

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KARL BARTH'S CONCEPTION OF PETITIONARY
PRAYER AS DIVINE-HUMAN CORRESPONDENCE IN *CHURCH
DOGMATICS*, IV/4 AND *THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: CD, IV/4: LECTURE
FRAGMENTS***

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Abstract

Karl Barth claims in *Church Dogmatics* that calling upon God as Father in prayer (invocation) is exemplary human action. Barth's treatment of prayer in this way provides a different vantage point on the topic of prayer than is often studied in contemporary Christian scholarship, where Christian prayer is studied to establish its devotional or community value. Barth's presentation of prayer is worth studying because it reveals prayer as the vehicle through which humans learn about themselves and about God. Moreover, prayer reveals God's divine nature as He connects with the Christian pray-er. Barth calls this relationship between God and the Christian *divine-human correspondence*. My focus is to explore Barth's theology to determine the significance of prayer in the context of *divine-human correspondence* and then to relate it to prayer in everyday Christian life. I conclude that prayer, as effective human action, is inherent to human correspondence with God.

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Introduction

Research Problem and Background

Karl Barth, one of the foremost theologians of the twentieth century, claims in his *Church Dogmatics (CD)*¹ that petitionary prayer is “the most intimate and effective form of Christian action,” wherein God acts first in correspondence towards humanity.² If Barth’s claim is correct, the question must be asked: What then is the significance for the Christian life? The answer(s) necessitates a clearer understanding of Barth’s concept of petitionary prayer as Christian action and its place within the broader theological purview. Generally speaking, there are two conventional expressions of prayer within contemporary Christianity: devotional³ and providential.⁴ Barth’s explication offers a unique way. The action of prayer is located ontologically, specifically, as an expression of the human position in relation to God. As such, Barth’s treatment of prayer cannot fit into either of the two prescriptive expressions, in the sense that he does not deal with prayer as a theological category relating to the doctrine of God, nor does he see it exclusively as devotional. Instead, prayer is a theological category relating the human person to his or her capacity for action that is rooted in the command of God and the doctrine of reconciliation. Because Barth locates prayer where human action is

¹ The *Church Dogmatics* will be shortened to *CD* henceforth.

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/3, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 264, 270; *CD*, III/4, 87. In this document footnote references to *Church Dogmatics* will follow the format *CD* or *KD* (for the German), volume/part, page number.

³ O. Hallesby, *Prayer*, trans. C. J. Carlsen (London: InterVarsity Fellowship, 1953). Hallesby addresses prayer as an attitude of the heart with an emphasis on the practice of prayer as essential to the individual Christian life. Cf. N. T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁴ Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000). For an academic comparison, Tiessen treats prayer in relation to the providence of God.

conformity to, or correspondence with, the revealed command of God (Christian ethics), the practice of prayer for the believer has significance beyond its devotional and providential dimensions into that of divine-human correspondence.

A Definition of Divine–Human Correspondence in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*

Barth’s theme of correspondence, more rightly termed divine–human correspondence, can be characterized as a sequence of communicative events that begin and end with God. Divine–human correspondence is a relationship wherein God first speaks and in speaking, reveals Himself as God, the God who calls the human agent to prayer. In prayer, human action takes the form of petitions, addressing the God of the Bible as Father. Then, corresponding to the human act of praying, God continues to respond (in speech and act) to the praying human agent. Thus, Barth’s theme of divine–human correspondence captures the sum total of these actions between God and the human agent, that is, Barth’s theo-anthropology. Therefore, as a part of this study I explore Barth’s theo-anthropology in order to illuminate more precisely the meaning of prayer and its significance for the whole of the Christian life. Along the way, I show how Barth’s conception of divine–human correspondence makes this act (i.e. prayer) all the more significant, and consequently the human agent’s obedience to the command to pray even more necessary.

The scholarly community has given much attention to Barth's concept of Christian ethics,⁵ among many others in relation to the individual Christian life.⁶ But little attention has been given to the placement of prayer as divine–human correspondence within that context; divine–human correspondence referring to the relationship in the form of dialogue between God and the redeemed human agent through the vehicle of prayer.

In this study, I investigate the significance of Barth's placement of prayer within the context of Christian ethics and suggest that Barth's concept clarifies the significance of prayer in the Christian life. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that Barth's concept of Christian petitionary prayer as divine–human correspondence in his *CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments* indicates his moral ontology and confirms the inseparability of theology and ethics for the Christian life. Consequentially, the question must be asked and answered: What then is the significance of Barth's conception of petitionary prayer as divine–human correspondence for the Christian life?

The subject matter and methodology of this thesis offers fresh insight into Barth's theology of petitionary prayer and its contribution to the larger body of knowledge on prayer. Through the practice of petitionary prayer, the human agent is not

⁵ For example, see Archibald James Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action: Ethical Ontology in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Eberhard Jüngel, "Invocation of God as the Ethical Ground of Christian Action," in *Eberhard Jüngel: Theological Essays, vol. 1*, trans. John B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989). In this article, Jüngel asserts that Barth locates the analogy between divine and human action, in invocation (prayer), 160; Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Through several essays on Barth, Webster clarifies Barth's ethics as the human agent's acknowledgement that human action, in its origin, basis and center, is divinely motivated, 109; and William Werpehowski, "Command and History in the Ethics of Karl Barth," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9, no. 2 (Fall, 1981): 298-320.

⁶ Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 185. Nimmo argues that for Barth, God's action and human action are connected through the ethical agent's participation in glorifying God.

only brought under God’s command, but also is free to correspond to the command of God in the day-to-day affairs of life. Through prayer, the human agent self-identifies as a member of God’s covenant people “through the covenant that took place in Jesus Christ.”⁷ Barth also teaches that God corresponds precisely to the action of prayer, and thus his concept adds to the church’s broader discussion on the efficacy of prayer in the modern age.

Methodology

My assessment of the significance of Barth’s theology of prayer takes an historical approach. I trace the genesis and development of Barth’s ideas on prayer with special attention given to his moral ontology in relevant sections of the *CD*. First, I examine the historical development of Barth’s thought on prayer in the context of his early material. Second, I explore and critique Barth’s basic moral ontology. The works of Eberhard Jüngel⁸ and John Webster⁹ on Barth’s moral ontology—that is, their understanding of the inseparability of theology and human action—will be the overarching idea from which prayer in the *CD* is explained. Third, I assess Barth in context, analyzing sections of the *CD* in relation to the whole. I focus on portions such as Command of God (*CD*, II/1), Doctrine of Reconciliation (*CD*, IV/1 and IV/4), and *Lecture Fragments* (*CD*, IV/4). The following procedural details demonstrate how I apply this method of research.

⁷ *CD*, IV/4, 65.

⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays 1*, trans. John B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

⁹ John B. Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Procedure

Following an introduction, chapter 1 considers influences on Barth's thinking, particularly with regards to piety and prayer as found in his letters and his earlier works.¹⁰ Such an approach allows me to feature Barth the theologian, with specific attention to the historical development of his ideas on prayer.¹¹ I further this chapter by presenting a literature review of the contemporary debate on the significance of Barth's moral ontology with respect to his theology of prayer. Here the relevant works of Eberhard Jüngel and John Webster are examined in detail. The three benchmarks of the literature review are (1) the secondary source understanding of Barth's theology on prayer, (2) the conclusions that these authors have drawn, and (3) an identification of how my thesis differs from, adds to, or is supported by these sources. All of which sets the stage for identifying where my thesis makes its contribution. In chapter 2, I expand the historical investigation into Barth's development of prayer to include key works, namely his *Epistle to the Romans*, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, and *Ethics*. Chapter 3 begins with my analysis and reading of Barth in context. I investigate prayer in the context of Barth's *CD*, focusing on Command of God (*CD*, II/1, §30), and Doctrine of Reconciliation (*CD*, IV/1, §58 and §60, and *CD*, IV/4). Continuing my reading in context, chapter 4 investigates how Barth infuses the theme of divine-human correspondence in *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments* as a key to petitionary prayer. In chapter 5, I evaluate the significance of

¹⁰ Secondary sources include: Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth's Critique of Pietism and Its Response* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004); John Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005); Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910–1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

¹¹ Secondary sources include: Archibald James Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*; Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster, 2004).

Barth's theology of prayer as divine–human correspondence in the context of the *CD* as a whole. Finally, I conclude with how Barth's legacy of ideas on divine–human correspondence situates prayer in ethics and I offer suggestions on its potential relevance to the church today.

Chapter 1: Biography

Introduction

Karl Barth—theologian, pastor, and teacher—was born into a family of pastors and academics on May 10, 1886 in Basel, Switzerland; “His family and background placed him at the center of Basel religious and intellectual life.”¹ Barth’s father, Johann Friedrich Barth (Fritz), earned his doctorate in theology with a thesis on Tertullian’s interpretation of Paul and lectured at the College of Preacher in Basel. Barth’s grandfathers were also pastors and teachers. J. T. Beck was a prominent influence and teacher of Franz Albert Barth (1818–1879), Barth’s grandfather on his father’s side. So close was the relationship that he officiated Franz’s wedding. Franz taught religion and music at an all-girls high school. Barth’s father was also heavily influenced by Beck. Fritz regarded him as a spiritual father who brought him “out of the barren wilderness of self-satisfied criticism into the green pastures of the word of God.”² Barth regarded Beck’s interpretation of the Bible highly; writing to his friend Edward Thurneysen that Beck, as an interpreter of the Bible, “towered above the rest.”³ What Barth found in Beck (and Blumhardt) was not only a new reading of Scripture, but also a reading that revealed the future kingdom of God.

What he found in Beck was in close conjunction to what he found in Blumhardt. It focused on the goal of the kingdom of God, understood not as the fulfillment of the desire for an individual salvation of the soul but as a comprehensive, holistic, spiritual and physical “living organism” that is established by divine “forces,” where Christ is the center and “is understood as the first seed.”⁴

¹ John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

² Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 34.

Later in his life, Barth recalled that he obtained his first theological instruction as a young child (in the last decade of the nineteenth century) through the songs of theologian Abel Burckhardt, taught to him by his mother, Anna Katharina. Burckhardt's songs made an indelible impression on him in the "homely and unpretentious self-assurance with which the events of Christmas, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, [and] Pentecost" were presented.⁵ Barth's reflection on that influence was, "that the words give one a firm foundation of faith on which to stand despite trial and temptation, but in the end he will be brought back relatively unscathed to firm ground."⁶ Barth's parents brought up their five children (Barth was the eldest) in "good Christian spirit."⁷ Barth was introduced to the ideas of Christian socialism as a young child through the newspaper his father read. Barth recalls that Friedrich Naumann's ideas made an influence on him in his youth:

I still remember the subtitle of his newspaper *Die Hilfe* (Help), which I sometimes saw on my father's desk, "Help for God, help for one's brother, help for the state, help for oneself." These strong words made an impression on me, though I could hardly understand them. I felt that something strong, great and new was on the way.⁸

Beginning in 1904 Barth studied at Berne and made the acquaintance of many people, such as Thurneysen, through his involvement in the students' association, Zoltingia. Thurneysen was to become a lifelong friend. Barth's love of music was a lifelong treasure. He played the violin and earned money during his years at Berne (1904-1906) by giving violin lessons.

It is no doubt that Barth's university studies influenced his reading. He read Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion to its*

⁵ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Cultured Despisers, and William Herrman's *Ethics*.⁹ In Berlin, Barth studied under Willhelm Herrman,¹⁰ much to his father's disapproval. Barth felt that Herrman's *Ethics* was a pivotal point in his theological development. He says, "This book started me off in perpetual motion. With more restraint, but no less gratefully, I would prefer to say: I think that my personal interest in theology began on that day."¹¹

In July of 1911, following his seminary training, Barth, like his father and grandfather, served as a pastor of a congregation of less than 1500 registered Protestants in Safenwil, Switzerland.¹² His appointment lasted a decade. Historically, early twentieth-century Europe exemplified social and political upheaval. "By the time Barth began his pastorate, what seemed like a prosperous, secure time of cultural self-confidence was a sham."¹³ The young pastor found preaching difficult and preparing his sermons a painstaking exercise.¹⁴ He wrestled with how to present the Bible's theological significance to his Safenwil parishioners. In part, Barth's struggle involved a realization that "the true theme of theology"¹⁵ was in fact to express God as He wants to be known by His creatures; that God is totally unlike His creations, yet seeks to be known by humanity and to allow them to participate in His future will. It was this task of addressing the question of the sheer otherness and distance of God "which then came down on me like a ton of bricks," Barth later commented.¹⁶ Such a realization began his pursuit of

⁹ John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 2.

