Theology as Theanthropology: Barth's Theology of Existence in Its Existentialist Context

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When we look back to fifty years ago, it is easy to forget how different the theological scene was at the time Karl Barth gave his Warfield Lectures in 1962. That same year, Paul Tillich moved from Harvard to Chicago, and his *Systematic Theology* was a major topic of conversation (two volumes were already published and the third appeared in 1963). Friedrich Gogarten had been a visiting professor at Drew University (1957-58) and later was a visiting professor at the Perkins School of Theology (1966-67).[1] On May 22, 1964, a *Time* magazine article was to make this statement: "Dr. Rudolf Bultmann's Marburg Disciples . . . dominate German theology the way the Russians rule chess."[2] Barth was not pleased with this description. He was interviewed on May 30 of that year by the American evangelical luminary Carl F. H. Henry, who was making a tour through Europe to gather thoughts about the contemporary state of theology. Barth remarked that the *Time* article had gone too far. Those in the Bultmann school, he said, "are divided among themselves," and Bultmann himself "has become more or less silent."[3]

1. During the latter professorship, *Time* published an article about him, "Prophet of the Future God" (Dec. 16, 1966), p. 75.

2. "An Existential Way of Reading the Bible," *Time* (May 22, 1964), p. 86.

3. Karl Barth, *Gespräche 1964-1968*, ed. Eberhard Busch, Gesamtausgabe IV (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971), p. 173. Barth's comment was accurate: Bultmann and his students were indeed divided over questions related to the historical Jesus and apocalypticism, and in the same year as Barth's 1964 interview, after several years of debating with his students, Bultmann mostly ceased his involvement in academic conversation.

Note: Page references to *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie* and to its English translation, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, will be cited parenthetically, with the German translation first and the English second. All translations from the German throughout this chapter are my own, unless explicitly noted otherwise.

Barth's lecture tour in the United States has to be seen, therefore, as occurring within an "existentialist" context. The exaggerated comments in the media notwithstanding, the scholarly attention was indeed focused on the *Bultmannschule*.[4] This was not lost on Barth. Though he was never one to name his interlocutors explicitly, he leaves clues throughout his texts to indicate the larger polemical setting. This occurs notably in *Church Dogmatics* IV. In the preface to *CD* IV/1 (1953), Barth says: "I have found myself throughout in an intensive, although for the most part quiet, conversation with Rudolf Bultmann."[5]

The argument of this chapter is that his introduction to evangelical (i.e., reformational) theology has to be read against the background of this wider historical and theological context.[6] A key piece of evidence in support of this argument can be found later in that same interview with Carl Henry. Barth refers to the work of Bishop John Robinson, which he understands as part of Bultmann's school, as a "repetition of Feuerbach and of a theology that is identical with a certain kind of anthropology." He then says: "The serious question for the future of theology is this: Is there a theology that is not anthropological but rather 'theanthropological,' grounded solely on the word of God in Jesus Christ?"[7] Barth's lectures on evangelical theology seek to provide an affirmative answer to this very question. At the end of his introductory comment, he remarks that what makes theology properly evangelical is the fact that it is best described as an instance of "theanthropology," in contrast to "anthropotheology," which characterized the theological liberalism that he opposed (18/12).

4. I speak of the *Bultmannschule* or of Marburg synecdochically to refer to the whole group of existentialist theologians, including someone like Tillich — though this is only because Tillich was connected to Bultmann in Barth's mind and is explicitly mentioned by Barth in *Evangelical Theology*. Tillich otherwise represents a distinct approach to theology that should not be conflated with the specific concerns of the Marburg school. Bultmann is obviously the figure that looms largest in Barth's consciousness, and Bultmann's theology represents for Barth a kind of nodal point connecting all the other existentialists. For this reason I will use references to Bultmann as references to the entire school of thought that Barth opposes.

5. *KD* IV/1, p. i/ix.

6. Karl Barth, *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie* (Zürich: EVZ, 1962); cf. Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, 1963).

7. Barth, *Gespräche 1964-1968*, p. 174.

Barth's advocacy of theology as theanthropology constitutes his attempt to reconceive the existentialist program on a proper dogmatic grounding. By locating the existence of the human in correspondence to the existence of Jesus Christ, he aims to be more truly existential than the existentialists. The existentiality of human beings is grounded in the *existentiality of God.* Barth's theanthropology is not a rejection of existentialism so much as its expropriation. Barth commandeers the insights of the Bultmann school in order to serve different theological ends. As we will see, Barth carried out this commandeering of Bultmannian anthropotheology as part of his missionary account of human vocation and existence. And yet it is this very emphasis on mission that calls into question the sharp bifurcation between theanthropology and anthropotheology.

Anthropotheology

1. References to the existentialist theologians appear throughout the text of *Evangelical Theology.* Some are explicit. The lecture on faith defines evangelical faith in opposition to "demythologizing procedures" that "overlook and even delete" controversial articles of traditional Christian belief (116/103). In his lecture on temptation, Barth gives a list of examples of the way theology is "reprehensible and open to temptation" to the extent that it is "*theoretical* work" (154/140). The list includes "a little demythologizing in Marburg and a little *Church Dogmatics* in Basel"; but it also includes a reference to the second quest for the historical Jesus by Bultmann's students, as well as a reference to Paul Tillich's concept of the "God above God" from *The Courage to Be* (155/141).[8] Barth also says in his lecture on solitude that Tillich's attempt at a "philosophical theology" is naively "paradisiacal" (125-26/112-14), and in the chapter on doubt he parenthetically expresses a desire for someone to whisper to Tillich that there is "no justification for doubt" (144/131). He mentions both Bultmann and Ernst Fuchs by name in another parenthetical comment about a "young man from Germany," who told Barth to burn his books, along with those of some other major theologians of the time (156/142). Barth indirectly refers to Fuchs near the end of the lecture on study, when he refers to the latter's concept of "speech-event" *(Sprachereignis)* as "bombastic" and inappropriately viewed as internal to the task of

8. See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 186-90.

exegesis and dogmatics (198/182).[9] This is an important point, and I will return to it later.

There are also more indirect and oblique references to the Marburg school. In the discussion of biblical exegesis in his lecture on theological study, Barth affirms two key aspects of Bultmann's position: (a) the biblical texts are subject to historical-critical scrutiny, while (b) these texts are "purely *kerygmatic* and they can be appropriately interpreted only as such," and again, these texts "are only appropriately explained through a constant consideration of their kerygmatic character" (192-93/176-77). A few lines later he asks about the "form" *(Gestalt)* and the "concrete statements" in which the prophetic-apostolic witness will come to expression within the community, and he acknowledges this as an inquiry into the problem of the "hermeneutical circle" (193-94/178). However, these slight affirmations of Bultmann are qualified by other references. The lecture on "the witnesses" includes a rejection of the claim that "the exegetical-theological task consists in the translation of the biblical statements from the language of a past time into that of modern humanity" (43/35). This entire passage is the clearest evidence that Barth is engaged in an indirect debate with the Bultmann school. Barth makes this plain when he says that translation presupposes that the content and meaning of the biblical text is self-evident and then connects translation with the secondary question, "How shall I say it to my children?" (43-44/35). He takes up both of these points almost word for word from his 1952 pamphlet on Bultmann.[10]

Finally, we should note that in 1957, Bultmann published a famous essay asking, "Is presuppositionless [*voraussetzungslose*] exegesis possible?"[11] At the end of the lecture on the Spirit — the last of the five lectures he gave at both Chicago and Princeton — Barth declares that Protestant theology is rich in its total poverty and is "supported and upheld" in its "total *presuppositionlessness*" (68/58). The dialectical response of yes and no within these lectures on evan-

9. In his classic work *Gottes Sein ist im Werden,* Eberhard Jüngel takes Barth to task for this dismissal of Fuchs. Jüngel argues, in a long and creative footnote, that Barth's theology of Christ's prophetic office already does the work that Fuchs assigns to the concept of *Sprachereignis,* and thus there is no reason for him to reject the term. See Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth; A Paraphrase,* trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 14, n. 1.

10. Karl Barth, *Rudolf Bultmann: Ein Versuch, ihn zu verstehen* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1952), pp. 7-8.

11. Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze,* 4 vols. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1933-65), 3:142-50.

gelical theology is representative of Barth's relationship with the Bultmann school more generally.

2. To get a better sense of Barth's assessment of the existentialists during this period of time, we need to look at the conversations recorded in the *Gespräche* of 1959-1968. Many of the interviews deal with the Bultmann school in one form or another. A key exchange occurs in his interview with a group of Protestant booksellers on June 24, 1962, about a month after he had returned from his trip to the United States.[12] The third question asked Barth whether he and Bultmann had come to an agreement. Barth then identified four basic areas in which they agreed. First, he said, they both understand the task of theology to consist in the interpretation of the Bible. Second, as I have pointed out already on the basis of *Evangelical Theology,* they both agreed on the essentially kerygmatic nature of the biblical text:

> We are also in agreement insofar as we believe to hear in the Bible of the Old and especially of the New Testament not only news from a distant time, but a *message,* a *proclamation.* Bultmann, who is a great scholar, likes to use a foreign word and call it: the "kerygma." So, in this point we are also in agreement: there is a kerygma in the Bible. And that is really a lot, that the Bible is for us not just another book, but one in which a voice resounds and calls us. (p. 362)

Third, the two of them agree on the necessity of reading the Bible in a "historical-critical" way. The kerygmatic character of the text does not compete with the fact that, as Barth puts it, the Bible is "a book full of documents of a particular time, along with all that that means"(p. 362). Hence his affirmation of the hermeneutical circle, as already noted. Fourth: "We both are of the opinion that a truth and reality encounter us in the Bible . . . that is infinitely bigger than anything that we make of it, understand, and explicate — in other words, that we ever again stand there before a *mystery* to which one cannot devote enough attention ever anew" (p. 363).

These are significant points of agreement. If only more Barthians were as sympathetic toward Bultmann as Barth himself was, theology today might look rather different.

12. Karl Barth, *Gespräche 1959-1962,* ed. Eberhard Busch, Gesamtausgabe IV (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1995), pp. 335-80. English quotations are taken from an unpublished translation by John Burgess, with occasional minor revisions. Hereafter, page references to this work appear in parentheses in the text.

3. Barth goes on to identify two points of disagreement, and these are instructive for understanding his later theological writings within their broadly existentialist context.[13] We can identify these as (a) the problem of hermeneutics and (b) the nature of faith.[14] Regarding the first point, Barth says:

> According to Bultmann, in order to read the Bible correctly, we first have to be in agreement about our understanding of humanity — to express it in a scholarly way, about a particular anthropology. . . . Bultmann would say that you first have to sit down and study anthropology. And you can do that best by studying Heidegger, for he has the right anthropology for our time. In his school of thought you can learn an existentialist ontology, and then you know who the human person is. You put on these glasses when you open the New Testament and with the help of this existentialist philosophy can understand the New Testament, but otherwise not. To that, I say: no, no, not *that!* It's not a matter of first preparing a set of glasses with which to read the Bible! Rather, the Bible itself is written in such large letters that, even if you are half blind, you can roughly see what is going on. And so I let the Bible tell me not only who God is but also who the human person is. I don't have to bring something to the Bible, but rather I let something from the Bible come to me. That is the principal difference. Nothing else is as important as that. You could also say that [it has to do with] the relationship of philosophy and theology. I would like to have a theology that stands entirely on its own feet, although I also have a little bit of philosophy somewhere in my head. [I would like] philosophy to be subordinate to theology, and theology to the voice of God from Holy Scripture. In this matter we are not in agreement. (pp. 363-64)

There is much here that warrants attention. Barth's basic disagreement is vintage Barthian territory: the sovereign freedom of God's word with respect to all other human discourses and sources of knowledge. As he puts it later in the same interview, "[Bultmann] won't give the Word of God its freedom, but rather believes that he must help out the Word of God with a philosophy" (p. 369). Here we see a fuller description of what Barth means by the "total

13. He actually identifies three — anthropology, self-understanding, and faith; but two of them, the emphasis on one's self-understanding and the emphasis on faith, are the same problem. For Bultmann, faith is simply a new *Selbstverständnis.* We have to remember, of course, that this is from an extemporaneous conversation, not a finely tuned lecture.

