets the Bible itself speak." His argument derives from a moral reading of Scripture, with a dynamic suite of tools employed that suit and progress each stage. As John Webster puts it, Barth's argumentation, "is best read as a set of conceptual variations upon scriptural texts and themes, sometimes explicitly tied to exegesis, sometimes more loose and direct, but always attempting to indicate what is already proclaimed in the prophetic and apostolic witness."<sup>288</sup> If it is true that there are points at which, "it is hard to avoid the conclusion that some of the material [Barth] considers is commandeered too quickly toward his own dogmatic ends,"<sup>289</sup> the form of Barth's theological exegesis deserves the sustained reflection that his legacy has

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<sup>288</sup> Webster, 'Karl Barth', in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Baker Academic, 2005), 83.

<sup>289</sup> Gibson, 'The Answering Speech of Men', 291.

received. This resonates with Daniel Treier's conclusion, that, "Barth is neither the sole model nor a static exemplar, but he has provided contemporary inspiration for theological exegesis."<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 18.

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