¹⁰ Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters*, 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹² Karl Barth and William H. Willimon, *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth: Fourteen Sermons with Commentary by William H. Willimon*, trans. John E. Wilson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), ix. A collection of Barth's sermons preached from 1917 to 1920.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁴ Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 3.

¹⁵ Karl Barth and William H. Willimon, *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth*, xi.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

reading the Bible with more avid diligence and writing down its message. As a result, his entrance into theology and biblical exegesis commenced with a commentary on *Romans*. The work qualified him for a post at the University of Göttingen where his lectures formed his first attempt at dogmatics, later titled *The Göttingen Dogmatics*. In 1935 he returned to Basel (having been discharged from his post due to his political position against the status quo between the two world wars in Germany) and continued his career until his retirement in 1962. He continued to teach, preach, and lecture until his passing on December 10, 1968.¹⁷

Barth's corpus includes works on the Lord's Prayer and the nature of ethics in his *Ethics I and II*. His interest in the nature of God as revealed in the Bible, God's relationship with His creatures, and the centrality of Jesus Christ to the Christian life is best viewed in arguably his greatest work, a work left unfinished at his passing, his *CD* and the fragments of his lectures published as *The Christian Life (CD, IV)*. In 1962, Barth's retirement was commemorated by a series of lectures published as *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* in which he addresses prayer in the context of theological work.

In sum, Barth's theological influence spans the periods from WWI to the present day. His work suggests for us a new way to explore prayer through the lens of how God chooses to communicate with His creature in the divine command to pray. Barth understood prayer to be more than devotion or petition to God. Rather, prayer was an essential part of the fabric of the divine-human connection, which God Himself devised and requires of His creatures, the call to prayer for the future that God wills for creation

¹⁷ Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 8.

as a whole—“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The next section provides an overview of some of Barth’s early influences and highlights formative moments in his ideas on prayer.

Early Influences on Barth’s Concept of Prayer

When attempting to understand great thinkers it is useful to consider their historical context in addition to their perspectives and influences.¹⁸ T. F. Torrance suggests that Barth’s influences and immediate historical context “[are] very much concerned with the great movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”¹⁹ For Barth, prayer was critical to his life’s work. In one of his early sermons he writes, “As one prays so one lives and walks and behaves.”²⁰ Don Saliers notes that Barth’s theology and his life manifest what it means to “begin and end in prayer.”²¹ In terms of influences, Barth was a product of his time, but he was not constrained by it. Webster observes that from 1911 to 1923 Barth’s theological development was marked by Reformation theology, specifically that of John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli. John Webster states that, “The *Church Dogmatics* did not come from nowhere. Its first volumes arose out of a decade of extraordinary activity which has to be borne in mind to catch the full resonance of what Barth is presenting there.”²² Webster argues that these three avenues of influence present in Barth’s early theology are reflected in his later works.

The Early Reformation

¹⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910–1931* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Karl Barth, *Come Holy Spirit*, trans. George W. Richards (New York: Round Table Press, 1934), 24. A collection of Barth’s sermons prepared from 1920 to 1924.

²¹ *Ibid.*, ix.

²² John Webster, *Barth’s Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 13.

It was Barth's influences from the Protestant Reformation, specifically Calvin, that show their impact on his ideas about prayer. He does give Martin Luther some attention, but his focus is on Calvin and the Swiss Reformer, Zwingli. The influences seem to have come from "Barth's desire in the first half of the 1920s to be instructed by the traditions of the Reformed Christianity,"²³ to meet his commitment to the role of Honorary Professor of Reformed Theology from 1921 to 1925 at Göttingen. About the Protestant Reformation, he writes that it

Appears to us as a great whole: a labour of research, thinking, preaching, discussion, polemic, and organization. But it was more than all that. From what we know, it was also an act of continuous prayer, an invocation, and let us add, an act of human beings, of certain persons, and at the same time a response on the part of God.²⁴

In one of his earliest recorded prayers during his pastoral days in Safenwil, Barth reflects on the influence of the Reformers thus "the voices of Luther and Calvin are heard at times quite distinctly."²⁵ A sample of one of these prayers seems modeled after Calvin's rules of right prayer, which Calvin modeled after the Lord's Prayer. Calvin's rules of prayer are that prayer should first demonstrate "a reverence for God."²⁶ Second, it should express "a sense of our want."²⁷ Third, that prayer must occur in an attitude of humility, putting aside all pride. And fourth, prayer should be said with a "sure confidence of being heard."²⁸ Barth prayed:

By your judgment, Almighty God we stand and fall. Grant that we may see our weakness and powerlessness...Help us to let go of all trust in ourselves...Grant that we may constantly call upon you and cast our sorrows upon you until we

²³ Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 15.

²⁴ Karl Barth, *Prayer*, 50th ed., ed. Dan E. Saliers, trans. Sara F. Terrien (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.4–11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

have finally escaped all dangers and come to that eternal peace prepared for us by the suffering, death and resurrection of your only begotten Son.²⁹

Further evidence with regards to prayer in Barth's early years (1911-1935) is reflected in his sermons. On May 19, 1918 Barth preached from Acts 2:1-4. In his sermon he discusses the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in the context of prayer. He suggests that prayer is an act wherein we are confident that God hears us. "Oh we need not pray in vain," He writes, "we need never forget what is necessary when we pray; we can find what we seek."³⁰ Thus, in these early years the great Reformers influenced Barth and as a result he focused on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in the work of praying.

Calvin's theology appears to have influenced Barth's life's work. In a letter to his friend Thurneysen, Barth speaks of Calvin's theology as "inaccessible," an inaccessibility that "spurred him on" to pursue understanding.³¹ He carried forward his interest and pursuit of Calvin's theology into his lectures, particularly "The Word of God and the Task of Ministry" (1922) and "The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches" (1923). Calvin's influence also impressed upon the *The Göttingen Dogmatics* and the whole of his theological career. In sum, "the attention Barth gives to Calvin in his later work, *CD* and in lectures exceeds the attention given to any other theologian."³² It is suggested that even Barth's exegetical starting point, being the book of *Romans*, was spurred on by Calvin, as his first commentary of 1540 was on *Romans*.³³

²⁹ Barth, *Prayer*, 71.

³⁰ Karl Barth and William H. Willimon, *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth*, 62.

³¹ Richard Burnett, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth*, Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 26.

³² *Ibid.*, 26.

³³ John McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth* (Liverpool: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), 42; John Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians: Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas Forsyth Torrance, trans. Ross MacKenzie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

Huldrych Zwingli

Barth says that Zwingli was relevant because of his useful critique of Luther's ideas. Furthermore, Barth writes of Zwingli:

He was really no great spirit, but rather it is only in the context of the whole Reformation that one can recognize him as the man who brought to express the (necessary!) protest against Luther . . . besides he is an excellent representative of the humanistic-Christian type . . . however not to be spoken of as a "Reformer."³⁴

Barth's proposal of prayer as human action that is obedient to God reflects Zwingli's themes. Webster suggests that Zwingli's theology of the "world as a distinct sphere of human activity where the knowledge of God and obedience defined human action in relation to God"³⁵ impacted Barth strongly. "Barth was—and would remain—strongly attracted to this aspect of Zwingli: the exposition of Christian baptism and the Lord's Prayer in the late ethics of reconciliation is undergirded by a similar sense."³⁶

Yet, Barth did not accept Zwingli's theology completely. He was uneasy about Zwingli's quickness to set the matter of the relationship between God and the world as one definite principle. As a result, Barth saw Zwingli as being "too undialectical."³⁷ However, one of the things that attracted Barth to Zwingli, as Webster notes, is the idea of participation of God in the human "sphere" as an encounter between God and creature. Webster notes that Barth's development of these ideas in his early theology is still rough around the edges. He writes,

Ethics is not concerned with "union with the Godhead" it is, instead, a matter of "human creatureliness" which comes from knowledge of "the deity of the Creator." Barth's presentation of these themes is undoubtedly abstract, rather

³⁴ Karl Barth and Edward Thurneysen, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth–Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914–1925*, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1964), 125.

³⁵ Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Zwinglis 1922/1923, Vorlesungen Göttingen Wintersemester 1922/1923* (Zurich: TVZ 2004), 321; quoted in John Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 30.

jagged, and not fully at ease with these concepts. He is it should be remembered, at a very early stage in his maturation as dogmatic thinker.³⁸

While Barth himself strongly disagreed with any influence of Zwingli in his later works, for example his doctrine of baptism in *CD*, Webster notes—and I agree—that Barth’s attempt to understand the substance of Zwingli’s theology is reflected in his later works as he grapples with the theology of contemporaries in his later and mature writings.³⁹ Webster states correctly, I believe, that Barth’s challenge of Zwingli’s ideas helped him to develop his own theological voice in dogmatics. Webster concludes, “As Barth interprets Zwingli, that is, he is already formulating in a rudimentary way a pattern of thought which is to play a commanding role in the *Church Dogmatics*, namely the very perfection of God’s free sovereignty is the ground of the moral life.”⁴⁰ The pattern of thought that Webster describes is very much present in Barth’s *Romans* and other exegetical papers.

Influences on Barth’s Exegesis

Barth’s emphasis on the Bible as the source of the Word of God is to some extent a product of Zwingli’s thinking. Webster states, “If we stand back from Barth’s very dense exposition, we can see that it was from his reading of Zwingli (alongside of course, much else) that Barth began to acquire a set of categories and patterns of thought . . . which were to be a permanent principle of his thought.”⁴¹ Webster is referring to what

³⁸ Webster, *Barth’s Earlier Theology*, 27.

³⁹ For example, “Nein!” in response to Emil Brunner’s article “Natural Theology: Comprising Nature and Grace.”

⁴⁰ Webster, *Barth’s Earlier Theology*, 26.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

Barth had discovered in his renewed reading of the Bible regarding the transcendence of God and “a deep and disturbing sense of the aseity of God in relation to the world.”⁴²

Also, Barth’s interest in the Bible was fuelled by his work as a pastor, particularly the task of preaching. Barth confessed that “preaching gets more difficult for me every time.”⁴³ The concept of the “otherness of God” sparked his theological mind with greater force as he searched the Bible. Although, the obvious distress of the political climate and WWI played a part in Barth’s challenge of preaching, the key reason according to his friend Bonheoffer “came from a new reading of Scripture, not from the trenches but from a Swiss village pulpit.”⁴⁴ Therefore, “the brash young scholar who burst on the theological scene in *Romans* had a couple of hundred sermons to prepare him to lead a theological insurgency.”⁴⁵

In 1915 Barth discovered the works of Johann Blumhardt and his son Christoph.⁴⁶ The Blumhardts were prominent Württemberg Pietists whose ideas appear to have influenced Barth’s work in *Romans* and in *CD*. Although there are various traditions within Pietism, the general idea is that Pietism espouses deep religious faith, the truth of the Bible as God’s word, and the authentic evidence of a personal relationship with Christ. Authentic evidence meant the individual’s role in social welfare and spiritual devotion. The engagement of the Pietist in these activities is believed to be the outflowing of the divine work of rebirth, made possible through Christ.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Barth and Willimon, *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth*, xii.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 31. Busch notes that Barth’s grandparents, Karl and Elizabeth Sartorius, were deeply interested in the Blumhardts’ work.