14. I have chosen these descriptions intentionally. "The Problem of Hermeneutics" is the title of Bultmann's important 1950 essay, which presents his most pointed critique of Barth. *The Nature* [or *Essence*] *of Faith* is the name of Gerhard Ebeling's 1959 book.

presuppositionlessness" of Christian theology. God does not depend on some prior "point of connection" [*Anknüpfungspunkt*] in order to communicate with us. Revelation is not bound to language, but rather language is taken up by revelation. These are common motifs in Barth's work. They serve to highlight the centrality of Jesus Christ in his saving significance for all we say and do regarding God, the world, and ourselves.

Notice, however, the tension between Barth's statements of agreement and disagreement. His third point of agreement with Bultmann is the acceptance of the historical-critical method as a presupposition for interpreting Scripture. The Bible certainly does not tell Barth to read the text this way. It is a perspective rooted in modern scientific and philosophical developments. Has not Barth already prepared, or at least accepted, a "set of glasses with which to read the Bible"? Does the sovereignty of God's word and the independence of theology require, for example, the affirmation of a geocentric cosmology or a six-day creation? No, of course not, but those are too easy. The question is: Once we start down that hermeneutical path — as Barth and Bultmann both agree that we must — where do we reach our limit? Is it not an arbitrary decision to let certain passages be subject to historical scrutiny while preserving others from the same treatment? And is it not problematic to accuse Bultmann of subordinating the text to an alien interpretive lens, when one has already accepted such a lens for oneself?[15] Instead of an "either-or," is it not rather a

15. Moreover, it is Bultmann's consistent position that philosophy is subordinate to theology. A well-known letter he wrote to Barth on June 8, 1928, makes this point abundantly clear. This letter finds Bultmann offering a word of friendly critique to Barth regarding the latter's Münster dogmatics, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*. Bultmann's problem was that Barth did not subject the traditional dogmatic conceptuality to a thoroughgoing criticism in light of contemporary philosophy, with the result that his dogmatics naively assumes a philosophical framework that is no longer meaningful. According to Bultmann, "If the critical work of philosophy, which is ongoing and which is especially now being done with renewed awareness and radicality, is ignored, the result is that dogmatics works with the uncritically adopted concepts of an old ontology. This is what happens in your case. It is true that dogmatics should have nothing to do with a philosophy insofar as it is systematic; but it is also true that it must learn from a philosophy that is a critical (ontological) inquiry. For only then does theology remain free and make use of philosophy as the *ancilla theologiae* [handmaiden of theology]; otherwise it becomes the maid [*Magd*] and philosophy the mistress [*Herrin*]. *Tertium non datur:* either maid or mistress" (Rudolf Bultmann to Karl Barth, June 8, 1928, *Barth-Bultmann Briefwechsel 1911-1966*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, 2nd ed., Gesamtausgabe V [Zürich: TVZ, 1994], p. 82).

Bruce McCormack agrees that "Bultmann certainly had a point," but "what Bultmann was really calling on Barth to do was to abandon completely traditional concepts and to replace them with concepts which had been 'purified' by existential philosophy. . . . Bultmann here displayed a blind-spot of his own. In his conviction that dogmatics could make use of existentialist categories alone, Bultmann had, in fact, transgressed his own rule. He had made theology the servant of existentialist philosophy, for it was from that quarter that he derived the content of his leading theological concepts" (Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], p. 400). In asking whether Bultmann really "transgressed his own rule," as McCormack claims, Christophe Chalamet responds: "I do not think so. Such an opinion does not take into account the dialectic between philosophy and theology, especially the paradox that it is only when theology profits from philosophy's critical inquiry that philosophy becomes, in fact, a servant of theology. Bultmann never 'made theology the servant of existentialist philosophy,' but quite the opposite. He used this philosophy for his own theological purpose." Chalamet goes on to claim that Bultmann and the early Barth share the same relationship between theology and philosophy: "In Bultmann's theology, the critical side is the aspect of the word or phrase, which anyone can understand, while the positive side expresses the event, which only faith perceives. Philosophy belongs exclusively to the critical side. But this critical side is not what theology is all about! Theology leads to the other side, to the Gospel, which is beyond the reach of philosophy" (Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann* [Zürich: TVZ, 2005], p. 213).

My own judgment is that Chalamet's position is the correct one. McCormack's position — which, for the record, is not one that I think he would continue to hold today — is belied by the fact that Bultmann's theology makes a clear differentiation between the *content* of theology and its *form*. The fact that theology makes use of philosophical concepts does not necessarily mean that theology derives their content from the philosophical uses to which they have been put. Of course, it remains a continual danger that their philosophical content will in fact have decisive and problematic ramifications for theology, but then it is precisely the aim of Bultmann's program of demythologizing continually to interrogate this influence and to ensure that the real scandal of the gospel is never obscured by the conceptualities in which it is clothed. In my view, as I explain in more detail below, Barth's own focus on the *object* of theology, over against any sustained attention to the cultural, historical, and philosophical context of theology's human subject, actually opens him up to the very dangers that he sought to forestall. Put simply, Bultmann's epistolary criticisms are, on the whole, correct, and it remains the challenge of post-Barthian theology today to take up Barth's profound insights in a way that does more justice to Bultmann's concerns.

question of degree? The question is not *whether* an alien lens is to be used, but rather *which* lens and *to what extent*. But to answer such questions requires sustained reflection on precisely the hermeneutical issues that Barth largely avoids in his later years.

Now is not the time to adjudicate this dispute between Barth and Bultmann. It must suffice to note that both theologians place the same limit on every external lens — the limit of soteriology. That is to say, what stands over and above every extrabiblical framework and critical perspective is the decisive truth of God's mercy and grace freely bestowed upon sinful human beings. *This* is the kerygmatic essence of Holy Scripture; this is what Barth refers to when he says that he turns to the Bible to discover the *truth* about God and humanity.

What he discovers there is neither deity nor humanity in the abstract, but the particular God who saves and the particular human person of Jesus in whom we are saved. Every philosophical wave crashes to ruin against the levee of this gospel. What too often goes unnoticed is that God's saving work in Christ is precisely where Bultmann himself places the critical theological limit on Heidegger and every other philosopher.[16] Bultmann is quite clear, especially in his letters to Barth, that philosophy is always subordinate to theology. Jesus Christ, who speaks to us in the kerygma, forms the normative criterion for the appropriation of philosophical and anthropological insights. What differentiates Barth from Bultmann is thus not a *formal* description of the relationship between theology and philosophy, but the material *content* of the kerygma itself. Soteriology, not anthropology or philosophy, is the actual point of divergence, something that becomes quite evident in their dispute in the 1950s over the relationship between Adam and Christ.[17] This issue also comes out in Barth's description of the second area of disagreement.

Because Bultmann begins with anthropology, according to Barth, what he discovers in Scripture is nothing more than a certain "self-understanding" *(Selbstverständnis)*. The witness of the apostles, says Barth, is reduced to "the expression of their self-understanding, their self-explanation, their self-explication. To that, I clearly say again, No! What we find in the New Testament are not explications of human beings about themselves but rather . . . *answers* [*Antworten*] that people give to what has been *addressed* [*Anreden*] to them from God" (*Gespräche 1959-1962*, p. 364). Barth mistakenly assumes here that Bultmann's account of faith as self-understanding means that faith is simply an inward reflection on oneself, a theologically dubious exercise in pious solipsism.[18] Existentialist theology overemphasizes the faith of the individual.

16. Bultmann expresses this rejection of Heidegger on many occasions. For a representative example, take the following passage from the posthumously published lectures on theology that he delivered between 1926 and 1936: "Both philosophy and faith have knowledge about the limits of humanity. . . . The difference is that faith denies that a person can achieve authenticity in a death-preparing resolve in the situation. . . . God wills to have the person otherwise. *Faith* cannot possibly get involved here in discussion with *philosophy*. . . . Faith can judge the choice of philosophical existence only as an act of the self-substantiating freedom of the person who denies being bound to God" (Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1984], p. 89).

17. Cf. Karl Barth, *Christus und Adam nach Röm. 5: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Menschen und der Menschheit* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1952); Rudolf Bultmann, "Adam und Christus nach Römer 5 [1959]," in *Exegetica: Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), pp. 424-44.

18. Bultmann actually defines faith (precisely *as* self-understanding) as "being the object of the divine activity [*Gegenstand des göttlichen Tuns*] and being oneself summoned to act" (Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, p. 129, n. 67). Eberhard Jüngel rightly speaks of "the passivity of faith" in Bultmann's theology, in which "the passivity of receiving is identical with the act [*Tat*] of decision." Consequently, "the understanding-of-oneself [*Sich-selbst-Verstehen*] that faith implies is the exact opposite of a dwelling-on-oneself [*Bei-sich-selbst-Verweilens*]." See Eberhard Jüngel, *Glauben und Verstehen: Zum Theologiebegriff Rudolf Bultmanns* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1985), pp. 56-59. Faith, for Bultmann, is therefore inherently *ec-centric*: it is an *encounter* with and an obedient *response* to the God who confronts us in Jesus Christ and in whom we come to understand ourselves anew.

"The rest of the world strangely steps into the shadows," Barth adds, and for this reason, "Rudolf Bultmann is a secret pietist. I can't help it — that's what he is" (p. 365). If the first point was that Bultmann is too close to the Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants who engage in natural theology, the second point is that he is too close to the pietists who, Barth says, "wish to get into heaven" and who therefore ignore the world around them. This is a common criticism of Bultmann, who is frequently charged with having an apolitical gospel (e.g., Dorothee Sölle)[19] and engaging in a theology of individualistic "religion," as opposed to something more robustly sociopolitical, such as Jürgen Moltmann's "theology of hope" or Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity."[20]

Barth's focus on faith as a central aspect of his divergence from Bultmann makes explicit what is only implicit in his lectures on evangelical theology. The chapter on faith begins with four "delimitations" that reflect Barth's mixture of agreement and disagreement with the Marburg school. The second of these delimitations expresses his agreement by rejecting the notion of faith as being the "assent to certain propositions and doctrines" and by affirming Wilhelm Herrmann's protest against every *sacrificium intellectus* (109-10/98).[21] The fourth delimitation, however, identifies his disagreement in a way that com-

19. Cf. Dorothee Sölle, *Politische Theologie: Auseinandersetzung mit Rudolf Bultmann* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1971).