Eberhard Busch suggests that Barth's discovery of the Blumhardts was one of the reasons for his clarified position on religious individualism. Joseph Mangina proposes, and I agree, that Barth's interest in the Blumhardts was due to his "interest in rethinking the gospel in a more eschatological and God-centered framework."⁴⁷ Not only the opening petitions, but also his approach to the whole of the Lord's Prayer is eschatological. "This is linked to Barth's fundamental conviction that God is faithful to God's self-given Word . . . [meaning] that prayer is an eschatological cry based precisely on the acknowledgement of God's name, will and reign."⁴⁸

In Barth's early life, being Christian meant living a certain way so that one is freed to provide assistance to those in need rather than the individual efforts to "get into heaven."⁴⁹ Thus, Barth's desire to clarify the relationship between God and the human creature preceded his interpretation of Romans. He had discovered the "wholly otherness of God." His discovery was influenced to some extent by his encounter with the Blumhardts "about one year before he began his interpretation of the epistle to the Romans in April 1915. He felt that Christoph Blumhardt's message was 'immediately true.'⁵⁰ Mangina observes that Barth's "encounter with Blumhardt seemed to shift his thinking into a new key."⁵¹ The theologian's emphasis was no longer on a "position" or point of view but his new approach was on divine action. Busch notes that the Blumhardts' influence impacted Barth's ideas in *Romans* and his later works, all of which

⁴⁷ Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*, 10.

⁴⁸ Barth, *Prayer*, xvi.

⁴⁹ Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵¹ Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*, 11.

helped Barth express two viewpoints.⁵² The Blumhardts were known for their “hearing of prayer” and their theology of hope.⁵³ “That Barth’s theology has the outspoken character of a ‘Theology of Hope’ he owes in part to Blumhardt.”⁵⁴ The second viewpoint is the divine human relationship as a “legal” relationship evident in Barth’s sermons from approximately 1913 onwards.⁵⁵ The “legal” relationship is based on truth.⁵⁶ Barth clarifies what he means by this relationship:

It is a relationship different from an animal with its young. It is something different from the love of parents who find their highest good in always seeing their darlings satisfied. The relationship of God to His own is a legal relationship. It does not rest on whim and inclination, but rather on truth.⁵⁷

Another influence on Barth’s exegesis was Beck. Barth writes to Thurneysen on July 27, 1916, “Discovery of a gold mine. J. T. Beck! As a biblical expositor he simply towers far above the rest of the company...Also in his systematic approach he is in part directly accessible and exemplary for us.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

Barth soon found that the many voices he had read and was using in his exegetical practice, including Beck, did not entirely express what he wanted to say. He wanted to say something new and fresh. He wanted to say “that all the Christian groups and trends could not carry on as they were doing...The fear of the Lord did not stand objectively at

⁵² Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*. Busch notes that although Barth wrote an acknowledgment of his indebtedness to Blumhardt in his first book *Briefwechsel I*, that sentence was omitted in a later version edited by Barth’s friend Edward Thurneysen.

⁵³ McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth*, 40.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Milton Keynes: Oxford University Press, 1997), 94.

⁵⁶ Karl Barth, Sermon 27, April 1913; quoted in McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 94.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Barth and Thurneysen, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 38.

the beginning of our wisdom; we always attempt as it were to snatch at his assent in passing.”⁵⁹ Barth was concerned that there was little desire for the kingdom of God. He argued that “humanity could not make [its] partisan standpoint God’s own. But rather all share responsibility before God!”⁶⁰

Two central themes began to surface in Barth’s exegesis and are later reflected in his first edition of *Romans* and even more so in the second. These central ideas represent his break with “the Romantic movement on the one hand and with pietism on the other.”⁶¹ These ideas are: hope in the “completion” in God of all things, that is, “the great future of God” and the fact that His “hope” is behind everything.⁶² As such, God is understood as “the living God,” and as the One who can bring something completely new. Busch observes that with these ideas, Barth had moved comfortably away from the individualism that is characteristic of Pietism.⁶³ The second is that this new life, this real life, this “new order”⁶⁴ can come only from God Himself. It is a newness that comes “quietly and gently” in which “we are not seeking anything of our own” and do not want to grow ourselves. Rather “we allow God to grow in us.”⁶⁵

In July of 1916, Barth wrote a review of Christoph Blumhardt’s “House Prayers” for the *Neue Wege*. In Blumhardt’s prayer of September 18th he prays: “Only you, through your Spirit, can awaken something in us to help us go toward your goal. Keep us from being caught up in what men do. The greatest help for our hearts is what you do,

⁵⁹ Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters*, 99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 32.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

and each of us can tell something about it.”⁶⁶ In Barth’s review of these prayers, he criticized religious socialism arguing that we must “quietly wait for God’s action,”⁶⁷ as opposed to giving primacy to human action. It was prayers like this that reflected Blumhardt’s influence on Barth.

In 1920, Barth wrote to Thurneysen that he was working on a prayer book using the Psalms that was to be used in the worship service of his pastorate. He expressed his amazement that the Psalms had not been more often used because they were “remarkable literature.”⁶⁸ He notes that “there are shocking things in it about ‘the wholly other’ that form a background for an ‘edification’ that has a very different appearance from what is usually called by that name.”⁶⁹ Thus, Barth, from the beginning of his exploration on prayer in his work as a pastor, expresses that he appreciates prayer as more than a devotional exercise for the individual, but rather a human activity in response to God’s divine command. Around this same time, Barth was reading Heiler’s book *Prayer*, which from his letters he found “a disagreeable reading.”⁷⁰

Around the same time as Barth was writing his prayer book, he delivered a lecture at a sanatorium in Tambach, Germany. The lecture “made his name known in Germany”⁷¹ and thus, Barth’s ideas on theology had moved from his personal milieu to a wider audience. Until then, his first version of *Romans* was known only in Switzerland.⁷² What was new about Barth’s lecture at Tambach was that he presented a kingdom focus

⁶⁶ Christoph Blumhardt, *Lift Thine Eyes: Evening Prayers for Every Day of the Year*, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://ibobs.org/reading/Blumhardt/LiftThineEyes.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Karl Barth, *Action in Waiting*, trans. and ed. Society of Brothers (New York: Plough Publishers, 1969); quoted in Archibald Spencer, *Clearing A Space*, 133.

⁶⁸ Barth and Thurneysen, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 50.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷¹ Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters*, 109.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 110.

to a relationship with God. Busch states: “It was striking that Barth then went on to make a clear and fundamental distinction between Christ or the kingdom of God on the one hand and human actions, whether conservative or revolutionary, on the other.”⁷³ Barth said in that lecture that the kingdom of God is first and before all revolutions. What Barth was saying was a radical shift from the social movement of his time and showed also that he had begun to disassociate himself from the “the danger of which he now recognized as such, ‘of secularizing Christ for the umpteenth time, e.g., today for the sake of democracy, or pacifism, or youth movement . . . or for the sake of liberal culture.’”⁷⁴ Mangina notes that Barth warned his audience in his lecture at Tambach in 1919, “God’s action is precisely God’s.” For Barth, God’s action is not religion. He declares:

Our concern is with God, the movement originating in God, the motion which he lends us—and it is not religion. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. The so-called “religious experience” is a wholly derived, secondary, fragmentary form of the divine.⁷⁵

Pietism Influence

In addition to being struck by the specific brand of Pietism of the Blumhardts, Barth was no stranger to the traditions of Pietism. The ideology had influenced Barth’s family’s thought for generations. “His early history shows that Pietism was not foreign to his background but was familiar to him so that he got to know it in the best light in the environment in which he was first at home.”⁷⁶ Barth’s great grandfather, Johan Rud Bruckhard (1738–1820), was a Pietist. In his later life, Barth characterized his great grandfather as “not a dark pessimistic Pietist, but a joyous one. He was not a hard,

⁷³ Ibid., 111.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 111.

⁷⁵ Karl Barth, *The Word God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), 285.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 10.

legalistic Pietist who was oppressive to his surroundings, but an edifying and pleasing Pietist in the best sense of the word.”⁷⁷ Busch states that it was especially this ancestral line that made its greatest impact on Barth as a young child.⁷⁸ In addition to his introduction to theology by way of the Pietist songs taught to him by his mother, Barth attended the “Lerber” school in Bern as a young child, a school “established to promote the cause of Pietism in contrast to the ‘liberal state schools.’”⁷⁹

Barth’s influences reveal that he was not inclined to all the ideas of Pietism but rather to specific aspects of it, particularly in his early life (1907–1912). A lecture from 1910 reveals Barth’s ideas on faith as morality—individual morality linked to religion. In this respect Barth was agreeing with the Pietist idea, that “it is important for the person to become acquainted with Jesus of Nazareth.”⁸⁰ Here, we can see in the Pietistic view, which focuses on the individual, the movement of the individual *to* God as the human person’s first act on the basis of faith. Barth’s ideas on the nature of faith as individual morality, a morality with its basis in religion, reveals his early teacher Herrman’s influence. For Herrman, “the prerequisite for religion is the morality of man.”⁸¹ Barth’s early sermons also reflected his Pietist influences with respect to the individual’s role in faith. He says in a sermon from 1909, quoting Angelus Silesius, “It is not outside, the fool seeks it there/it is in you, you bring it forth eternally.”⁸² Again in a later sermon in 1911, Barth says Christians believe what they themselves experience in this way “God is awakened in us.”⁸³ T. F. Torrance suggests, and I agree, that Barth’s thinking in his early

⁷⁷ Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

theology moved “between two poles, from the new world within the Bible and the concrete life of human beings around him “forcing Barth to come to terms with the whole pietistic traditions of inwardness and diluting it to a purely individual hope.”⁸⁴

Barth’s treatment of Pietism with respect to the individual’s role in faith forms a key aspect of his critique of Pietism that was to be reflected in the first edition of his commentary on *Romans*. Archibald Spencer argues that what Barth discovered in the Bible was “revolutionary.”

It was not a rejection of “idealism, pietism and socialism . . . it was not right human thoughts about God but right divine thoughts about men...This was the overriding purpose of his composition of the commentary of Romans in the first edition.”⁸⁵

Historical Development of Petitionary Prayer in Barth’s Later Theology (1936-1968)

Introduction

The development of petitionary prayer in Barth’s later theology represented by his major work, the *CD*, is presented in the form of a literature review with attention given to his later works by Jüngel and Webster. Such theologians have written on Barth’s works with respect to his ethics and moral ontology. They have examined Barth’s claims of divine-human correspondence, prayer, invocation, and the nature of Barth’s theology. The following section presents their individual ideas on Barth. It also explains where their ideas support this thesis.

⁸⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910–1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 36.

⁸⁵ Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*, 135–136.

Literature Review: The Significance of Barth's Theology of Prayer
Eberhard Jüngel

Jüngel was Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy of Religion at Tübingen University from 1969 until his retirement in 2003. He authored a number of articles and books on Christian theology including *Theological Essays I and II*. He authored two books on Barth and wrote several essays on Christian ethics and invocation (prayer). He considered the writings of Barth as “seductive and impressive, they demand something more than to be read with approval (or rejection)... they demand to be studied.”⁸⁶ Jüngel’s attention to Barth’s exegesis and his ethical ideas form the majority of his attention to and critique of Barth’s overall contribution. Jüngel believes that Barth’s overall contribution is his demonstration of the Word of God as the Yes of God.⁸⁷ Jüngel states,

We are indebted to his realization of the unsurpassability of the divine Yes for what may be his most significant work: the doctrine election. From his realization of the humanity of the God who says Yes came his masterwork, the Christology. And with the realization of how the divine Yes can be answered in a Christian life, his unfinished lifework came to an end.⁸⁸

Jüngel’s goal in studying Barth is to show the consistency of his theology throughout his life, to show the dimensions of Barth’s dogmatic style and to display its unique qualities. Jüngel aims to show that from the beginning of Barth’s theological career to his later works Barth continually revisited and rethought his ideas as new beginnings. Barth, he says, was not afraid to reconstruct his ideas and begin anew (even in *CD*).⁸⁹ “Barth’s path from the *Epistle to the Romans* to the *Church Dogmatics*, with all its carefully considered

⁸⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), 12.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

self-corrections and turnabouts, was consistent.”⁹⁰ Jüngel believes that at the very least the theologian’s life’s work should “provoke us the desire . . . to continue to build in the same way.”⁹¹

God’s being, Jüngel argues, flows both from who He is as God and from His actions towards us as human individuals. Although God is hidden from us, He chooses to reveal Himself to us. We come to understand that God is hidden through revelation.⁹²

Jüngel states that “revelation means God’s self-interpretation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁹³ It is God who acts first in choosing to reveal Himself to us.

God is thus not to be thought of “only in a functional sense,” although God’s being can be conceived only as a “personal being” according to Gollwitzer, “may be, at any rate used theologically, only as a concept of relationship.”⁹⁴ This relationship is revealed, that is, becomes visible to us in Jesus Christ in the “antithesis of the cross thus on the basis of the action that is our salvation.”⁹⁵

Thus, the Christian can be in relationship with God in Jesus Christ because God has made it possible through the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Jüngel concludes that “the significance of the historical Jesus consists in the fact that he is the human person in correspondence to God and as such is the Son of God who also wishes to make us into human persons in correspondence to God, which means, into human persons who, instead of being unhappy gods, are content to be truly human persons.”⁹⁶ Thus, God’s relationship to the human person “can only be made on the basis of this one event,”⁹⁷ the

⁹⁰ Ibid.,.

⁹¹ Ibid., 21.

⁹² Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. John B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 124.

⁹³ Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 77.

⁹⁴ Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming*, 106–107.

⁹⁵ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, vol. 2, 137.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 132.

death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God chooses to define Himself as God revealed to us in the human person, Jesus Christ. “Everything here depends upon the fact that for the Christian faith the meanings of ‘God’ and ‘humanity’ are defined by reference to the person of Jesus Christ.”⁹⁸ In Jesus Christ, God made a decision about humanity’s future and the relationship between Himself and humanity. “The person called by that name is humanity in correspondence to God.”⁹⁹

On the basis of this one man, Jesus who corresponds to God then all of humanity now consists in corresponding to God. Jesus does not exist to correspond to God solely for his own sake, but in his being God makes a decision about all, in that this one man who corresponds to God brings into that correspondence all who do not correspond to God. Paul calls this event, in which we are brought into correspondence with God, justification.¹⁰⁰

Thus, Barth regards the connection between the human person and God as a distinctive relationship based on God’s grace to pardon sin because of Jesus Christ on one hand and the deep appreciation of the human agent towards God for His loving kindness on the other.¹⁰¹

Jüngel explains that in Barth’s theology God’s grace has two foci. First God’s revelation, the fact that He spoke to the human agent is grace. Second the words that He spoke, the Word of God is also grace. “But if the very fact that God speaks to us is already grace, then the content of what God speaks must also be grace in all circumstances.”¹⁰² Jüngel uses his discussion on Barth’s approach to the gospel and the law in order to reveal the nature of Barth’s insight on God’s covenantal relationship with

⁹⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰¹ *CD*, II/2, 564.

¹⁰² Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, 111.

the human creature.¹⁰³ Barth's theology begins with God first acting in relation to humanity and then the human responding. Because "the relation of God to humankind is first and foremost an expression of the divine disposition . . . [his] loving action in accordance with his being, his gracious action towards the sinner."¹⁰⁴

Jüngel suggests that human action corresponds to God's action in Barth's anthropology where "human decision corresponds to divine action."¹⁰⁵ Therefore, "where God acts and we receive (and only then can begin to act) . . . there we are seen to act—precisely in receiving. God as Lord of the covenant . . . necessarily becomes the judge of man, the law of his existence."¹⁰⁶ The analogy between God and humanity that Barth orders as the gospel and law defines his anthropology in that the connection between gospel and law is a correspondence between God and the human person. The work of God's grace reaches us through the gospel, humanity, who was under the law because of sin, is now commanded to and empowered to act like Christ. "It is precisely as a doer that a person corresponds to God."¹⁰⁷ Jüngel believes that such an analogy of gospel and law defines Barth's understanding of correspondence or analogy of God and humanity. It also propels Barth's insistence that the ethics, the nature of good human action (the goodness of human action in relation to divine command), is tied to dogmatics in its role of expounding the Word of God for the church.

Jüngel's summary of Barth's ethics throughout the *CD* supports this thesis in tracing the placement of prayer as within the command of God and reconciliation. First,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, 125.

Barth develops his ethics in the doctrine of creation, reconciliation, and redemption by way of his examination of the command of God as the Reconciler and the Redeemer. Next, Jüngel regards the command of God in relation to the human action. Human action is defined as “good” only when the human person responds to God’s command in obedience. The doctrine of creation then shows us that God is Creator and we therefore exist and live before Him. We live before God in freedom, a freedom that comes from God’s grace and the freedom of the human person to respond to that grace. Next, the doctrine of reconciliation heralds God’s call to the human person by rendering eternal relief from His judgement through the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸ In this way, the “reconciled God lays claim to humanity through his command, in so far as we are judged and uplifted, justified and sanctified in the gospel.”¹⁰⁹ The human person acknowledges and obeys God’s command/claim through three actions, two of which Barth links to prayer—baptism and praying—and living in agreement with the Lord’s Prayer.¹¹⁰ These actions are the elements of the daily working out of the command God in the Christian life.

Jüngel considers Barth’s *The Christian Life: CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments*¹¹¹ in his essay “Invocation of God as the Ethical Ground of Christian Action,” which will prove useful both in the discussion of prayer as invocation and in the context of Barth’s ethics. Jüngel argues that the central premise of Barth’s *The Christian Life* is redemption grounded in revelation and reconciliation.¹¹² Jüngel argues, “We are to understand both

¹⁰⁸ In *CD, I/IV*, 22 Barth states that “The fellowship which originally existed between God and man, which was then disturbed and jeopardised, the purpose of which is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the work of reconciliation, we describe as the covenant.”

¹⁰⁹ Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, 126.

¹¹⁰ The third action is observance of the Lord’s Supper.

¹¹¹ Title will be reduced to *The Christian Life* henceforth.

¹¹² Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, Volume I, 155.

the being, action and commanding of God creator and redeemer and the being and action of the human person as creature and ‘future heir’ out of the event of the reconciliation of God.”¹¹³ Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation (under his “special ethics”) presents a model of God and human interaction made possible through the covenant as realized at its core in Jesus Christ. God’s speech in creation and redemption through the covenant is to be regarded (according to Barth and Jüngel agrees) as one and the same command but in different forms.¹¹⁴

Jüngel explains Barth’s definition of ethics in several ways. First he suggests that what Barth means by ethics is good human action in relation to Jesus Christ. He states “And the same is true of the action which is to be called good. It is not ethically constructed. It is not ethically deduced . . . it is the event—the many events—of the encounter between the commanding God and the [person] who acts.”¹¹⁵ Thus for Barth, ethics, good human action, seeks to answer questions of what is good action by directing the human agent “in the most profound freedom through God’s gracious command.”¹¹⁶ In turn, the human agent “corresponds to these imperatives through love for God and through action which is in conformity to that love.”¹¹⁷ The response to God’s command is obedience in love because the human being is claimed by God’s love¹¹⁸ and has its identity through the covenant, which came out of that love. Jüngel regards this entire argument as the fundamental elements of Christian ethics “which equally makes human action thematic from the point of view of free decision.”¹¹⁹ Specifically, Barth says that

¹¹³ Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 156.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 157.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 157–158.

¹¹⁹ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, Volume I, 158.

the human person is humbled *for* invocation, calling upon the name of God in prayer in gratitude and in petition. The Christian is “empowered for this and obligated to it, by God’s grace...as the one thing in many that God who has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ demands.”¹²⁰

Jüngel’s second point about Barth’s ethics is that the definition of good comes from how Barth regards value. He states that the only being and action that can be defined as good are God’s (Luke 18:19; Mark 10:8; Psalm 34:8, 145:9). Therefore, it rests with God to define the good on the part of His creation. Such defining requires a human response that is “analogous to the act of God himself.”¹²¹ In close analogy to this, Jüngel argues that Barth attributes the existence of the Christian community as the continuing work of Jesus Christ. The Christian life is action. The action of calling upon God (invocation) “is speech in the ethical context from the point of view of its accomplishment of the act in which we lift up our hearts to invoke God as “our Father.”¹²² Barth regards the proper ethical question not of an individual nature but that of the community of faith, not “what should I do?” but rather “what should we do?” Hence we call upon God as “our Father.”

Third, Jüngel argues that this leads Barth to position the Lord’s Prayer as the building blocks for his doctrine of reconciliation. “The Lord’s Prayer is laid out in manifest analogy to the architecture of the dogmatic parts of the doctrine of reconciliation which are constructed in parallel to each other.”¹²³ Jüngel argues that Barth’s analysis of the Lord’s Prayer presumes divine and human action based in a relationship of invocation

¹²⁰ *CD*, IV/4, 43.

¹²¹ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, Volume I, 159.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

on the human side, asking God on the divine side for a response/action that is distinct from our own work/capacities. Jüngel regards Barth's invocation of God as divine human action in correspondence, that is, "in our invocation of God commanded of us by the God whose 'being is in act,' we are exalted to a life in act which corresponds to God, so that in our very relation to God we 'may and should be truly active.'"¹²⁴

Jüngel suggests that in the *CD* is Barth's discovery of the "call on me" as the basic meaning of *every* divine command. Thus, calling upon God in prayer is ethics as instruction. Jüngel understands Barth to show throughout the doctrine of reconciliation that the ethical question: "What shall we do?" is replaced with a request for instruction: "How then shall we pray?" The response Jesus Christ provides is, "this then is how you should pray, 'Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name . . .'" (Matthew 6:9). The human's decision to call upon God in obedience to this command is at the heart of Barth's understanding of ethics. Jüngel addresses the obvious objections by explaining that human moral will is contrary to the will of God. The statement refers not only to the Christian life, rather it is how the Christian includes the whole of humanity in prayer as he or she calls upon the name of God for the hallowing of God's name and His will to be done.

At this point, attention turns to Webster's literature on Barth. Webster is linked to Jüngel in that he introduces the English-speaking world to Jüngel through his dissertation, which included translations of some of Jüngel's works.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 161.

John B. Webster

Webster wrote the introduction to and is editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. In this work he provides an extensive biographical sketch of Barth's life and works. Webster believes that Barth's life and his works "are inseparable because his writings need to be read in light of biography and vice versa. He was close to the center of most of the major developments in German-speaking Protestant theology and church life from the early 1920s to the early 1960s."¹²⁵ In contrast to Jüngel's penchant for Barth's rebirth of ideas, Webster highlights the consistency in Barth's train of thought throughout his theological career. Both Jüngel and Webster, however, want to show that Barth's work is not reducible to one idea, principle, or theme. They support Barth's multifaceted ideas and a theological method that sought to challenge the established traditions of the church. Webster is sympathetic to the bulk of Barth's ideas but provides a balanced critique of many of his works. He calls Barth a "vivid, provocative, at times infuriating but never dull pupil of the Word."¹²⁶

Webster studied Barth's life and writings at great length. His insight into Barth's work is evident in a number of places. His expertise is able to offer reasons for Barth's intent. For example, he notes that Barth was "going against the grain of some of the most settled intellectual habits of modernity."¹²⁷ He says of Barth's *CD* that it was unified around a twofold concern "for God and humanity, agents in covenant, bound together in the mutuality of grace and gratitude."¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

In addition, Webster's expertise on Barth allows him to provide insight into how to read Barth's works. First, he suggests that one way to read Barth is to remember that the theologian was "distancing himself from idealist and subject-[centred] tradition."¹²⁹ Such traditions opposed his views on ethics and human moral selfhood. Webster suggests that Barth was offering "a different way of doing Christian theology."¹³⁰ Second, reading Barth is not a matter of taking one theme and trying to understand a linear progression. Instead, the observant reader must examine the extensions, development, and recapitulation of that theme as Barth discourses with the reader. Thus, "no one stage of the argument is definitive; rather, it is the whole which conveys the substance of what he has to say. As a result, Barth's views on any given topic cannot be comprehended in a single statement, but only in the interplay of a range of articulations of a theme."¹³¹

Additionally, Webster reviews Barth's ideas on Scripture by examining how his Göttingen lectures on the Reformed tradition (specifically, the Reformed confessions of E. F. K. Müller) impacted his ideas on God's revelation as an expression of His mercy, which figures prominently in Barth's commentary on *Romans*. "This event of revelatory mercy constitutes not only the formal but also the material center of the Reformed confessions."¹³² Webster points to Barth's purpose in examining the Reformed confessions. He states that ultimately, Barth is interested in the Word of God as stated in Scripture. Webster's point in highlighting Barth's examination of the confessions of the church is to point out that Barth would carry these ideas into this doctrine of reconciliation in *CD*. Webster sums up his arguments as follows:

¹²⁹ Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 11.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 47.