20. As an all-too-typical example, Russell W. Palmer describes Bultmann's theology as "a new form of pietism, locating faith in what Bonhoeffer calls the sphere of personal inwardness, which is one of the essential features of religion" (Palmer, "Demythologizing and Non-Religious Interpretation: A Comparison of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer," *Iliff Review* 31, no. 2 (1974): 3-15; quotation from p. 12.

21. Bultmann took up the Herrmannian mantle of protesting against a *sacrificium intellectus* in theology and made that central to his hermeneutical program. Barth's positive reference to this concept in these lectures can thus be seen as a kind of olive branch to the Bultmann school, even if Barth would still no doubt agree with his earlier opposition (in 1948) to the Bultmannian appeal to this concept in the debate over the historicity of the resurrection. See *KD* III/2, p. 535/446.

plements his 1962 interview. Barth rejects the elevation of faith into the "central concept" such that faith becomes the "true event of salvation," to the exclusion of the "real object of theology" (111/99). It is Barth's understanding of the "real object" that marks the crucial divide between his theology and that of the existentialists.[22]

We can sum up Barth's critique of the existentialist theologians in the following way: anthropotheology begins with the believing "I," and it seeks to understand the relationship to God from that anthropocentric (even egocentric) starting point. The result, according to Barth, is a *philosophical* understanding of the human person and a *pietistic* understanding of that person's relationship to God. From Barth's vantage point, such a theology places law before gospel; consequently, as a science, it can be neither free nor happy. Barth thus aims to reverse the approach: theology first clarifies the God-human relationship and only then speaks about what it means to be human. These are the basic elements of Barth's theanthropological response.

Theanthropology

1. On March 2, 1964, a few months before his interview with Carl Henry, Barth met with a group of students from Tübingen at the Bruderholz restaurant for one of his many lengthy conversations. At one point, an unknown student raised the question of Eberhard Jüngel's interpretation of Barth's *analogia fidei*, which had appeared two years earlier.[23] The student wanted to know whether Jüngel's understanding accorded with Barth's own. Barth said that he no longer remembered the details of the essay, so he changed the subject to address Jüngel himself as an interpreter of his theology.

> I know only one thing that I remember for sure: Jüngel is . . . a good representative of those who are terribly eager to learn the essentials from me . . . and then comes an "and"! With him it is the "and" of Ernst Fuchs. It's well known that one can also say: Barth "and" Bultmann. Here in Switzerland we have Ebeling, so that one can also say: Barth "and" Ebeling. I like to compare this theology to a garden of paradise, at the entrance to which stand, on the left and the right, two heraldic stone lions [*zwei steinerne Wappenlöwen*] that bear these names.

22. It is interesting to note that Barth does not focus his critique on Bultmann's program of demythologizing. He points this out in the interview: "You will have noticed that I have said nothing about *'demythologization,'* have I? If we have to, we can talk about that later. But that was never for me the burning question with Bultmann. It is just something that follows" (Barth, *Gespräche 1959-1962*, p. 366).

23. Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie auf dem Grunde der Analogie: Eine Untersuchung zum Analogieverständnis Karl Barths [1962]," in *Barth-Studien* (Zürich-Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1982), pp. 210-32.

Later in the conversation, while discussing Bultmann, Barth again returned to the lions guarding the entrance to this garden of paradise.

> I am reminded of the two heraldic lions. Do you really and seriously want, as many do, to combine us, so that Bultmann is one of the lions and I am the other? And do you seriously believe that the way into paradise actually goes through this gate? . . . Beware of what you're doing! I would really advise everyone: choose! It is better to choose! Then go this one way consistently to the end! And see which way to the end is worth it! But not through these eternal mediations, the eternal "both-and," "yes — but." Rather go through it [on one side]! Even at the risk that it will perhaps become a little one-sided, whether one chooses one way or the other![24]

Barth did not use the terms in this particular conversation, but he was expressing the same either/or that we see in his lectures on evangelical theology, and which he would later repeat in his interview with Carl Henry. Either the anthropotheology of Bultmann and his pupils, or his own theanthropology — "one way or the other!"

A rebuttal came sooner than anyone could have expected. In early 1965, Jüngel — a student of Fuchs and, at least initially, a member of the existentialist school — published his now-famous work *Gottes Sein ist im Werden* (ET *God's Being Is in Becoming*). On the surface the book presents itself as a commentary on Barth's doctrine of the Trinity. The real thesis of the book, however, is that Barth's christocentric dogmatics accomplishes the same theological goal as Bultmann's hermeneutical program, just from a different perspective. Jüngel's key claim appears at the book's midpoint and provides the orientation for the present essay:

> The difference between the theology of Karl Barth and that of Rudolf Bultmann is therefore not grounded in the fact that Barth's theological statements leave out of account the anthropological relation given in revelation, whereas Bultmann, by contrast, dissolves theological statements into an-

24. Barth, *Gespräche 1964-1968*, pp. 86, 124.

> thropological statements. Such descriptions label the theology of both theologians superficially and so fail to understand them at all.[25]

Jüngel rejects Barth's either/or, and in its place he suggests two different but complementary trajectories: Barth as one whose theological statements are always anthropologically relevant, and Bultmann as one whose emphasis on anthropological relevance is always rooted in a theology of revelation. Only one side of this thesis can be explored here, though both, I wish to claim, are correct and fully defensible. In lieu of a complete analysis, we turn now to Barth.

2. In the opening lecture of *Evangelical Theology,* Barth acknowledges that the existentialists are right to have this concern for the question of human existence:

> Theology is well aware that the God of the gospel is in fact genuinely concerned with human existence; that God in fact awakens and calls human beings to faith in God; that God in fact makes use of and sets in motion [*in Anspruch nimmt und in Bewegung setzt*] humanity's entire spiritual (and not only spiritual) capacity. What this means, however, is that theology is interested in these things because it is primarily and comprehensively interested in *God.* It thinks and speaks under the superior presupposition of the demonstration of God's existence and sovereignty. If theology wished to reverse this relationship — if it wished to refer God to *humanity,* as opposed to referring humanity to *God* — then it would surrender itself to a Babylonian captivity of some anthropology or ontology or noology, that is, some anticipated meaning of existence, of faith, or of humanity's spiritual capacity. (14/8)

This is one of the clearest and most succinct descriptions of Barth's challenge to the existentialists. It is not that their concerns are in themselves misguided or irrelevant. The problem is that they have placed these concerns in a superordinate rather than subordinate position within theology. Theology must begin with God, and only from that perspective speak of the human person. But Barth's response to the existentialists only works if God is *intrinsically* related to human beings. The existentialist question must be *internal* to the question of God. For this reason, I take as my starting point Barth's theology subsequent to the revision of his doctrine of election that was catalyzed in

25. Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming,* p. 73.

1936, developed in 1939, and made public in 1942.[26] For it is only on the soil of this dogmatic decision that a theanthropology in Barth's sense can truly grow.

As is well known, Barth's revised doctrine of election is a dispute with the Reformed scholastic tradition of the *decretum absolutum.* The God of this absolute decree is "everything in the way of aseity, simplicity, immutability, infinity, etc., but this one is not the living God, that is to say, not the God who lives in concrete decision" (*KD* II/2, p. 85/79). God's decision in election is concrete by virtue of the concrete history of Jesus Christ. The election of grace is a "temporal history, encounter, and decision between God and humanity" that "eternally *happens* in time," namely, in the time of Jesus in his life of obedience to the Father (*KD* II/2, p. 204/186). It is this particular person, in his divine-human unity, who constitutes the subject, as well as the object, of election. His human existence is thus *internal* to the identity of the God who elects. The electing God is the *living* God precisely because the divine self-determination that occurs in the event of election takes place in a living person, Jesus of Nazareth. For this reason, "our human existence [*Menschsein*] is no longer alone," according to Barth, because our humanity is "enacted" *(abspielt)* in fellowship "with the human existence of Jesus Christ and therefore with God's own human existence [*Gottes eigenem Menschsein*]" (*KD* II/2, p. 619/558). Human existentiality now has its basis in divine existentiality. The revised doctrine of election confronts us with what Barth in 1956 refers to as the "humanity of God" *(Menschlichkeit Gottes).*

This lecture, delivered at a meeting of Swiss Reformed ministers, is most well known for the way it documents how Barth's mind has changed. In particular, Barth acknowledges the one-sidedness of his earlier emphasis on God's "wholly otherness," which showed "greater similarity to the deity of the God of the philosophers than to the deity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." This deity did not appear to be "the *deity* of the *living* God," who lives in a "sovereign *togetherness* [*Zusammensein*] with humanity" that is grounded in and determined by God's own decision. Barth's revised christological position, built on the basis of his doctrine of election, is that "God's deity does not exclude but includes God's *humanity,*" and again, that "God's deity *encloses* hu-

26. These are the dates, respectively, of (1) Pierre Maury's lecture on "Election et Foi" that served as the impetus for Barth's revision; (2) Barth's winter semester lecture course in 1939-40 in which he lectured on his new doctrine of election; and (3) the publication of *CD* II/2. See Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 159-64.

manity *in itself.*"[27] Barth admits that he has come to see the grain of truth in nineteenth-century liberal theology, but this grain of truth can only be taken up and developed on the basis of the break with liberalism that Barth inaugurated. God is a human God only *as* the wholly other God. And conversely, God is only wholly other *as* a concretely human God in the history of Jesus.

What often goes unacknowledged, however, is the way Barth explicitly connects his understanding of God's humanity with the Marburg school. Toward the end of his lecture, he declares that theology deals neither with deity-in-itself nor with humanity-in-itself, but instead only with "the humanity-encountering God and the God-encountering human being." Barth insists on the objectivity of this covenant history as the proper subject matter of Christian theology. He then adds: "Whether the theological existentialism of Rudolf Bultmann and his followers, close to which we find ourselves here, carries us further toward this objectivity [*Sachlichkeit*] that is indispensable to good theology remains to be seen. . . . Certainly existentialism may have reminded us once again of the elements of truth in the old school by introducing once more the thought that one cannot speak of God without speaking of humanity."[28] His doubts about existentialism notwithstanding, it is nonetheless important to see that Barth's later theology moves him *closer* to Bultmann rather than further away. It is no accident that he takes up the question of existence in his final lectures at Basel. His mature theology, governed by the logic of election and the affirmation of God's humanity, leads him to develop a theology that is, at least potentially, more anthropologically relevant than that of the existentialists. And that is because the anthropological question no longer resides merely at the level of epistemology or hermeneutics (i.e., at the level of our thinking and speaking of God); now it resides at the more basic level of theological *ontology.* The very being of God includes humanity in its eternal essence, and thus theology essentially *is* anthropology. The only difference between Barth and Bultmann now is that Bultmann looks to the present human situation to understand the anthropological essence of theology, whereas Barth would have us look to the history of Jesus to see the truth of our existence. We will have to ask later whether these two approaches really should be in conflict with each other.

3. The consequences of Barth's theanthropological existentialism are evident throughout his later writings. The influence of existentialism is most obvious

27. Karl Barth, *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes,* Theologische Studien 48 (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956), pp. 9-10, 13-14.

28. Barth, *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes,* pp. 18, 19.

in lectures six and seven of *Evangelical Theology,* where Barth takes up the concepts of "wonderment," or "astonishment" *(Verwunderung),* and "concern," or "affectedness" *(Betroffenheit).* Both of these are concepts associated with existentialist philosophy and theology.

Early in the sixth lecture, Barth places theological wonder in the context of philosophical wonder (p. 73/64). Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics,* defines the receptive posture of wonder *(thaumazein)* as the origin of philosophy.[29] Hegel takes up this idea in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History,* where he translates the Greek *thaumazein* as *Verwunderung.*[30] Heidegger expounds at length on the question of wonder in his Freiburg lectures during the winter semester of 1937-38.[31] He distinguishes between four different kinds of wonder, subsuming *Verwunderung* (along with *Bewunderung* and *Bestaunen*) under his ontological conception of wonder, *Erstaunen.*[32] Barth, in a typical move of his own, reverses this conceptual relationship. In a very subtle criticism of existentialist philosophy, Barth subordinates *Erstaunen* to a theological conviction that is more ontologically basic than Heidegger's ontology. After identifying the biblical wonder-stories as signs of something radically new, Barth asks what this new thing is. "Wonderment [*Verwunderung*] as such," he says, "might still be something like an uncomprehending, gaping astonishment [*Erstaunen*] at the *portentum* or *stupendum* as such" (p. 76/68). In other words, *Erstaunen* does not reach what is truly wondrous, because it only concerns the being of the world as such. Theological wonder, as attested in Scripture, points toward what Barth calls "a redeemed nature" and an "order of freedom" in which "death as the last enemy is no more" (pp. 76-77/68-69). Only Christian theology can truly stand in awe and wonder before the world.

The existentialist connection is even more evident in the discussion of concern. There is, for instance, Barth's repeated reference to Horace's famous phrase *tua res agitur* ("the matter concerns you"), which is a common refrain within existentialism (p. 86/76-77).[33] More significantly, the concept of *Betrof-*

29. Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* 982b.12-13.

30. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte,* 3rd ed. (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1848), pp. 286-87.

31. Martin Heidegger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte "Probleme" der "Logik,"* ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, Gesamtausgabe II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923-1944, Bd. 45 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1984), pp. 151-80.

32. See Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 28-30. Cf. John Llewelyn, *Seeing through God: A Geophenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 64.

33. Horace, *Epistles,* 1.18.84. In his letter to Barth of Nov. 11-15, 1952, Bultmann says that

fenheit is a central idea in Heidegger's fundamental ontology. To be "concerned with" or "taken by" being *(betroffen vom Sein)* is a basic aspect of *Dasein* in its attunement or disposedness *(Befindlichkeit)* within the world.[34] We can trace the historical influences even further by pointing out that Heidegger takes the concept of *Betroffenheit* from the work of Emil Lask (1875-1915), a philosopher in the Heidelberg (or Southwestern) school of neo-Kantianism. Lask and Heidegger were both pupils of the neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936).[35] And, of course, it is the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, mediated through Wilhelm Herrmann, that forms the common philosophical background for the work of Barth and Bultmann.[36]

The concepts of wonder and concern are equally central to the existentialist theologians. One likely thinks first of Tillich, who is well known for his concept of "ultimate concern" *(unbedingte Betroffensein).*[37] In addition to Tillich, there are other, perhaps more important, intimations of the existentialist school of theology. Wonderment *(die Verwunderung),* as Barth notes, has its basis in the appearance of a wonder *(das Wunder),* and the theological debate concerning the status of "wonders" and "miracles" in the

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he and Barth diverge because the latter does not accept that the task today is "to make Christian proclamation intelligible to contemporary human beings in such a way that they become aware that: *tua res agitur*" (Bultmann to Barth, Nov. 11-15, 1952, *Briefwechsel,* p. 169). Barth's positive reference to this same existential axiom in his 1962 lectures is thus an indirect way of denying Bultmann's charge. Barth aims to demonstrate that his theology fully embraces the *tua res agitur,* but on very different theological terms. It is worth quoting Christophe Chalamet here: "Barth also believed in the practical character of theology, in the *tua res agitur,* in the *hic et nunc,* but all of this should be located properly, namely as part of what is greater, i.e. the theoretical character, the *Dei res agitur* and the *illic et tunc*" (Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians,* p. 289).

34. Kenneth Maly, *The Path of Archaic Thinking: Unfolding the Work of John Sallis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 204-8.

35. See Jeffrey Andrew Barash, *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning,* 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), p. 96, n.4. Cf. Theodore J. Kisiel, "Why Students of Heidegger Will Have to Read Emil Lask," in Alfred Denker and Marion Heinz, eds., *Heidegger's Way of Thought: Critical and Interpretative Signposts* (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 101-36.

36. See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology,* pp. 43-49; Roger A. Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing: Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 38-86.

37. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 1:11-12. The first two volumes of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* had appeared in German by the time of Barth's lectures (1955, 1958); the third volume appeared in 1966. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie,* 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1955-66), 1:19-20.

biblical text is central to Bultmann's hermeneutical program. Bultmann devotes an entire essay to the subject in 1933, "The Question of Wonder," and in a 1952 discussion of demythologizing he directly connects the theological problem of wonder with the existential significance of concern.[38] Bultmann says that mythological thinking objectifies divine action as a false "wonder" that is visible to any person apart from faith. A true wonder, that is, a true act of God, can only be perceived and talked about by one who is "existentially affected by it," or has an "existential concern for it" *(existentielle Betroffenheit von ihm).*[39]

Barth's own position is quite similar, insofar as he, too, has little interest in miracles as occurrences that are objectively verifiable. For him the true wonder is Jesus Christ himself as the event of the world's reconciliation: Christ is the "wonder of all wonders," through whom we "must again and again be astonished *about ourselves*" (p. 79/71). We are able to be "not only fascinated but even *concerned*" (p. 86/77) about the subject matter of the gospel, because we hear the good news that the gospel already concerns us long before we are aware of it. We are thus free to be existentially concerned, since God has actually lived as one who is existentially concerned for each of us in the history of Jesus.

4. Barth's existential theanthropology has its most surprising and interesting impact on the material in *CD* IV/3. This part-volume is the most thoroughly theanthropological of Barth's dogmatics, insofar as it presents his complete theology of existence under the description of a theology of vocation. In §71.4, Barth sets out to define the specific form of Christian existence, or what he calls "the *structure* of the Christian, as it is conditioned by and reflects one's belonging to Jesus Christ, and as it is controlled by a definite principle" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 638/556). Before describing this structure and principle, Barth first examines three commonly given answers of his time. He judges each to be overly one-sided. This section is especially instructive for our analysis of Barth's relationship to existentialism.

The first answer Barth examines is that of Bultmann himself, namely, the latter's account of *Entweltlichung* or "deworldlizing."[40] Bultmann defines faith

38. Bultmann, "Zur Frage des Wunders," in *Glauben und Verstehen,* 1:214-28.

39. Rudolf Bultmann, "Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung," in Hans-Werner Bartsch, ed., *Kerygma und Mythos,* Band II: *Diskussion und Stimmen zum Problem der Entmythologisierung* (Hamburg-Volksdorf: H. Reich, 1952), p. 196.

40. I follow Roger Johnson in translating *Entweltlichung* as "deworldlizing." While awkward, it is a necessary neologism, because it brings out the semantic connection be-

as an eschatological mode of existence that places a person in a dialectical freedom with respect to the world, a freedom structured by the Pauline "as if not" (ὡς μή) of 1 Corinthians 7:29-31. Barth's judgment here is that Bultmann has only uncovered a small aspect of Christian existence, and thus his position is inadequate on its own. The second answer Barth examines is what he calls "Christian moralism," which defines faithful existence in terms of one's participation in a "specific *ethos*" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 641/558). Here he seems to include everything from Kantian deontology to Thomistic virtue ethics. The third answer — what he calls the "classic" and "most significant" position — is that of pietism, or what those in North America would simply call "evangelicalism" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 644/561). It is the notion that Christian existence is defined by individual conversion and the personal experience of divine grace — including the "assurance of salvation" *(Heilsgewißheit)* (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 649/565), which comes through this act of faith.

Recall my earlier observation that Barth criticizes Bultmann for being a "secret pietist." He reinforces that view in this section when, in commenting on the pietist idea of vocation as something that concerns us personally, he says that "the theological existentialism of our day has again provided enormous support for this self-evident presupposition" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 647/563). When he goes on to criticize the pietist position, his criticism is virtually identical to his later comments about anthropotheology. He begins, as usual, with a word of approval, and it is the same one he gives to the Bultmann school: that the goal of the Christian vocation is one that "concerns us *personally* and affects us 'existentially'" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 650/566). But then he goes on to say that while this answer is "genuinely human," it is also "all too human" and smacks of "egocentricity" and "self-interest" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 650/566-67). Barth closes with a strong word of judgment: "Would not every other form of human egocentricity be excused, even confirmed and consecrated, if egocentricity in this holy variety is the divinely willed meaning of Christian existence, and if its song of praise consists finally only in the resounding cry of a many-voiced but monotonous *'pro me, pro me!'* and similar possessive expressions?" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 651/567).[41]

Barth's response to these failed answers to the question of Christian vocation is well known but is rarely given the attention it deserves, especially

tween *Entweltlichung* and *Entmythologisierung*. See Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing*, p. 118.

41. Those of us who have grown up within a certain breed of North American evangelicalism know how close to home Barth's judgment hits.

with respect to existentialism and his lectures on evangelical theology. His answer, in short, is that Christian existence, properly understood, is one of *witness*. The Christian is called by God to live as a missionary agent of God's good news in the world; she is called to participate in the covenant of grace as an apostle. Barth goes so far as to say that the very knowledge *of* God is bound up with one's active witness *to* God: "Those who are called, according to the biblical narratives, are those to whom God has made Godself known as this Immanuel — and this happens to them in their calling" (*KD* IV/3.2, p. 660/575). Epistemology is inseparable from apostolicity. This position is already established for Barth in the discussion of the election of the individual in §35, where he explicitly connects our self-understanding as elect individuals with our active participation in God's reconciliation of the world as agents of apostolic witness. All of this follows quite naturally from his theanthropology. If God has already taken up our existence into the history of Jesus Christ, then there can be no "egocentric" focus on *my* personal assurance of salvation and *my* experience of grace. The *pro me* now has its ground in the *pro nobis*.[42] What

42. Barth develops this thesis in a key small-print passage in *KD* IV/1, pp. 844-46/755-57 (§63.1, on the nature of faith), which actually brings together all of the major themes and ideas of this chapter: the methodological relationship of theology to anthropology and ontology; Barth's criticism of pietism and its relationship to Bultmann; Barth's soteriological response to existentialist preunderstanding; and the debate over demythologizing. All of this gets filtered through a soteriological lens that differentiates between a theanthropological *pro nobis* and an anthropotheological *pro me*. Two things are especially worth noting about this passage. First, Barth begins the section by noting his agreement with the emphasis on the *pro me* that characterizes the theology of Luther, old and new pietism, Kierkegaard, Herrmann, and "the theological *existentialism* of our day (so far as it can seriously be regarded as theological!)" (*KD* IV/1, p. 844/755). Here we see expressed very clearly the point of agreement between Barth and the existentialists. Remarkably, Barth even says that the *pro me* functions as a "catalyzer" that forces those who confess the *pro nobis* to "disclose" whether they are "competent subjects," or whether what they confess is merely an "abstract theory" that does not have the "power of a witness" but rather the "nature of a myth" (*KD* IV/1, p. 844/755).