There is much in these opening lectures of the cycle that anticipates Barth's ecclesiology in the doctrine of reconciliation from the 1950s—above all, the emphasis on the way in which the visible forms of the church testify to (rather than replace, embody or realize) the communicative presence of the activity of God.¹³³

Webster explains that in addition to Barth's focus on Scripture as God's Word, his attention to the Reformed confessions "pressed him to clarify the significance of Christian theology as doctrine, and the normativity of Holy Scripture for doctrinal construction."¹³⁴ Doctrine is an expression of the church's activities towards God. Moreover, the life of the church is in looking outwards to the world for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. "Doctrine is thus crucial to resisting immanentizing of the life of the church, to ensuring its reference outwards."¹³⁵

Webster highlights Barth's lectures on the life of the church in the nineteenth century.¹³⁶ Webster notes that it is in this work that Barth presents Christian theology as a "conversation" with others (that is with both Christians and non-Christians), "a conversation which deeply and intensively engaged him from the beginning of his career as a theological professor until the end of his life."¹³⁷ On several occasions Webster makes the point that Barth's interest was in historical theology that looks to the past life of the church and the church's doctrines. His purpose, Webster states, was to explore how church doctrine reveals God's history in relation to the human creature, "which is the history of God's sanctification of human thought and speech in the life of the church."¹³⁸

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 59.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹³⁷ John B. Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 91.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 117.

In *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* Webster presents a convincing and positive view of the continuity of Barth's thoughts, specifically his views on the human ethical agent acting in the context of God's command. He engages with several scholars (for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar) who suggest that Barth's early theology does not extend into his later works (meaning *CD*). Webster believes this to be a misunderstanding of Barth's ethical stance in his early work because his later works were not "freshly minted convictions,"¹³⁹ but lavish expansions on ideas already expressed in his early materials. Webster regards that Barth himself agreed with this position later in his life.

But he also took pains to state the continuity of his work: reflecting on the past ten years in 1938, for example, he saw the period as a matter of deepening and applying what he had been brought to think before 1928, so that his ethical–political engagements in the 1930s are only the making visible of what had already been there.¹⁴⁰

Webster's expression of Barth's overall theology can be found in his book *Barth*. Once again, Webster emphasizes that Barth's theological ideas and themes in *CD* were not a mature voice. Rather, Barth's development was already in place in his early theology to one extent or another. For example, he states that Barth's early lectures (namely those from the 1920s) and occasional writings are "at least as important as the commentaries and essays which Barth published at that time."¹⁴¹ In fact, Webster states that Barth's early theology shows "striking continuity with the later *Church Dogmatics*. The tying together of the doctrines of Trinity and revelation that will form Barth's basic approach to theological prolegomena in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* in 1932 is already

¹³⁹ John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

¹⁴⁰ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 4.

¹⁴¹ John B. Webster, *Barth*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers (London: Continuum, 2000), 23.

firmly in place in 1924.”¹⁴² Barth’s materials on ethics are taken with only slight revisions into his *CD*. Furthermore, Webster suggests that by his first job as professor, Barth had already made theological decisions that would shape the form and content of his work done in *CD*.¹⁴³

Webster’s assessment of Barth supports this thesis in the following ways. First, Webster’s description of correspondence as a theme within Barth’s ethics¹⁴⁴ proves valuable. For instance, Webster suggests that when Barth says “correspondence” he means “conformity.” That is the correspondence between our human action “the life-act” of repenting of sin and turning to Christ, and the divine action (God’s will and plan in the work of salvation through Jesus Christ) from which it derives.¹⁴⁵ Webster argues that this is Barth’s basis for human morality. “On Barth’s terms, moral responsibility is not defined by reference to an inner deliberative sanctum, but by the closely allied notions of ‘response’ and ‘correspondence.’”¹⁴⁶ Thus, the human decision to act or not to act, for example to pray or not to pray is a response to the Word of God “spoken to us as command.”¹⁴⁷ “The grace of God wills and creates the covenant between God and man. It therefore determines man to existence in this covenant. It determines him to be the partner of God. It therefore determines his action to correspondence, conformity, uniformity with God’s action.”¹⁴⁸ Webster suggests that the language of correspondence is central to Barth’s understanding “of the relation of God to the human creature.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² Ibid., 23.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ John B. Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ *CD*, II/2, 628.

¹⁴⁹ Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 58.

Second, Webster's attention to the connections between Barth's early and later theology supports my approach to Barth's ideas on prayer. In *Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies* Webster examines Barth's theology in his works from the 1920s. Webster explores what Barth was learning from his intense readings of Calvin, Zwingli, and the Reformed Confessional writings.¹⁵⁰ Webster's goal here, as in most of his writings on Barth, is to examine how his thought in *CD* is reflected in and develops from his earlier theology. Webster is of the mind that Barth's work in *CD* is evident from his very early theological efforts to one extent or another. He does not believe that Barth's ideas in *CD* were the result of a final maturation of Barth's theological efforts. For example, on the influence of Zwingli and others, Webster writes: "even in Gottingen there was beginning to coalesce in his mind the basic shape of the account of Christianity rendered in the *Church Dogmatics*."¹⁵¹ Webster wants Barth's readers to understand that although his "so-called break with Protestant liberalism" did occur, Barth "from the beginning was a moral theologian, and so he remained."¹⁵² Likewise, Webster regards that Barth had the idea of divine human correspondence from very early on and his later articulation of these ideas in *CD* gives them "a greater profile to and a massive amplification of the affirmations."¹⁵³ Essentially Webster is saying is that Barth's theological ideas were more complex than they appear in his early development. The noted "break" from liberalism, Webster suggests, was Barth's attempt to make sense of his own path "towards

¹⁵⁰ Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 4.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

understanding of God's freedom in which he will later root his convictions about God's humanity. From the very beginning, Barth says 'no' in order to learn how to say 'yes.'"¹⁵⁴

Furthermore, Webster argues that Barth's ideas on human action were already formed in his 1922 lectures on Calvinist and the Reformed confessions. He proposes, "God's mighty acts necessarily, inescapably, include talk of human action: this conviction, already present in Barth's earliest reflections on social ethics, was to remain one of his most consistently emphasized theological motifs."¹⁵⁵ The best examples of these are his lectures on ethics from the late 1920s. "They lay characteristic emphasis on the inseparability of ethics and dogmatics and the importance of moral action as the locus of human response to the divine initiative—themes that will subsequently be explored at great length in Barth's *magnum opus*."¹⁵⁶

Third, Webster's presentation of Barth's moral ontology supports my ideas on Barth's location of prayer in ethics. In *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, Webster attempts to show that *CD* in addition to being a work of systematics is also Barth's moral ontology, which is "an extensive account of the situation in which human agents act."¹⁵⁷ Barth, Webster argues, "describes the space the agents occupy" with only minimal attention to the predicaments in which humans find themselves, predicaments which may require a moral response.¹⁵⁸ This lack of attention to the predicaments that bring about moral thought places Barth's moral ontology on a different footing than is commonly understood in Christian traditions. "Yet Barth pushes this kind of moral selfhood out of

¹⁵⁴ Webster, *Barth*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

the way in order to introduce in its place what is to him a more theologically—and humanly—satisfying account of moral life as genuine action in analogy to prior divine action.”

Webster argues throughout *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* that moral ontology in *CD* is an account of “what *the* good is, rather than is *chosen* or *desired*.”¹⁵⁹ The action of the human agent and the human agent themselves are inside of God’s prescribed plan. They act within certain limits when they obey God’s commands. “To be ‘inside’ moral space in this way is to be circumscribed by a morally textured reality that is inexhaustibly independent of our private and public dispositions.”¹⁶⁰ Christian ethics, and by extension theological ethics, attempts to answer the question: What is good human action from within that moral space defined by God’s commands?

The command of God is to be understood, Webster suggests, as separate and distinct from human ideas and thoughts; it is a gift.¹⁶¹ Obligation is given along with this gift “at the hands of a gracious God.”¹⁶² Commands then are gifts that the human agent responds to in freedom, a freedom that is on God’s side as He freely addresses the human agent and freely offers His salvation.¹⁶³ By contrast, the human agent is freed to respond to God’s actions and in responding finds freedom through responding to the command of God, responding to the grace of God.

Webster’s brief attention to Barth’s contribution on the Lord’s Prayer and its significance is expanded upon in this paper to examine what prayer means for the

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁶⁰ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 216.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

Christian today, beyond the element of personal and private devotion. The foci of Christian and theological ethics are the practices of the Christian life in faith, of which prayer is one such common practice. Webster suggests that Barth's use of the Lord's Prayer to elaborate on this theme is not an accident. He says, "Barth's use of the Lord's Prayer as a framework for expounding the Christian life is no mere incidental device, but consistent with his understanding of the theological task as a whole...It is an explication of that which is given to faith as faith hears and obeys the command of a gracious God."¹⁶⁴ This is how prayer fits into Barth's moral ontology. He describes prayer as divine and human action in correspondence. The "prior divine action of prayer" is God's command to pray. "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray" (2 Chronicles 7:14) "and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). "This then is how you should pray, 'Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name'" (Matthew 6:9). Addressing God as Father, Barth states, is appropriate because that is who and what He is. Webster states, "'Father' is not to be construed as human naming, but as a predicate identifying that which properly (not merely by attribution or metaphorical transfer) belongs to God."¹⁶⁵ Calling upon the name of God as Father is Barth's idea of the Christian response to the covenantal grace of God. Barth states, "In the sphere of covenant, this is the normal action corresponding to the fulfillment of the covenant in Jesus Christ. Man is empowered for this, and obligated to it, by God's grace. In it man in his whole humanity takes his proper place over against God."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 217–218.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 178.

¹⁶⁶ Barth, *CD*, IV/4, *The Christian Life: Lecture Fragments*, 43.

Webster's explanation of Barth's human and divine action as the fruit of communion between God and the human agent will also be helpful in the discussion on divine human correspondence in the context of prayer. Webster notes that because Barth's *CD* is an extended treatise on the statement "God is," it is also anthropology because it examines the form of God's being, His chosen path as specified in the history of Jesus Christ, and the place that He has willed for human participation with Himself (that is, in Jesus Christ). But Barth addresses both human action and divine action; hence his "anthropology" is really "Theo-anthropology, an examination of the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man, the commerce and communion between God and man."¹⁶⁷ Prayer fits precisely into Barth's "theo-anthropology" because it is a transaction (commerce) between human and divine as they correspond in communion. The communion is based on God's covenant, which He planned in advance in His freedom for His partnership with humanity through Jesus Christ. Webster suggests rightly, "because the theme of *Church Dogmatics* is this God in covenant with humanity, the dogmatics is intrinsically an ethical dogmatics, and includes description of the human covenant partner as agent."¹⁶⁸ In short, in *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, Webster uses *CD* to tease out from Barth's ideas a "Christian theological account of human agency"¹⁶⁹ that can be useful for the Christian community today.

In *Barth's Moral Theology*, Webster clarifies Barth's thoughts on the human agent, moral ontology, and ethics as he critiques Barth's ethics. Webster suggests that the human agent finds its best definition in the context of God's self-limitation. "God's self-

¹⁶⁷ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 4; Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁶⁸ John B. Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

limitation in the person and activity of Jesus Christ . . . fulfills the covenant between God and his human creation.”¹⁷⁰ Calling on the name of God, or invocation, represents the one human action that is consistent with God’s self-limitation. “Where God as the one who has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ encounters man . . . and where it is a matter of the commanding of God and the responsibility of man in this particular encounter, we stand as it were before the model of all that takes place between God and man.”¹⁷¹

Thus, prayer or calling upon God in prayer (invocation) becomes exemplary human action. Webster notes that Barth’s language throughout the doctrine of reconciliation (*CD*, IV/4) is on partnership between God and the human agent made possible by the covenant of grace. “What this means is that invocation of God is attributable to the immediate self-bestowal of God in the Holy Spirit, and is at the same time the ‘dynamic actualization’ of our partnership in the covenant.”¹⁷² For Barth, prayer is at the “innermost center of the covenant between God and man.”¹⁷³ Prayer is also genuine human action, “the primary motif of the Christian’s ethical life.”¹⁷⁴ Prayer directs human action to God’s action, actions He alone is able to bring about as He chooses. In chapter 3 I focus on Barth’s interplay between the themes of the command of God, prayer, and the doctrine of reconciliation. The goal is to establish the significance of Barth’s ideas on the meaning of prayer beyond its devotional dimension. By devotional dimension, I mean the focus of prayer as a way to build relationship with God through

¹⁷⁰ Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 168.