Second, Barth registers his disagreement with this tradition of existential thinking on the grounds that the *pro me* "must not be systematized and so made into a systematic principle," and this is because Jesus Christ, a living person, is the one who is *pro me* (*KD* IV/1, p. 845/756). We cannot abstract the promeity of the gospel from the concrete person who constitutes this promeity. Barth here anticipates his later debate in *KD* IV/3 about the so-called "triumph of grace," as G. C. Berkouwer terms it (cf. *KD* IV/3.1, pp. 198-206/173-80). Barth claims that the existentialists — whether the old pietism or the current *Bultmannschule* — turn the saving relationship of God to the individual person into an abstract methodological principle. The result is that theology begins by focusing on the human *subject* at the expense of the divine *object*. Everything is interpreted in light of "what a person acknowledges and confesses as being 'existentially' relevant," as being that which existentially concerns her or him (*KD*

now truly "concerns" me — what is of real existential significance — is bearing witness to the truth of the gospel.

Barth's missionary response to the question of vocation leads him to take up the issues of individual existence and personal experience *within* his larger theanthropological framework. This becomes most explicit in §71.6 on the "liberation of the Christian." The entire section is an exposition of the fact that individual experience of grace is a necessary component of Christian vocation. One could say that what Barth takes away in §71.4, he gives back in §71.6. Barth emphasizes the importance of subjectivity in the knowledge of objective truth. It is this theme above all that connects Barth with the existentialists. The most remarkable instance of this appears in a small-print section in which he objects to what he calls "ecclesiastical-theological orthodoxy" on the grounds that it seeks to speak about God in a purely objective manner:

> [Orthodoxy] ceases to be good when it is linked with indifference to or a disdain for the incidental but necessary question of the existential determination [*existentiellen Bestimmung*] of Christians by the content of their witness. However carefully this content is investigated and presented . . . it will harden into a possibly impressive but dead idol [*Götzenbild*], and the joy and ability of the Christian to witness to it would fade away if one tries to ignore the fact that the living God in Jesus Christ, who is indeed the content of Christian witness, necessarily affects and grabs those people who

IV/1, p. 846/757). Barth proceeds to mention all the usual words and tropes that he associates with Bultmann and his students. He even refers to the idea of a "point of contact," but he uses the more ambiguous concept of *Beziehungspunkt*, rather than the more well-known *Anknüpfungspunkt*. While the connection between existentialism and pietism is strongly implied throughout, Barth makes it explicit near the end when he says that the "usurping invasion [*Einbruch*] of a subjectivist philosophy into theology . . . coincided with the uprising [*Aufbruch*] of pietism." The fact that the "Christian faith is an 'existential' occurrence" has to be positively acknowledged, he claims, but this has to be carried out through the "necessary demythologizing of the 'I'" that occurs in the extrinsic and objective reality of Christ (*KD* IV/1, p. 846/757).

Barth's statements in this section shed a great deal of light on the real nature of his debate with Bultmann. It becomes evident that soteriology is the real basis of the divide in a way that remains less clear in Barth's other statements. The hermeneutical problem is really a soteriological problem. The issue is that Barth's emphasis on the *pro nobis* has the effect of nullifying any interrogation of theology from the perspective of the *pro me* in its particular historicity. The *pro me* is in no way distinctively *pro me*, that is, related uniquely to *me* and my context; it is just the *pro nobis* in its generic application to an indeterminate individual. While this is soteriologically essential, it has drastic implications for missiology, as we will see below.

> are called to bear witness, engaging them in their whole being, making disposition concerning them, finding reflection in their lives in the form of their personal liberation. We cannot ignore or abstract away this accompanying phenomenon. We cannot ignore, conceal, or only speak quietly about this aspect and significance of vocation. Otherwise even the most conscientious, sincerest, and strictest orthodoxy becomes an idle pursuit. . . . Even the trinitarian God of Nicene dogma, or the Christ of the Chalcedonian definition, if seen and proclaimed in exclusive objectivity and thus with no regard for this accompanying phenomenon, necessarily becomes an idol like all others, with whom one cannot live and to whom one cannot therefore witness. Such an orthodoxy would be something highly menacing [*Versucherisch*] and dangerous. (*KD* IV/3.2, pp. 750-51/655)

Barth's claim in §71 is that we *only* have knowledge of the true God — and the adherence to the ancient creeds only avoids being idolatry — if we simultaneously know ourselves to be called and commissioned by this God for a life of apostolic service. Here we see a powerful example of how Barth's theanthropology results in a theological existentialism just as radical as that of his anthropotheological opponents.

5. The point of agreement between Barth and the existentialists is perhaps most clearly on display in an earlier section of *CD* IV/3, where he discusses the identity of Jesus Christ as the true witness, as the true missionary. The sinful human counterpart to Christ's prophetic work is the futile endeavor to set up a "worldview" *(Weltanschauung)*. A religious worldview attempts to speak of God "from a certain distance" and to state "that which is always and everywhere the same" (*KD* IV/3.1, pp. 293-96/255-57).[43] In other words, a worldview is theology *without* anthropology, a theology that ignores the "existential determination of the Christian." Bultmann's theology is similarly concerned throughout with overcoming all worldviews on the grounds that a worldview attempts to speak *about* God *(über Gott)* as an object available for neutral observation, and about which we can make general statements that are valid in the abstract; by contrast, faith speaks *of* God *(von Gott)* in such a way that one is always at the same time speaking of oneself.[44] This antiworldview posture represents the common property of Barth and the existentialist theolo-

43. Cf. Clifford Blake Anderson, "Jesus and the 'Christian Worldview': A Comparative Analysis of Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth," *Cultural Encounters* 2, no. 2 (2006): 61-80.

44. Rudolf Bultmann, "Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden?" [1925] in *Glauben und Verstehen*, 1:26-37, esp. pp. 28-33.

gians, and it has a distinctively missionary basis and significance. Theanthropology thus stands with anthropotheology in the consistent opposition to every worldview, even (and perhaps especially) if this takes the form of a "doctrinal orthodoxy."[45] Barth can thus say, in his lectures on *Evangelical Theology,* that "theological knowledge, thought, and speech cannot be *general,* and the general cannot be *theological*" (p. 127/114). Such statements represent a shared conviction between Barth and the existentialists.[46]

While the missionary character of Barth's theology is a significant point in its own right, I bring it up here for two specific reasons. First, the question of mission reveals the intimate connection between Barth's theology and existentialist theology.[47] Second, it is the very same missionary question that exposes a shortcoming in Barth's theology that the existentialists can help rectify. To this dilemma we now turn.

Sprachereignis

1. Earlier I noted the way Barth dismisses Fuchs's concept of "speech-event" *(Sprachereignis)* as "bombastic" (p. 198/182). It is easy to overlook this idea as tangential at best to Barth's overall exposition. But that would be a mistake. In truth, this brief discussion is key to the entire debate between Barth and the Bultmann school.

What is at stake in the concept of "speech-event"? According to Barth, the concept has theological significance when one asks "how the word of God . . . can be served by human words in the community and, through the community, in the surrounding world."[48] This is because "those who undertake to

45. It should be noted, however, that Bultmann is far more concerned with the problem of "liberal historicism" than he is with Protestant orthodoxy, in large part because he does not view the latter to be much of a threat. Today, the reverse seems to be true: liberalism is dying a slow death, while various forms of fundamentalist orthodoxy are on the rise. The common witness of Barth and Bultmann is just as necessary today as it was in the last century.

46. For key explorations of this topic by Bultmann, see Rudolf Bultmann, "Wahrheit und Gewißheit" [1929], in *Theologische Enzyklopädie,* pp. 183-205; Rudolf Bultmann, "Allgemeine Wahrheiten und christliche Verkündigung" [1957], in *Glauben und Verstehen,* 3:166-77.

47. We might explain the reason for this by noting that a theological account of mission is concerned with the relationship between a missionary God and commissioned human beings. That is to say, on a certain account of missionary theology, the participating human subject is made internal to the dogmatic exposition of the gospel. Missionary theology is a thoroughgoing attempt to overcome the so-called subject-object schema.

48. Those familiar with Fuchs's concept of *Sprachereignis* (or with Gerhard Ebeling's related notion of *Wortgeschehen*) will quickly realize that Barth is not cognizant of the nuances of the concept — a point confirmed for me in personal conversation with Hans-Anton Drewes. Barth does not understand the way this term functions as part of a debate within post-Bultmannian New Testament studies concerning the historical Jesus. Fuchs and Ebeling actually use their concepts *against* Bultmann. Barth, however, only sees *Sprachereignis* as coming from someone in the Marburg school (he does not even bother identifying Fuchs by name), and thus he lumps it into his already ongoing debate with Bultmann. As I will point out later, the argument he has here with Fuchs is actually the third iteration of an argument that he had previously with Bonhoeffer in 1956 and with Bultmann himself in 1952. He identifies these as three forms of the same "problem of language," which is really the problem of missionary translation. Connecting demythologizing, nonreligious interpretation, and speech-event in terms of mission and language is not at all wrong; it is, in fact, a keen insight that rightly sees a shared concern among these various theologians. Of course, it is highly unlikely that Barth recognized his own insight. More than likely he simply reacted to whatever existentialist theme or writing was being discussed at the time, and in the winter semester of 1961-62, it happened to be the work of Fuchs. Barth had an allergy to existentialist theology in his later years that was very similar to the allergy he had to natural theology in his earlier work. In both cases Barth makes astute observations and offers brilliant alternatives, but along the way he often does a disservice to his interlocutors and, in the case of existentialism especially, creates additional theological problems that have to be sorted out later.

proclaim [the word of God] have to deal with the problem of *language [Sprache]*" (p. 198/182). They have to learn to speak "in religious *and* everyday tones, both sacredly *and* profanely . . . the language of Canaan *and* of Egypt and Babylon, as well as 'modern' colloquial speech" (p. 199/183). While Barth does not use this terminology, he is referring here to the central task of mission, namely, the translation of the gospel into the language of a particular context.[49] He is not at all wrong to view the concept of "speech-event" in these terms. Fuchs is concerned throughout his writings with the gospel's proclamation, and in April 1956 he even gave a lecture at the Berlin Mission Conference on how "the missionary proclamation of the church today is apostolic service."[50] In other words, the problem of missionary translation is bound up with the concept of speech-event. The word of God, for those in the Bultmann school, always occurs as an event of proclamation in the present situation of the community. This much Barth gets right in his discussion of the idea.