¹⁷¹ Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 169.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁷³ *CD*, III/4, 93.

¹⁷⁴ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments*, 103.

the act of regular individual or communal prayer. In addressing the devotional nature of prayer, Tiessen suggests that prayer as devotion trains the individual to recognize God's actions in the world, specifically with regard to the providence of God.¹⁷⁵ Barth raises objections to prayer in the context of devotion. He states that God's actions demonstrate that prayer goes beyond devotion to a wider context, that is, that prayer is human speech uttered to God and in this apparent simplicity lies the mystery of the gift of prayer, the ability to call upon God as Father knowing that He hears and responds.¹⁷⁶ In the next chapter, I discuss Barth's works *Romans*, *Gottingen Dogmatics*, and *Ethics*, examining the historical development of his early theology of prayer.

¹⁷⁵ Terrance L. Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press), 108.

¹⁷⁶ *CD*, III/4, 92.

Chapter 2: Historical Development of Prayer in Barth's Early Theology (1915–1935)

Introduction

In a sermon delivered in the early in his theological development (1920–1924), Barth says that the one “who prays the Lord’s prayer aright will be heard: in difficult and adverse circumstances; his way will become clearer, more steady, more perfect, as perfect as the way of a man can be.”¹ The assurance of being heard continued for Barth into his somewhat reformed creedal understanding of prayer, particularly in his early development. He did not simply duplicate the ideas of the reformers, but rather engaged their voices along with other influences. The following section considers these other influences around the time that *The Epistle to the Romans* was published.

The Epistle to the Romans²

In *Romans*, Barth criticizes Pietism because it claims that being is in God and God is in being, which cannot be realized in an individualistic way.³ Barth’s influences, particularly those of Pietist ideals of individualism and religious morality, never quite settled in Barth’s mind. He wrestles throughout his theology to reveal the distinctness between religion and God’s revealed word. “Religion is one thing,” he writes, “Revelation is quite another thing.”⁴ He questions these ideas often. But, because of who God is,⁵ Barth argues “we may not pursue talk of divine action in isolation from talk of

¹ Karl Barth and Edward Thurneysen, *Come Holy Spirit*, trans. George W. Richards, Elmer G. Homrighausen, and Karl J. Ernst (New York: Round Table Press, 1934), 24–25.

² *The Epistle to the Romans* will be shortened to *Romans* henceforth.

³ Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 66.

⁴ John McConnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth* (Liverpool: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), 67.

⁵ Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*, 68.

human ethical realm.⁶” In other words, “he never speaks of God without at the same time speaking about man.”⁷ The first edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*⁸ was “an assault on individualism. The understanding of the individual as the ‘creative subject’ of culture, history, and moral values was, for Barth, the real enemy of any truly theological understanding of the human agent.”⁹ Human action stems from God’s action (from divine action) as the human agent responds not as an individual, not even an individual with a conscience, but as part of the body of Christ.¹⁰ While writing *Romans I* Barth’s influences included Calvin, Luther, Overbeck, Beck, and Pietist writers. In the summer of 1916 in a letter to Thurneysen regarding his exegetical work. Barth explained that “with great excitement he found in J. T. Beck a guide who led him in this exegetical work.”¹¹

In the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*,¹² Barth quotes Overbeck as he addresses with confidence the idea that “God knows us.”¹³ In his exegesis of the verses on justification (Romans 5:9–11), Barth quotes Calvin: “We praise God as God; and the fountain of all possible good things is opened unto us.”¹⁴ Barth seems to quote Calvin to support his idea that the nature of divine human relationship rests in peace with God. Calvin writes, “Peace with God is contrasted with every form of intoxicated security of the flesh.” Christians have this peace through faith in Christ, which is, Barth suggests, “the proper ordering of the relation between man as man with God as God.”¹⁵

⁶ Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 18.

⁷ McCnachie, *The Significance of Karl Barth*, 65.

⁸ The first edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* will be shortened to *Romans I* henceforth.

⁹ Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*, 137.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 146–147.

¹¹ Paul S. Chung, *Karl Barth: God's Word in Action* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 114.

¹² The second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* will be shortened to *Romans II* henceforth.

¹³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwin C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford, 1968), 162.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

Among his Pietist influences, Barth echoes Johannes Bengel, C. H. Rieger, and August Tholuck. In addition, his studies included the biographies of David Spleiß and Ludwig Hofacker.¹⁶ Barth's treatment of individualism in *Romans I* bolsters his assault on liberalism, pietism, and nineteenth-century beliefs about the individual as the pivot in culture and history.¹⁷ In this way, "he was attacking a religion which provided bourgeois culture with perhaps its most crucial ideological support."¹⁸

In *Romans I* and *II*, Barth's primary concern is exegesis. Through exegesis he attempts "to see through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, which is the eternal Spirit."¹⁹ *Romans I* and *II* demonstrate that God purposed to build relationship with His human creation before time, in other words, predestination. "Thus before every moment in time, God foreordains; and the very brokenness and indirectness of our relationship with Him sanctions and authenticates the calling of those who love Him: *if any man love God, the same is known by him*" (1 Corinthians 8:3).²⁰ In *Romans I*, Barth describes God's action and God's history as unique from human history.²¹ In *Romans I*, he wants to make it clear that "the movement and action of God in history is beyond the reach of historical investigation."²² Historical investigation is accomplished through human effort as it explores events in time. God's history is completely apart from any such investigation. God provides the way to correspond with His creation through Jesus Christ. It is God who acts first in making this correspondence possible by allowing Christians to hear and understand His Word, the truth. "The truth of the love of men

¹⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 136.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Barth, *Romans*, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 324.

²¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 143.

²² *Ibid.*, 147.

towards God is His Truth, not man's...It must therefore be distinguished absolutely from temporal human knowledge."²³ I agree with Jüngel, who says that "we are dependent upon . . . a word which is to be measured against the God who speaks, which theology calls the Word of God."²⁴ Barth's overall aim in *Romans I* (and to a greater degree in *Romans II*) and in his early theological development (1910–1931) was to allow the Word of God to direct the doctrine and work of the church and the life of the Christian "in the whole realm"²⁵ of their existence.

The Epistle to the Romans Commentary: Connection to Barth's Theology on Prayer

Prayer, as an idea beyond personal devotion, is evident in Barth's commentary on *Romans* in three ways. First, in his exegesis of Romans 3 he argues that the motive behind the individual act of praying is an acknowledgement of the limits of human existence. Barth seems to be saying that the motive reflects the fact that the human agent, in his or her own being acknowledges (at some level) that he or she cannot escape the limits of humanity and the consequence of sin. The essential element in prayer, from which this motive stems, is not personal devotion, communion with God, or even an experience. Rather, the individual prayer has confidence that his or her existence is bound up in the plan and limitless purpose of God, in Jesus Christ. It is He, the Risen Lord, who justifies the Christian's prayer. But Christians need not despair. The Holy Spirit intercedes for the Christian when he or she prays with incomprehensible "groanings" (Romans 8:26). Barth interprets these "groanings" as songs of worship, which, when combined with our prayer, justifies the words of the prayer. He writes, "the justification

²³ Barth, *Romans*, 325.

²⁴ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, Volume 1, 125.

²⁵ Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction*, 47.

of our prayer is not that we have attained some higher eminence on the ladder of prayer...The justification of our prayer and the reality of our communion with God are grounded upon the truth that Another, The Eternal, the Second Man from heaven (1 Cor. 15: 47), stands before God pre-eminent in power and—in our place.”²⁶ Thus, justification of Christian prayer is a consequence of Christ’s salvific and redemptive efforts. It is a gift. Therefore, Christological justification supersedes individual motives for praying.

Second, Barth’s expression of the problem of ethics in *Romans* “reminds us that our act of thinking cannot be justified.”²⁷ Barth equates the problem of ethics with dogmatics.²⁸ He regards ethical behaviour or “goodness” in the Christian’s life as “living holy and acceptable to God,” which assumes a life of prayer. Barth believes that this is the kind of life that God wills for the individual. Later in his career, Barth presents a more fully formed idea of prayer within the context of the problem of ethics (the question of human existence) in the *CD*. In the doctrine of God, the theologian observes that God’s will is the life of “the praying man,” meaning Jesus Christ, and by association, all who are in Christ. Barth articulates,

God’s eternal will is the act of prayer (in which confidence in self gives way before confidence in God). This act is the birth of a genuine human self-awareness, in which knowledge and action can and must be attempted; in which there drops away all fear of what is above or beside or below man, of what might assault or threaten him; in which man becomes heir to a legitimate and necessary and therefore an effective and triumphant claim; in which man may rule in that he is willing to serve. If Jesus Christ was that man, if from the very beginning He was elected man, then we have to say that God’s eternal will has as its end the life of this man of prayer.²⁹

²⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 317.

²⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 426.

²⁸ Barth, *Romans*, 431; see also Karl Barth, *Ethics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

²⁹ *CD*, II/2, 180.

The idea of prayer being a part of ethics and ethics a part of dogmatics is evident from early on in his theological development. Later works flesh out the idea of prayer as human action in the realm of what is “good” human action. For example, such a theme is present in *CD*, IV, where he regards prayer as “the primal and basic form of the whole Christian ethos.”³⁰

Third, Barth’s idea of invocation, as calling upon the name of God and that calling upon God as Father, presumes knowledge of God and is evident in *Romans* in his treatment of the gospel, specifically with reference to hearing the message of the gospel in faith. Barth refers to the knowledge of God, the Redeemer who calls all to repentance. In later works, Barth expands his ideas on invocation to refer to the individual Christian life. More specifically, he regards invocation as a response in the context of the believer’s ability to respond (responsibility) to God’s claim, God’s claim being his claim on humanity made possible through His redemptive plan in the person of Jesus Christ. Because of this claim, God comes to the believer in freedom and invites him or her to pray. This action, which God initiates, highlights for Barth the very real sense that God and the human creature are in completely separate spheres. God chose revelation to bridge this divide and to help the believer comprehend who He is as God. In gratitude for this gracious divine action, the human act is to respond by calling on the name of God (invocation). Barth incorporates the nature and limits of human existence, God’s divine nature, God’s covenant, and the response of God versus the response of the human person, into the theme of invocation. Thus, invocation in *Romans* is more formative in his later works. In the forward to the second edition of *Romans* Barth notes his indebtedness

³⁰ *CD*, IV/4, 89.

to Luther, Calvin, and Beck in so far as they reveal the nature of the Christian life according to God's Word. He writes,

I call real understanding and explanation, that activity which Luther practiced in his expositions with intuitive sureness, which Calvin obviously and systematically set as the goal of his exegesis and which has at least been clearly attempted by the more recent writers such as Hofmann, J. T. Beck, Goder and Schlatter.³¹

While Barth acknowledges early influences he does not cling slavishly to their ideas in *Romans II*. Instead he moved in a new direction. He considers the meaning of freedom before God in light of sin.³² He summarizes his departure from these influences:

We may, however, judge the relentlessness of Calvin, the dialectical audacity of Kierkegaard, Overbeck's sense of awe, Dostoevsky's hunger for eternity, Blumhardt's optimism, too risky and too dangerous for us. We may therefore content ourselves with some lesser, more feeble possibility of religion. We may fall back on some form of rationalism and pietism. Yet these more feeble types of religion are also pregnant with implications pointing towards that outermost edge, and some day they may bring this harsh and dangerous reality to birth.³³

Barth's departure resonates specifically in his views on election and predestination, which challenge the classical Reformed tradition's doctrines on these subjects, formulating as a result his own style of dogmatics. I turn next to Barth's first offering of dogmatics in *The Göttingen Dogmatics*.

The Göttingen Dogmatics

On the strength of his work in *Romans*, Barth was offered a teaching opportunity in Göttingen. While at the university, his class lectures were his first attempt at sustained dogmatics. Barth defines dogmatics as "the basic statements and presuppositions of

³¹ James M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Keith R. Crim and Louis De Grazia Robinson (Richmond: Westminster John Knox Press, 1968), 93.

³² Barth, *Romans*, 253.

³³ Barth, *Romans*, 252.

Christian proclamation.”³⁴ In *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth examines God’s being, specifically, God as subject and object in the context of the revelation that comes from His Word. When Barth says God’s Word, he is thinking and speaking of God’s Word in three forms: The Word spoken by God Himself, the Word from God spoken by the prophets and apostles and finally, the word of God proclaimed by individuals of all kinds “in which the number of its human agents or proclaimers is theoretically unlimited.”³⁵ For Barth, God’s Word is alive and active. God’s Word as Holy Scripture (the canon) is complete and closed; it “took place as the witness given to revelation.”³⁶ The Word of God that is being proclaimed (Barth’s third form of the Word of God) includes both the present and future components of God’s living word evident in the preaching of the Word of God.

Barth divides his discussion of God’s being into the following categories: Word of God, humanity in relation to the divine (God), the doctrine of the trinity, Jesus, incarnation, predestination, and God’s revelation. Barth argues that the individual alone has no capacity to comprehend God or His revelation. Specifically, no human body part or organ can comprehend God. Therefore, understanding God’s revelation requires God’s assistance. Barth presents the case that God is Himself “the content as well as the subject of revelation.”³⁷ God does not wait for humanity to identify this contradiction, namely, that humankind cannot know God without God’s help. Therefore, Barth argues, God acted first in opening humanity’s eyes to comprehend what He has revealed to them.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 475.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 174.

In other words, there will have to be an activation of the humanity that is entangled, definitively entangled, in the contradiction. God will have to bear and fill and make good our human incapacity by the capacity, the sufficiency, the adequacy which can be present only in God himself for God himself . . . granting us his good pleasure of his own free grace, that is granting us meaning, truth, power and success.³⁸

In summary, God's Word is not only God's speech, but also God's speech that is *heard* by the human.³⁹ Revelation is God speaking in person.⁴⁰

Barth sets the whole process of his dogmatic work in *The Göttingen Dogmatics* invoking the "Name of the Most high" that is, calling upon God in prayer. Barth feels that dogmatics is a "mortally dangerous undertaking,"⁴¹ and as such must be bathed in prayer. Therefore, he begins his Göttingen lectures with the prayer of Thomas Aquinas put at the head of his *Summa Theologica*: "Merciful God, I ask that you grant me as it pleases you, to seek earnestly, to investigate carefully, to know truthfully, and to present perfectly, to the glory of your name. Amen."⁴² Barth emphasizes that while Aquinas presents an already established viewpoint on the nature of God, he anxiously tries to learn anew what Aquinas and the theologians of his day "took for granted."⁴³

Barth references prayer throughout *The Göttingen Dogmatics*. For instance, he points to Solomon's prayer, where Solomon asks God to "look upon the prayer and petition of his servant, that his eyes may be open day and night to this house where he has promised to set his name"⁴⁴ in order to counter Solomon's location of God in a specific "house." Barth describes God's freedom as one that has no limit in time or space in that

³⁸ Ibid., 175.

³⁹ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁰ *CD*, I/1, 304.

⁴¹ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 3.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 435.

He is not present in any one “house” or place. “God’s freedom has to be God’s lordship over time and space.”⁴⁵ God as Creator rules over that which He has created (the past), while simultaneously ruling over the present and the things to come.

Prayer also plays a significant role in the human aspect of preaching. He explains, “Prayer is offered before and after preaching, and he seems to indicate that we are pressing on to the frontiers of human existence between such acts.”⁴⁶

Moreover, Barth regards prayer as a continuous action of the human person with regards to faith and obedience in view of God’s relationship to humanity. He says,

And if we know that for us the only issue is that we should know God in this fellowship with God, then how can our worship in spirit and in truth [John 4:24], how can our watching and praying and beseeching ever cease or change themselves into possessing and enjoying . . . this relation takes place (for if it does not continuously take place, it is not this relation).⁴⁷

Barth appears to consider continuous prayer as a relationship with “unequivocal humanity on one side of the relation; the sure, distinguishable, personal presence of God himself on the other side.”⁴⁸

Barth characterizes the second powerful work of the Holy Spirit⁴⁹ as the miracle that allows the Christian to watch and pray on the one side and God on the other, divine side. In the “human stammering and stumbling, God recognizing his own work in these human marvels and weaknesses, so that it can be true.”⁵⁰ Barth seems to be saying that because human beings are human, prayer with all its weakness is made true when the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁷ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 181.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The first miracle of the Holy Spirit, according to Barth, is the Spirit’s ability to reveal human sinfulness and that the human is willing to hear Him speak on this matter. See Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 193.

⁵⁰ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 194.

Holy Spirit empowers human speech in prayer to be truth according to God's truth not by the words that are spoken per se but in the obedience to God's command to pray.

Throughout *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth is drawing attention to prayer and specifically to the Lord's Prayer as the framework for his arguments. For example, in his discussion on the attributes of God he outlines how incomparable God is to any idea that humans have about Him. He explains that God is unique, that "he cannot be united with anything else."⁵¹ Moreover, the idea that God is unique is revealed in God's word: "I am the Lord your God you shall have no other gods but me" (Exodus 20:3) and "I am the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Throughout the discussion on God's divine nature, Barth is repeating the Lord's Prayer, using it as a framework for his examination. He notes that God is hallowed, that He is the past, present, and future ruler of the present kingdom and the kingdom to come. He expresses the nature of human need with respect to safety and security in the section of *The Göttingen Dogmatics* on the nature of humanity. He outlines Christ as God's elect and incarnation in defense of his ideas on predestination. He explains, for example, in his section on God's attributes, that if the reader "understood what I have been trying to say in this whole section, then you have gathered that with each attribute I was trying to say: 'Thine is the kingdom . . .'" (Matthew 6:13).⁵²

Moreover, Barth reiterates that prayer sustains his ideas on the nature of God. For him, God is not confined to a particular place or time, as in the house that Solomon built and dedicated with the prayer in 2 Chronicles 6:19–20. Barth argues that instead of being

⁵¹ Ibid., 431.

⁵² Ibid., 439.

contained by space, God Himself “gives space and the things that are in it their being.”⁵³ In addition to his first attempt at dogmatics, Barth presents lectures on ethics wherein he discusses God’s role in the command to pray. These lectures were published posthumously with the title of *Ethics*.

Ethics⁵⁴

Barth’s *Ethics* is a collection of lectures on ethics delivered first in his Münster professorship (1928/29) and then again in Bonn (1930/31). These early lectures prefigure his writings on ethics in *CD*.⁵⁵ The conversation begins with the argument that ethics is an appropriate task of theology. If such a statement is true, then it follows, Barth claims, that ethics is also a task of dogmatics, which is the science of the content of the revealed Word of God preached in the church. All of which is because preaching “is God’s Word to real man, and because real man is caught at work, in the act of his being.”⁵⁶

In *Ethics*, Barth seeks to establish a connection between ethics and the Word of God. The subject of ethics is the response to the question—what shall we do—with the answer being “good human conduct.”⁵⁷ He approaches the question of human existence (expressed for example in the question: What is good human conduct?) in three stages.

First is his assertion that the revealed Word of God is the command of God, which sanctifies the human person. Barth writes, “we shall be concerned to understand as truly good conduct the human conduct which is thus understood to be set under God’s command.”⁵⁸ Furthering his explanation, he suggests, “we believe that in theological

⁵³ Ibid., 435.

⁵⁴ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

⁵⁵ Barth, *Ethics*, vii; see also Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 5.

⁵⁶ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, 15.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 59.

ethics we have to seek and find the goodness of human conduct in the event of an act of God himself toward man, namely, the act of his speech and self-revelation to him.”⁵⁹ Barth presents his ideas on revelation through the three-fold witness of God’s being: Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer.⁶⁰ Such ideas he calls the “great orientation points of the whole course of Christian dogmatics.”⁶¹ For this reason, Barth argues for ethics to be a part of dogmatics throughout *Ethics*. Barth follows the pattern of God’s three-fold form (regarded as one) to express the nature of God’s relationship to humanity and at the same time to explain Jesus Christ and His pivotal involvement in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Jesus is the “specific fellowman” whom God chose to convey His command to the human agent.⁶² Jesus shows us what it means to be good, consistent (meaning obedient to) with the command of God. God’s goodness is shown to us in Christ’s humanity.⁶³ “But God, God in Christ, God revealed and incarnate, is not good for himself.”⁶⁴ He is good for our sake. He *turns* to us, His creations, reconciles us to Himself consistent with His covenant. “God in this turning and relationship to us he reveals himself in Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶⁵

Second, Barth considers the nature of good through his idea of the human person. The human person and his or her good action are contained in God’s Word and not in philosophy. Philosophy, he says furthering the argument, can only comment on what God’s Word already has to say. Only the command of God in the Word of God provides

⁵⁹ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁶¹ Ibid., 52.

⁶² Ibid., 349.

⁶³ Ibid., 337.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 339.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

fresh insight into the concept of humanity and the nature of what is to be considered “good.”⁶⁶ Barth considers it unwise to rationalize Christian action. He says,

We are not Christ. We never shall be. Hence it is only with great caution and reserve that we can say that we are commanded to be Christ to our neighbor...We live our lives bad and good...Even fellowship with God is for us a supreme and secret image...Our goodness is human goodness. In it we are sinners—at best moral and devout sinners—but still sinful sinners.⁶⁷

However, these human limitations notwithstanding, believers are ambassadors for Christ and such humans occupy the role of being “in Christ” because they are forgiven.⁶⁸ A human life “in all its unsaviourlike orientation to itself is not set under the Saviour’s command, that it be fundamentally open to others in and with their sin.”⁶⁹ These actions are based on faith, believing that the individual has been pardoned and is reconciled to God because of Jesus Christ.

Third, God the Redeemer reveals the nature of good as the “command of promise.”⁷⁰ By this Barth is referring to the eschatological reign of God and the promised return of Jesus, Lord of all. Argumentation here shifts from the nature of human good to the goal of the human person,⁷¹ which is the future divinely willed reality for the human person.⁷² Barth says all that can be said, that this future relationship of Creator to creature is as Father to His children, what Barth terms “the goal of creation”—not the first creation but the completed creation, to which the present creation only points.⁷³ “For it is true in Jesus Christ that God is our Father and we are his children . . . as the Word of God

⁶⁶ Ibid., 41–44.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 342.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 343.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 344.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 461.

⁷¹ Ibid., 462.

⁷² Ibid., 463.

⁷³ Ibid.

is spoken to us.”⁷⁴ Thus, God’s claim on believers is that they are obedient children to the Father and in agreement with His will, His kingdom to come in which believers will participate as heirs of Christ. As a result, the clearest evidence of human action in correspondence to God’s command is to pray. Barth writes, “Perhaps all that needs to be said about our claiming by God from this third standpoint may best be understood if it is seen in the light of prayer. From this ethical standpoint our conduct must conform to the measure of our being truly related to God as we are when we truly pray.”⁷⁵

Summary

Thus, prayer is the basic human response, the created being’s innate answer to the Creator. In prayer, the human person reaches beyond his or her own reality. In prayer, the human person acts as one who belongs to God the Father⁷⁶ and calls upon His name (invocation). Prayer in the manner of the Lord’s Prayer instills hope, for it is looking towards the promised future that only God can create in His covenantal reconciliation with His creation, those redeemed by His grace through Christ.

Chapter 3 further explores the significance of Barth’s position of prayer in the *CD* (*CD*, II/1, §30; *CD*, IV/1, §58, and §60; *CD*, IV/4) both as a command of God and as part of his doctrine of reconciliation. Expressing the idea of prayer as a command of God is certainly not new. However, the meaning that Barth attributes to the command of God seems unique. Further discussion on this point commences in the first section of chapter 3. The second section looks at Barth’s position of prayer within the doctrine of reconciliation. It is my view that Barth’s placement of prayer in the doctrine of

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 467.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

reconciliation determines his location of prayer within ethics. By ethics, I mean the essence of human action; that is, what is good human action.