However, Barth makes a crucial and catastrophic move at precisely this

49. See Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture,* 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

50. Ernst Fuchs, "Die missionarische Verkündigung der Kirche und der Mensch der Gegenwart" [1956], in *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie: Die existentiale Interpretation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), pp. 306-19, quotation on p. 314. Cf. Ernst Fuchs, "Das Sprachereignis in der Verkündigung Jesu, in der Theologie des Paulus und im Ostergeschehen" [1959], in *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie,* pp. 281-305.

point. He says that this concept is "inappropriately passed off as the basic problem of exegesis and, if possible, also of dogmatics"; it has its proper place, instead, in the field of "practical theology" (p. 198/182). Contrary to much of the work in hermeneutics and missiology over at least the past half century, Barth refuses to recognize that the problem of translation is *internal* to the task of exegesis and dogmatic reflection, despite the fact that he has already made human existence internal to the being of God. Mission is here relegated to the secondary and subordinate field of *practical* theology, as if one could easily and cleanly separate praxis from theory. In fact, Barth goes so far as to say that those who have the task of proclaiming God's word "learn the content [*sachlich*] from exegesis and dogmatics *and* discern the form from the psychology, sociology, and linguistics that is most appropriate at a particular time," and it "always takes the direction from the first to the second (and thus never the reverse)" (p. 199/183). Like Bultmann and the other hermeneutical theologians, Barth posits a form-content distinction that makes possible the work of translation.[51] But he makes this distinction in such a way that exegesis and dogmatics fall on the side of the divine *content*, as opposed to the human *form*.[52] This decision allows him to subordinate the hermeneutical problem, but only at the expense

51. Ironically, Barth sets up essentially the same form-content distinction that is operative in Bultmann's hermeneutics, where non-theological disciplines, such as philosophy or sociology, provide the contextual form that the kerygma will take in a particular situation. There are two differences. First, Barth wrongly believes that dogmatics and exegesis operate prior to the task of formal and contextual discernment. Second, and more important, Barth and Bultmann disagree on what counts as "content" and what counts as "form." For example, Bultmann does not believe that ancient assumptions about an imminent end of history, the substitutionary logic of the old sacrificial rites, the general belief in angelic and demonic beings, or the supernatural-miraculous nature of divine agency are aspects that are internal to the kerygma. These are, he claims, general religious presuppositions of the ancient world; they are not unique to the Christian faith, and thus they are dispensable as part of the cultural form of the gospel within the ancient world. Barth in practice agrees with Bultmann on some of these points, but he refuses to engage in conversation with him at this level. Both Barth and Bultmann demythologize, but Bultmann seeks to incorporate demythologizing into the very method of doing theology, whereas Barth insists that such interpretive decisions have to be done on a kind of ad hoc basis in order to preserve the freedom of God's word. Bultmann's response to Barth is that this results in conceptual confusion and exegetical incoherence, and it also wrongly assumes that there is a competition between methodological consistency and divine freedom.

52. This problematizes Barth's consistent emphasis on the unfinalizability and reformability of all theological statements, which suggests that the question of the creaturely form is internal to the exposition of the content. See, for instance, *KD* I/2, p. 971/868, where Barth says that "in dogmatics, strictly speaking, there are no comprehensive views [*Totalansichten*], no final perorations, conclusions, and results."

of proposing, at least at the level of logic, the conceptually incoherent notion of a *formless* gospel message, a kerygma that is ahistorical and disincarnate. Of course, he advocates no such thing. Even though the first always comes before the second, Barth adds that "the first is never without the second, and certainly never the second without the first — always the first *and* the second!" (p. 199/183). And yet the logic of his position requires a highly questionable differentiation between dogmatics and mission, between theory and praxis.

For Barth, this order and sequence follows from his theanthropological thesis. The kerygmatic content precedes its linguistic form because, as he puts it, the word of God "goes *forth* from God and goes *to* humanity" (p. 199/183). Because revelation is inseparable from reconciliation, the reverse movement — from humanity to God — would call into question the saving work accomplished in Jesus Christ. We can only understand humanity by first coming to an understanding about God. Barth resists locating the problem of hermeneutical translation within the exegetical-dogmatic task for the same soteriological reason that he rejects the way anthropotheology begins its exegesis with reflection on anthropology and philosophy. As I have quoted it above, his consistent position is: "I let the Bible tell me not only who God is but also who the human person is."[53] Where the knowledge of humankind is concerned, the-

53. Barth, *Gespräche 1959-1962*, p. 363. Barth's response to an audience comment (following his August 1934 lecture entitled "The Christian as Witness") provides an excellent example of his position on this topic. According to the audience member, a man from India, the response of the human to God's word should be "more strongly emphasized" than it was in Barth's address, and this is necessary in order for the gospel to take hold in India. Barth gave the following response: "You consider me too severe, too one-sided. Perhaps I am one-sided. But, please, do not hold me responsible for that. Tell me a single prophet, or apostle, or Reformer, who has done differently from what I am trying to do with my weak strength. What is the relation which exists between God and man according to the Bible? Certainly, two principals are involved. But the Bible has no room for a man who plays the role of an independent partner! The Bible speaks of man as a child of God, as of one who belongs to Christ and is already redeemed. According to the Bible, it is God who reached out for man. If the Christian witness meets other men he ought to think that Christ has died for them also. For this reason, and for this reason alone, does any man belong to God" (Karl Barth, "Appendix: A Discussion of the Address on the Christian as Witness," in Barth, *God in Action* [Manhasset, NY: Round Table Press, 1963], pp. 127-29). Is it really true, however, that giving theological attention to the human recipient of God's word requires making that person an "independent partner" in the work of salvation? Does that actually follow? Barth seems to think it is self-evident that one gives the hermeneutical problem (i.e., the question of the human partner) a place interior to Christian exegesis and dogmatics only at the expense of the soteriological axiom of *sola gratia*. But it is this assumption that we must subject to serious scrutiny — precisely on Barth's own theological terms.

anthropology only recognizes as relevant the fact that human beings are sinners justified solely by divine grace. The freedom of God's word, as the word of our justification, requires no prior "point of connection" *(Anknüpfungspunkt)* in humanity; it freely and sovereignly breaks in "from above" as the event of reconciling grace. The question of "how the one who proclaims the word should 'approach' this or that person and get the word of God to 'catch on'" with him or her is therefore a "vain [*eitle*] question," since it is anthropocentric in nature. On the contrary, he says, this word "catches on" among people "by its own freedom and power," and those who proclaim it are called only "to *serve* it by *pointing* to its coming" (p. 198/182).[54]

Barth's theanthropology has the unfortunate effect of viewing humanity in terms of Christology at the expense of viewing theology in terms of mission.

54. For Barth, the word of God comes to each particular human situation, and thus it is true that the gospel is culturally translatable: God's word is always in the process of ongoing contextualization. But the theologian is barred, so Barth claims, from examining the gospel *from the perspective of this contextualization.* Any attempt to look at the God-world encounter from the side of the human context is judged to be anthropocentric. This position finds clear expression in Barth's lecture on concern in *Evangelical Theology.* He provides three answers to the question about the meaning of "you" in the claim "you are concerned" *(tua res agitur).* In the first answer, he defines theological existence as determined by one's "special needs" and "special tasks" within a specific historical situation in the "present aeon of the cosmos" (p. 87/77). He recognizes that "this word [of God] is directed precisely to this *world,* to humanity of all times and places and thus to the human beings of *this* time and *this* place" (p. 87/78). It would seem appropriate for Barth to give the particular historical situation a certain significance in the exegetical and dogmatic task of explicating the gospel, since the word of the gospel is always a word *to* and *for* this particular context. But Barth immediately halts this line of inquiry by defining the word of God in soteriological terms as "the word of God's decree and judgment regarding the whole of human essence and its distortion [*Wesen und Unwesen*]." The word especially concerns the "already established and fulfilled covenant of grace with human beings; it speaks of the completed reconciliation of human beings with God and therefore of the righteousness by which all human unrighteousness is already overcome" (p. 88/78). The emphasis throughout is on a reconciliation that is already finished in the *past,* and for that reason the gospel does not — in a way, cannot — take into account the present historical context in which this gospel meets particular human beings here and now. The result is the same distinction between primary and secondary: the gospel is a word of "woe and salvation" that is "eternal but therefore also temporal, heavenly and therefore also earthly, coming and therefore already present" (p. 88/79). When Barth then goes on to say that this word is declared "to Europeans *and* Asians, Americans *and* Africans . . . to poor, rigid communists *and* to the still poorer, still more rigid anticommunists" (pp. 88-89/79), it is clear that any recipient could be inserted into this list and it would make no difference. The kerygma itself stands above and behind every historical situation. Exegesis and dogmatics, on Barth's account, apparently have access to a kerygma whose content is undetermined by the present context of the exegete and theologian.

Theanthropology makes missionary proclamation constitutive of human existence without making missionary translation constitutive of theological exposition. The question to pose to Barth is whether theanthropology necessitates such a move, or whether there is instead a way to integrate more thoroughly the issues of mission, context, and form into the dogmatic content of the kerygma without compromising his Christology.

2. Barth further confirms his position on translation and its connection to his theanthropology in two other places: (1) his 1956 lecture on the humanity of God, which we have discussed earlier, and (2) the podium discussion in Chicago during his tour of the United States.

Immediately following his discussion of Bultmann in *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes,* Barth turns to the "question of *language*" and the problem of speaking to "so-called 'outsiders' [*Draußenstehenden*]." His interlocutor here is not Ernst Fuchs, whose work on the *Sprachereignis* first appeared three years later (in 1959), but rather Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as indicated by references to the "world come of age" and "revelatory positivism." Bonhoeffer's prison letters, *Widerstand und Ergebung,* had been published for the first time several years earlier (1951). The differences between Fuchs and Bonhoeffer notwithstanding, the same missionary problem drives Bonhoeffer to the "non-religious interpretation" of Scripture that drives Bultmann and his followers to the existentialist interpretation of Scripture. In both cases the question is how to think and speak about God in the present situation. Barth responds in this lecture much as he does in his later lectures in the United States. He recognizes the potential validity of translation in certain situations, but he nevertheless insists on the sovereignty of the content above questions of form. Our task, he says, is to give people "a strange piece of news" regarding "the eternal love of God directed to us human beings *as we at all times were, are, and shall be*" (italics added). Because this universal truth about human sin and salvation stands prior to and above the question of translation, Barth can say with confidence that "we shall certainly be very well understood by them."[55] If this seems a bit naïve, it is at least a naiveté born of faith in God's promise to bear witness to Godself.[56]

Six years later, during his trip to Chicago — and the week before his Warfield lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary — Barth was asked to clarify

55. Barth, *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes,* pp. 21-22.

56. Barth himself affirms a "naïve" reading of Scripture in a small-print passage in §65. He says that "we must *still* or *again* read these [biblical] histories naively, in their unity and totality" in order to encounter their "kerygmatic sense." He calls his hermeneutical approach a "tested, critical naiveté" (*KD* IV/2, pp. 541-42/479).

his position on this same problem by none other than Schubert Ogden, who was instrumental in bringing Bultmann's writings to an English-speaking audience. Ogden asked Barth to comment on his understanding of the relationship between "the kerygma, the witness to Jesus Christ," and the "elements" that "serve to proclaim this witness more or less appropriately."[57] Barth initially responded with a statement that would seem to correct the position found both in his *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie* and *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes:* "I should say two things: finding out the true content of the kerygma of which I spoke this very morning, and the selection of the useful words, are not separate things. They go together. What I deny is the idea that first we can have a quite certain understanding of what the kerygma means and then the only problem remaining is how to tell it to one's children."[58] Barth seemed to soften, if not do away with, the strong primary-secondary distinction that is present in his published writings.

Ogden recognized this immediately, and he said to Barth, "As you have stated it this evening, I could accept it wholeheartedly." But just to make sure he had heard Barth correctly, Ogden continued: "My trouble with your statement this morning, as in other statements that you have made to the same effect, is that when you put it the way you did, it is a secondary concern, not a primary one. This again seems to me to separate [these] two things in a way that violates the point you have just made, namely, that they belong together." Barth's reply to Ogden demonstrates that his position was, in fact, the same as it had always been: "I agree that they cannot be separated; but there is an order and the task to find out the truth of the Gospel itself is the primary task, and this order cannot be reversed. The task of interpretation and of translation — this task can only follow the other, but they belong together."[59] Barth confirmed Ogden's suspicions regarding the primary-secondary distinction. His earlier comment, therefore, cannot be taken as a correction of a previously stated view. The two tasks always go together, but they go in a specific order: beginning with exegetical and dogmatic analysis of the content, followed by practical and hermeneutical analysis of the appropriate form. In other words: theology first, mission second.

57. Barth, *Gespräche 1959-1962,* p. 459.

58. Barth, *Gespräche 1959-1962,* p. 460. The phrase "tell it to one's children" is a reference to his exchange with Bultmann in 1952. However, as will become clear below (when I discuss this exchange), Barth here reveals that he has either misunderstood Bultmann or has willfully chosen not to accept Bultmann's correction on this point, namely, that translation is not about "telling it to one's children" but "telling it to oneself."

59. Barth, *Gespräche 1959-1962,* p. 460.

3. As correct as Barth was to emphasize the soteriological dimension of human existence, I cannot refrain from raising a criticism on this very point. It simply does not follow from the fact that grace encounters us as those who are dead in sin that our particular historical and cultural contexts are thereby rendered irrelevant to the task of dogmatic and exegetical exposition. It does not follow from the fact that God's word confronts us under "its own freedom and power" that it is thereby "vain" and theologically illegitimate for us to ask, precisely *as* a dogmatic question, how best to formulate this word in human language so that the message confronts others with the true scandal of the gospel and not as a *sacrificium intellectus.* It does not follow from that fact that we are no longer strangers to God because of Christ's reconciling work that we are no longer strangers to each other, much less to the cultural presuppositions and philosophical categories within the biblical text.

Barth was aware of this objection. A decade before his trip to the United States, he published a pamphlet discussing Bultmann's theology with the cheeky title *Rudolf Bultmann: Ein Versuch, ihn zu verstehen.* Early in this essay Barth sets out what he takes to have in common with Bultmann. He agrees that the New Testament presents its message "in the language, conceptuality, representational-forms, and ideological [*weltanschauliche*] presuppositions of the particular time in which these documents came into being." He then says that, "if it is to become contemporary with people of other ages, the message of these documents must first be understood in its original historical form. Only then can it be *translated* into other forms — i.e., into the language, conceptuality, etc., of these other ages — into the form of the particular time in which the text is now to be understood and interpreted." Barth asks whether he has accurately understood Bultmann, and if so, he says they are in agreement. But he goes on to push the "first . . . then" distinction further. He says that, "first and above all," the task of interpretation is concerned with "*what was said* in the New Testament (in its historical form)," so that "then in the course of this *material* endeavor [*sachlichen Bemühung*] one will also do the necessary work of *translation* [*Übersetzungsarbeit*] and somewhere confront contemporary human beings." The "work of translation," he says, "is a *secondary* task [*cura posterior*]" that "can . . . be done well" only "in relation to the primary task [*cura prior*]" — that is, the task of discerning the content of the message itself. "No doubt I am not understanding Bultmann correctly here."[60] On that point, Barth was quite right.[61]

60. Barth, *Rudolf Bultmann,* pp. 7-8.

61. The situation is actually a bit more complicated. Barth accuses Bultmann of failing to

Over the course of five days in November 1952, Bultmann wrote a page-by-page response to Barth's essay. When he arrived at Barth's distinction between the primary and secondary tasks, Bultmann made the following comment:

> I reject the "first" and "then" (p. 8 [14]), the "work of translation" being understood as practical application, whereas, as I understand it, it takes place along with the grasping of the message. Translation does not answer the question: "How shall I say it to my children?" but consists of the question: "How shall I say it to myself?" or rather: "How shall I hear it myself?" I can understand the NT as a word that *encounters* me only if I understand it to be spoken to my existence, and in understanding it I already translate it. . . . For an understanding of the decisive question [*Entscheidungsfrage*] addressed to me in the text is identical with translation.[62]

Barth wrote a response the following month — on Christmas Eve. The conclusion to the letter finds him in what is ostensibly a conciliatory mood. He says that his "most peaceful and best" thoughts about Bultmann are when he views him like Schleiermacher, that is, when he regards Bultmann's theology "as an attempt at a 'theology of the third article' and therefore of the Holy Spirit." If Bultmann concedes this, Barth says he "could 'heidegger' a little" with him.[63] Such a statement only confirms the problem. Barth is content with Bultmann only if he is willing to place his hermeneutics in a secondary position to dogmatics, in the same way that pneumatology constitutes a secondary and subjectivizing position in relation to the primary and objective field of Christology — in the sense that the Spirit reveals what Christ has already accomplished. Of course, Barth has resources for making pneumatology internal to Christology; likewise, he has resources for making the missionary problem of translation internal to dogmatics in ways that he failed to develop. Translation and mission are internal to dogmatics and exegesis in such a way that, by implication, we might say that the third article is internal to the second article. Is this not the cumulative witness of the New Testament Gospels, when they describe Jesus as empowered by the Spirit upon his anointing, and then they describe Jesus as the one who breathes out this same Spirit upon his disciples?

We can see in this exchange between Barth and Bultmann that the questions raised by Barth in 1956 and 1962 are the very same questions he raises in his 1952 debate with his Marburg interlocutor. The topic throughout is the question of language and the status this question has in the field of dogmatics. Bultmann attempts in his letters to disabuse Barth of any misunderstandings; but for Barth, the differentiation between primary and secondary has its ground in the soteriological — and thus ontological — nature of the gospel, which begins with the history of Jesus Christ and only then moves to the present situation. This leads him to develop a fulsome account of human ex-

62. Rudolf Bultmann to Karl Barth, Nov. 11-15, 1952, *Briefwechsel,* pp. 172-73.
63. Karl Barth to Rudolf Bultmann, Dec. 24, 1952, *Briefwechsel,* p. 197.

focus enough on the primary task: "I trust without hesitation that he [Bultmann] also knows what I regard as the more important issue, yet I still see him pounding away with unparalleled monotony on the problem of the various historical forms of the message: as if he already knows *what* is in the New Testament, as if he wants himself and us only to engage in the translation of this message that is already known from one language and conceptuality to another, as if this task, which is certainly important, could be treated and solved as it were in a vacuum" (Barth, *Rudolf Bultmann,* p. 8). This is quite revealing. It demonstrates just how profoundly Barth has misunderstood his Marburg colleague. The truth is that Bultmann's position is just the opposite of what Barth has described. It is precisely because translation is internal to exegesis that we cannot have a settled view (that would be a *worldview*!) about the kerygmatic content. The kerygma is always in a process of ongoing translation and interpretation. What appears to Barth to be an inordinate interest in the "secondary" task of translation is actually a quite appropriate interest in the "primary" task of discerning the message of Scripture. Barth thinks that Bultmann has failed to give adequate attention to the message itself, but what he means is an exposition of the content independent of the task of translation. But that is to posit a distinction where none should exist.

As I noted above, Barth repeats this charge a decade later in his lectures that make up *Evangelical Theology.* Once again, Barth claims that Bultmann has not given sufficient attention to the task of understanding the word of God itself. The message "must be *sought after,*" and Barth thinks that hermeneutical translation is not engaged in this kind of seeking (p. 44/35). But Barth then moves from critique to affirmation. He says that this inquiry into the message of Scripture should make use of "philological and historical criticism and analysis" and indicate "the nearer and more distant textual connections." Finally, he even says that we should use the whole array of "divinatory imagination" *(divinatorischen Phantasie),* a reference to Schleiermacher's well-known psychological method of interpretation (p. 44/35). This might seem surprising, until we remember that Barth had insisted (in §51 of his *Church Dogmatics)* that the "historically nonverifiable" accounts of angels and demons in Scripture could only be properly grasped by means of "divinatory imagination" (*KD* III/3, p. 432/374). Moreover, he proceeds in a small-print paragraph to pit this poetic mode of interpretation over against Bultmannian translation. If, he says, our aim is to achieve "*knowledge* of these texts," then we may certainly "try to translate them into the language of the more familiar representations and pictures of the worldview and myth of our own time" (already here Barth is criticizing Bultmann by speaking of the present context as mythical). But if our aim is "really to understand them," then we must abandon translation into categories of the present or the future and instead engage in a "divinatory crossing of the boundaries of the historical" by entering the realm of "imagination and poetry" (*KD* III/3, p. 433/375).

istence as enacted in apostolic witness to the gospel. But Barth fails to acknowledge the other side of the missionary dynamic, namely, that this witness occurs among and for a particular group of people living in a specific moment of history. The material content of the gospel is only thinkable and speakable within the terms of that particular situation. The problem of language is not a merely practical matter to be carried out only after the gospel's content has been settled. Instead, coming to an understanding of the gospel through exegesis and dogmatics is already to engage in the missionary enterprise of translation. What I am suggesting, therefore, is that Bultmann more consistently takes to heart the missionary concern to (re)contextualize our God-talk.[64] Bultmann without Barth lacks the *dogmatic basis* for mission, but Barth without Bultmann lacks the *hermeneutical logic* of mission.

4. Barth saw clearly — perhaps more clearly than any theologian in history — the full force of the soteriological truth regarding the grace of God. From this perspective, he was right to insist that God does not presuppose something given in the world as the condition for God's speech. God's grace does not perfect nature, as the Thomistic axiom puts it; instead, grace encounters us as corpses who are dead in our trespasses but who are made alive in Christ. But the soteriological dimension, while necessary, is insufficient to describe the complexity of the God-world relationship. And this is where mission enters the picture, for the missionary task recognizes that, just because we are all corpses resurrected by grace alone, this does not mean that we are thus all identical. Each person has her or his own particular history, with unique experiences, biases, capabilities, and preunderstandings — all of which make the hermeneutical task necessary.

Barth did not deny outright the significance of the hermeneutical problem, but he nevertheless refused to give the question a positive place in his dogmatics for fear of the possible consequences. He viewed such attempts as opening wide the door to all manner of natural theology. While he was right to fear those consequences, he was wrong to assume that all talk of presuppositions is equally natural theology and thus liable to ideological manipulation. I would argue, in fact, that the best strategy is to develop a hermeneutical approach that makes the missionary opposition to ideological worldviews constitutive of the task of translation itself. And *that* is precisely what Bultmann achieved in his program of demythologizing.[65]

64. More recent work in missiology and intercultural theology corrects the previous generation's talk of contextualization and indigenization by noting that the biblical text is already an instance of contextual speech. The process of translation is not limited to the present interpretation of a text or tradition but is an ingredient in every act of God-talk, including the original apostolic witness. Theo Sundermeier has made this point most forcefully: "Contextualizing thus does not take place afterwards, after the [biblical] text is fixed, but is already involved in the initial witness, because it is inherent in the process of understanding and passing on. It is therefore inadequate to speak of 'contextualizing' . . . since it is in truth a matter of *re*contextualizing in the particular appropriation of a text. Recontextualizing is less a problem of communication; rather, it belongs centrally to hermeneutics" (Sundermeier, "Erwägungen zu einer Hermeneutik interkulturellen Verstehens," in *Konvivenz und Differenz: Studien zu einer verstehenden Missionswissenschaft* [Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1995], p. 88).

On the Nearly Apocalyptic Seriousness of Our Time

1. I have argued that Barth's *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie* is set up from the start as a rejoinder to his existentialist contemporaries. He presents at the outset a distinction between anthropotheology and theanthropology, that is, between the egocentrically ordered theologies of the existentialists and

65. To understand why this is the case, we must keep the following points in mind: (a) Bultmann defines mythology as an objectifying form of thinking within an antiquated world-picture *(Weltbild)*; (b) objectifying thinking is equivalent to what Barth calls metaphysics or natural theology and refers to a mode of thinking and speaking about God that captures (or objectifies) revelation within language; (c) a world-picture refers to the prereflective assumptions about the world given within a particular cultural and historical context (which becomes a world*view* when those assumptions are systematically reflected upon and integrated into one's understanding of existence); therefore, (d) mythology is a kind of cultural-historical extension of Barth's critique of metaphysics, which recognizes that the metaphysical capture of revelation within language is also always a capture of revelation within a determinate set of cultural assumptions and conceptual thought-forms. Therefore, to demythologize means to liberate our God-talk *from* objectifying modes of speech, and thus to liberate God-talk *for* new world-pictures and new conceptualities.

One should also note that Bultmann argues that such demythologizing is *internal* to the biblical witness and made necessary by the very nature of the kerygma itself. In his programmatic essay of 1941, he develops the task of demythologizing as an exposition of the Johannine formula: "The word became flesh." And in 1952 he furthers this line of thought by arguing that demythologizing is simply the extension of the Pauline-Lutheran doctrine of justification into the field of epistemology. Jüngel supports this point in his excellent essay on the necessity of demythologizing within Christian theology, a necessity born out of the *truth* of the Christ-myth, as he puts it, and not out of a modern disdain for myth. See Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Wahrheit des Mythos und die Notwendigkeit der Entmythologisierung" [1990], in *Indikative der Gnade — Imperative der Freiheit: Theologische Erörterungen 4* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp. 40-57.

the christocentrically ordered theology that he provides. The upshot of this distinction is that it allows Barth to take up the existentialist themes and concepts on a more solid christological footing. He does precisely this throughout his mature work in dogmatics. In the three writings primarily discussed here (*Evangelical Theology, The Humanity of God,* and *Church Dogmatics* IV/3), we see the repetition and development of certain thematic connections: Barth presents his position in explicit contrast to the existentialist theologians; his own position creatively appropriates existentialist concepts and aims; and each writing finds Barth engaged in a discussion of mission. The missionary dimension is paramount, for it is around this issue that everything else revolves. Mission opposes the anthropocentric starting point that Barth wishes to reject by defining Christian vocation as an act of *witness* to Jesus Christ who stands beyond and outside of us; our identity is thus entirely *extra nos.* But at the same time, mission is a thoroughly *existential* concept in that it necessarily involves human agency in the work of apostolic proclamation. Therefore, it is no accident that Barth's theology was so strongly missiological toward the end of his career. Mission provided him with a positive response to the existentialists, who were dominating the theological conversation at that time.

Notwithstanding Barth's achievement, we cannot overlook the *aporia* lodged at the heart of Barth's missionary response to the existentialists. The soteriological insight regarding the freedom of divine grace that forms the basis for his theanthropology is the very same insight that leads him to posit a bifurcation between dogmatic-exegetical reflection and missionary translation. The logic of mission that Barth so powerfully uses in his response to the existentialists is arbitrarily excluded from the primary task of theology, with the result that while his theology is ordered *toward* mission, it is not structured *by* mission. Even though he has already made mission primary in his theological ontology, he makes mission secondary in his theological epistemology. We might also say that his theology is missionary in practice but not missionary in theory, by virtue of the fact that he has subordinated practice to theory as a secondary moment in theology.

Barth's inconsistency is driven by his overriding concern to shut the door on Bultmann's hermeneutical project. But it did not have to be that way. Is not the work of exegesis inherently the work of translation? And if so, should we not examine this practical and hermeneutical nature of theological speech, precisely at the level of theory, so that our engagement in hermeneutical translation is not done arbitrarily or inconsistently but as the proper unfolding of the kerygma itself? Doing so would, I argue, be the appropriate fulfillment of Barth's theanthropological project. The result would be to take up the existentialist problematic not only into the *being* of God in Jesus Christ, but also into our *thinking* and *speaking* about God as part of the missionary fidelity to our Christian vocation.[66] The payoff, in agreement with the stated intentions of both Barth and Bultmann, is a thoroughgoing criticism and exclusion of all worldviews from Christian theology — an exclusion of every attempt to turn the knowledge of God into general, abstract statements that lack an intrinsically existential determination.

In short, theanthropology and anthropotheology are not rightly viewed as opposed at all, at least when viewed in a fresh light. Theanthropology is the soteriological counterpart to anthropotheology, and anthropotheology is the hermeneutical counterpart to theanthropology. The former looks at the God-world relationship in terms of sin and grace, death and resurrection; the latter looks at the God-world relationship in terms of word and situation, address and answer, vocation and mission. The two are not rightly placed in conflict. They are, in fact, complementary aspects of the divine-human encounter as revealed in Jesus Christ.[67]

2. At the end of his "Foreword to the American Edition" of *Evangelical Theology,* Barth says that what is needed today is a "theology of freedom" that "looks

66. I have said above that, according to Barth's theanthropology, "the anthropological question no longer resides merely at the level of epistemology or hermeneutics . . . but rather now resides at the more basic level of theological *ontology.*" We can express the central thesis of this chapter by saying that, while Barth was right to move anthropology into divine ontology, he should have also kept it in the fields of epistemology and hermeneutics.

67. Though no competition need exist between soteriology and hermeneutics, it is nonetheless true that a thoroughgoing integration of these two aspects will demand a shift in presentation, if not interpretation, of Christ's saving work. It is no accident that Barth's hermeneutical approach is closest to Bultmann *prior* to the revision of his doctrine of election (as seen best in the *Römerbrief* and his *Göttingen Dogmatics*), when he held to an "actualistic" election that takes place in the present moment. If reconciliation is an occurrence in the eschatological "now," then it would make sense for our speaking and thinking about God to be determined by the present situation. Barth's shift to a protological, rather than eschatological, conception of election thus marks his own transition to a hermeneutic of "critical naiveté," which seeks to think within the contours of the narrated history of Jesus Christ. The constructive project that this chapter proposes thus cannot restrict itself to integrating a Bultmannian hermeneutic into a Barthian soteriology; that would fail to recognize the interrelatedness of soteriology and hermeneutics for both theologians. Instead, there needs to be a reciprocal influence on both sides: soteriologically, Barth's grounding of election in the primal decision of God needs to be reconstructed in a way that emphasizes the present eschatological moment as the locus of election; hermeneutically, Bultmann's emphasis on the present encounter with the kerygma needs to be understood as grounded in the God who elects this encounter in Jesus Christ.

ahead and strives forward." Anything less would "scarcely be suitable . . . to the nearly apocalyptic seriousness of our time" (p. xii). These words ring as true today as they did fifty years ago — perhaps far truer. Barth struggled against the forces of anthropotheology throughout his life. He developed his theology in contrast to those who wanted to make the human subject, conceived in abstraction from the lived history of Jesus Christ, the starting point and norm of theological discourse. In response he called for a turn, not away from the subject, but to the subject-matter *(zur Sache)* — not away from anthropology but to theanthropology. In doing so, he sought to remain faithful to the valid concerns that came to expression in liberal theology, but on the soil of a Christology that could alone make proper sense of those concerns.

We live in a very different time. The forces of liberalism have largely abandoned theology, or they have scattered into such disunity and confusion that they no longer present a force to be reckoned with. Instead, today we face, especially in North America, a massive reaction against modern theology and a return (if I may borrow a favorite phrase of Barth's) to the "fleshpots of Egypt," by which I mean the fleshpots of doctrinal orthodoxy and classical metaphysics. Confronted by a narcissistic culture all too wrapped up in its own existence, many theologians take refuge in a divine object without the human subject, in a theology without anthropology. We live in an age where confessionalism is all but indistinguishable from fundamentalism, where many of our best minds are captivated by the metaphysical grandeur of the *analogia entis,* or the logical rigor of analytic philosophy, rather than the concrete existence of Jesus Christ.

An interpretation of Barth for today will need to take the present theological situation into account. We do indeed live in a "nearly apocalyptic" time, speaking not only politically but also theologically. The struggle facing Barthian theology today is no longer anthropotheology, but rather simply *theology* — that is, a theology not determined by the questions of existence and mission. To address these problems requires a theanthropology that is also an anthropotheology. The church today needs the joint witness of Barth *and* Bultmann.

The First Community: Barth's American Prison Tours

Jessica DeCou

> *In prison, I feel at home among sinners. In the churches, there are sinners too. But they think they are saints, and I do not feel at home.*[1]
>
> Karl Barth, 1962

In a sermon at the Basel prison on Good Friday 1957, Karl Barth proclaimed that the two criminals condemned to be crucified alongside Jesus represented the first Christian community. Of course, there were others who had followed Jesus during his life, but the criminals could not deny or abandon him, for "they are linked in a common bondage never again to be broken." They were, therefore, "the first certain, indissoluble and indestructible Christian community."[2] Given these sentiments, it is quite fitting that, on the day before his first U.S. prison tour five years later, Barth delivered a lecture titled "The Community."

Barth visited three American correctional facilities in 1962: Chicago's House of Correction, California's San Quentin State Prison, and Rikers Island in New York. In what follows I provide some background on these facilities and as many details as are available on the tours themselves, and I offer some reflection on their significance for today, though this is part of a larger work-in-progress chronicling Barth's travels in America, and there are many details yet to be uncovered.

1. Louis Cassels, "Dr. Karl Barth in US, Clarifies Themes of 'Evangelical Theology,'" United Press International, May 11, 1962.

2. Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1961), p. 77.

Karl Barth and the Making of *Evangelical Theology*

A FIFTY-YEAR PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

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Introduction

Clifford B. Anderson

Karl Barth visited the United States of America only once during his long career as a theologian. He arrived on April 7, 1962, to visit his son Markus and family, and to deliver lectures that were subsequently published as the book *Evangelical Theology.* For roughly two months he toured the United States, traveling "from sea to shining sea." He visited Chicago, New York, Princeton, Richmond, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., among many other places. He visited with Billy Graham, exchanged greetings with Martin Luther King Jr., and talked politics with Arthur Schlesinger Jr. He returned to Switzerland on May 26th, ending the two months with a superfluity of impressions. He wrote to his son-in-law: "Max, America, which we have sampled a little in the midwest, east, and west, is a fantastic affair, a world in which much is astonishingly alike and much astonishingly unlike. When people ask for impressions of America one's mouth simply closes; there is no knowing where to begin, since generalizations are certainly wide of the mark."[1]

This volume of essays exhibits a similar form of astonishment at the depths and riches of Karl Barth's theology. The eleven contributors to this volume address different facets of Barth's theology and ethics, but his visit to America serves as the common thread running through these reflections. The contributors all took part in a conference held at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, held June 17-20, 2012, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Barth's *Evangelical Theology.* The conference also celebrated the 200th anniversary of the 1812 founding of Princeton Theological Seminary.

1. Karl Barth to Max Zellweger, May 19, 1962, in Barth, *Letters 1961-1968* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 45.