Chapter 3: Prayer as a Divine Action: Command and Reconciliation

The Doctrine of the Command of God (*CD*, II/1, §30)

In §30 of *CD*, II/1, Barth argues that the basis of Christian prayer is what God has revealed about His attributes through His Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹ Therefore, our decision to pray to God, that is, to be in His presence in prayer, is our acknowledgement of the nature of God as He has revealed Himself. He has revealed Himself by His commands. Barth perceives the command of God to be an instrument to prayer in the context of good Christian action. Prayer for Barth is part of “special ethics” or action solely in the Christian context, where God treats the human person seriously because of His claim, His decisions, and His judgment concerning humanity.²

The human agent, as a free subject, responds to God in obedience or disobedience. The free choice to obey or not to obey is at the core of Barth’s ideas on human freedom in the light of God’s commandment to pray. By the expression “the command of God” Barth does not mean principles, rules, or precepts, but rather how God’s covenant is revealed through Christ as the living Word, the living command of God expressed as the election of Jesus Christ in humanity’s place. Webster explains Barth’s use of the term “command of God” as “the history of Jesus Christ—this subject, this sequence—forms a series of events in which the claim and command of God can appropriately be specified.”³ Barth explains the command of God as the manner by which God sanctifies sinners as they grow in Christ. He explains further:

We are sinners before God, but this fact is covered by the high righteousness of the divine forgiveness. That we are judged in this way is the purpose of the divine

¹ *CD*, II/1, 229.

² *CD*, IV/3, 23.

³ John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 52.

judgment as it is not merely attempted but actually fulfilled. It is on this basis that God will again see and address us. It is as such that we are sanctified by the command of God. It is as such that God will take us seriously the next hour and the next day.⁴

Thus for Barth, the command of God sanctifies. In other words, God's command (spoken word) confirms humanity's covenantal relationship to Him through Christ's election. It is on this basis therefore that believers come to God in prayer.

In terms of understanding prayer as a command of God, Barth examines how God's attributes bring humanity to a deeper knowledge of who He is. Such knowledge should instill a deep gratitude for God's command to allow Christians to call upon Him. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honour me" (Psalm 50:15). Moreover, God's justification of humanity through Jesus Christ brings them to act in a specific way. Humans are called to be disciples to which the right human response is invocation, or calling upon the name of the Lord, which for Barth is another name for prayer.⁵

Barth examines the nature of God's being to whom we pray by first suggesting that humans do not know who they are until God reveals it to them, in the person of Jesus Christ. In addition, human beings do not know their own actions until God shows them. "What do we know of our selfhood before God has given us His name, and named us by our name?"⁶ In that regard, when a human prays how does he or she know what it means to say "Thou" when one refers to God, that is, when one calls upon His name (invoke). Barth argues that it is thanks to God's revelation that humans know what they mean when they refer to God and when they refer to humanity. "God demonstrates as deserving and

⁴ *CD*, II/2, 765.

⁵ Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 154.

⁶ *CD*, II/1, 306.

answering prayer. He does and will demonstrate himself as the object of man's awareness and at the same time has illuminated man's mind to grasp this object."⁷ Thus, God commands humans to approach Him and call upon His name. For this grace, which God has extended because of God's love for His creation, Christians are invited to join in relationship with God in prayer. The grace and love of God comes to humanity through the gift of God, Jesus Christ. Barth explains the relationship between Christ and Christians as follows:

The One, the person, whom we really know as a human person, is the person of Jesus Christ, and even this is in fact the person of God the Son, in which humanity, without being or having itself a person, is caught up into fellowship with the personality of God. This one man is therefore the being of God making itself known to us as the One who loves.⁸

Thus, Barth says, and I agree, that a person's prayer should always be in some way shape or form a cry for God to be gracious. Barth states, "This is what God's inclination, good will and favour means for God Himself and for us. It is always God's turning to those who not only do not deserve this favour, but have deserved its opposite."⁹ For Barth, prayer is a grateful, thankful turning to God knowing that God at the same time is turning to us in Christ.

The fact that God is merciful and righteous encourages one to pray and also encourages people as they enter into prayer. Such encouragement comes from Christ's completed work on the cross, which freed us from the bondage and penalty of sin (that is, death). As we pray, such knowledge revealed through Jesus Christ gives the person hope. Barth examines the Psalms and suggests that there is a confidence expressed in them

⁷ *CD*, II/1, 334.

⁸ *CD*, II/1, 286.

⁹ *CD*, II/1, 356.

when the authors speak of God's righteousness. Barth says, "by allowing that God is in the right against him, and accepting God as his only righteousness, his own but his real righteousness. It is in this sense that Zion boasts of its hope in Micah 7:7f. 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.'"¹⁰

The patience and wisdom of God also bring the Christian hope as he or she calls upon God in prayer. Barth examines God's forbearance as indicative of his patience. He overlooked sin so that Christ would be the one and only who suffered instead of humanity, as is proclaimed in Romans 3:23: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Barth references Christ primarily as *the* way that God's wisdom to forbear brings hope to the believer. Barth says,

By His own suffering He has characterised our suffering as a token of life and not of death, as a token of His friendship and not of His enmity, as a token which is meant to awaken and maintain and not destroy our faith. It is the shadow of death under which our life stands the shadow of the eternal death which Jesus Christ has suffered for us. It is this which lends it its seriousness, but takes from this seriousness its absoluteness, thus preventing it from giving rise to fear.¹¹

God's love is bound up in His attributes of constancy and unity. "For each of God's qualities and perfections declared and knowable in His revelation is at the same time His one, complete essence. This is also true of God's constancy and omnipotence."¹² All the perfections of God's freedom (and therefore of His love, and therefore of the one whole divine essence) can and must be recognized and expressed by acknowledging and proclaiming that God is constant.¹³

¹⁰ *CD*, II/1, 413.

¹¹ *CD*, II/1, 420.

¹² *CD*, II/1, 491.

¹³ *CD*, II/1, 551.

The eternity and glory of God for Barth are God's essence unencumbered by time. Eternity exists only in God. Eternity is not a very long time as one may think in order to understand it better. Barth says that humanity cannot express eternity because it is an element of God's love and His glory. Eternity is God in the sense in which in Himself and in all things God is simultaneous (i.e. beginning and middle as well as end, without separation, distance, or contradiction).¹⁴ When a person prays the Lord's Prayer, wherein they declare, "thy kingdom come" and later in the closing "for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory now and forever," one is praying with the expectation that God's divine nature will reign eternally.

Therefore, we can ascribe attributes to the being of God only in so far as God has revealed them to us. In Barth's thinking, one reason for God's decision to reveal Himself through these qualities is to establish a relationship with the human person. I agree with McCormack who interprets Barth by explaining that "the being of God is self-determined being; it is a being which God gives to himself in the primal decision in which God determines himself for this gracious relation to humankind."¹⁵ As a result, prayer is an unpretentious act; it stakes no claim to selfhood. The Christian in the act of prayer acknowledges the Lordship of Christ, whose saving work has made the Christian prayer His own prayer. In response, prayer "can and should be ventured with childlikeness, without hesitation, confidently, as a genuine act of hope in Jesus Christ."¹⁶

¹⁴ *CD*, II/1, 608.

¹⁵ Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 59.

¹⁶ *CD*, IV/4, 210.

The Doctrine of Reconciliation (CD, IV/1, §58 and IV/4, §60)

Barth's doctrine of reconciliation speaks to Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, anthropology, and ethics. "For Barth these loci are inseparable because the history of Jesus is once again, the history of covenant."¹⁷ Covenantal and reconciliatory language interact, but are not separate from each other in *CD*.¹⁸ Barth is consistently presenting these elements in the context of the work of Jesus Christ as the eternal and central focus of God's plan. In the case of God's reconciliation of the world, the basis is the two roles of Christ—as fully God and fully human.¹⁹ Christ's dual natures are inseparable, but rather combined to form a whole. "Understood by this the history in which Jesus Christ is not only very God but also (and this is our particular concern for the moment) very man, whose existence, as seen from below, is the basis of the reconciliation of the world with God. The first role is Jesus as the Son of God who took on sin and its penalty of death and stood in humanity's place to fulfill God's judgment. The second role is Jesus as the Son of Man, wherein Christ acts rightly in the place where humanity acts wrongly (active obedience)."²⁰ Barth suggests,

He who is in the one person the electing God and the one elect man is as the rejecting God, the God who judges sin in the flesh, in His own person the one rejected man, the Lamb which bears the sin of the world that the world should no longer have to bear it or be able to bear it, that it should be radically and totally taken away from it.²¹

¹⁷ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 81.

¹⁸ Joseph L. Mangina, *Issues in Systematic Theology*, vol. 8, Karl Barth on the Christian Life: The Practical Knowledge of God (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 154.

¹⁹ *CD*, IV/2, 116.

²⁰ George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 137.

²¹ *CD*, IV/1, 237.

Barth defines reconciliation as the event that God planned in advance and for which He elected Christ. He determined and revealed Himself as “an electing God” who participates in human history (God with us) for the purpose of human salvation. The history of “God with us” represents God’s divine action in relation to His human creation. In this one divine act, God reveals Himself as capable of a relationship with us as His covenant partners.²²

Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation pivots on his unique description of election, God’s election of Jesus Christ. As fully human, Jesus Christ “the eternal Word of God, chose [to be] sanctified and assumed human nature and existence into oneness with Himself, in order thus, as very God and very man, to become the Word of reconciliation spoken by God to man,”²³ which signifies the mystery of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Barth argues further that revelation begins with Jesus Christ. In sum, God’s revelation was for the purpose of reconciliation.

For Barth, Christ is divine and He is God simultaneously. Moreover, “God becomes the companion of man” in Christ. That is the foundation-plan and sign of all His works.²⁴ Here, Barth’s presents clearly the qualifying character of Christ as the Lamb of God in God’s salvific plan and covenant. For Christ’s divinity and humanity bridge the chasm of death (the penalty for sin) as nothing or no one else can. Hans Schwarz describes this reality clearly: “It is not a human act or a human and divine cooperative act, but completely and totally God’s own doing.”²⁵ God prostrated Himself by His own self-will for His creation’s deliverance. The result is that God enables a relationship with

²² *CD*, IV/2, 344.

²³ *CD*, II/2, 122.

²⁴ *CD*, II/2, 11.

²⁵ Hans Schwarz, *Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 195.

humanity because of Christ. Therefore Barth makes the point that “God does not will to be God without us, that He creates us rather to share with us and therefore with our being and life and act His own incomparable being and life and act, that He does not allow His history to be His and ours to be ours, but causes them to take place as a common history.”²⁶ That is, “the exaltation of our humanity as it takes place in Jesus Christ, to fellowship with God.”²⁷ The manner prescribed is God’s command. Barth states, “His one primal decision, not only in the fellowship of God with man as established by the free grace of God . . . not only in the divine movement from above to below but also in the human movement from below to above.”²⁸ Barth’s description gives an indication as to how prayer is an act in the presence of God, how it is divine human correspondence.

In the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth suggests that prayer rights the relationship between the human agent and God. He says, “Where there is prayer, man’s relationship to God is corrected and it is in order.”²⁹ It is in the doctrine of reconciliation that Barth claims that human beings are in Christ and exclusively in Him.

The doctrine of reconciliation must end where it began. We shall speak correctly of the faith and love and hope of the individual Christian only when it remains clear and constantly becomes clear that, although we are dealing with our existence, we are dealing with our existence in Jesus Christ as our true existence, that we are therefore dealing with Him and not with us, and with us only in so far as absolutely and exclusively with Him.³⁰

Prayer and other activities of the church (confession, humility, and baptism) attest to one activity, that is, Christ at Golgotha. Barth explains, “In His death He dies the death of man. Order is created, then, not by any setting aside of sins, but by that of the sinner

²⁶ *CD*, IV/1, 7.

²⁷ *CD*, IV/2, 383.

²⁸ *CD*, IV/2, 32.

²⁹ *CD*, IV/4, 45.

³⁰ *CD*, IV/1, 154.

himself.”³¹ In §60 of Barth’s doctrine of God, he regards the weight of the resurrection in so far as it reveals God’s verdict about human sin. He writes,

The verdict of God ... took place once and for all for us. It is also decided what it incontrovertibly means for the human situation. This verdict has been revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, in the first instance to those to whom it is proclaimed and who can confess it in faith.³²

Christ passed beyond the limits of death and carried every person in Him. In Christ, through the power of the Spirit, humanity hears the death sentence spoken by God to Adam in Genesis 2:17: “for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” Thus, there was no possibility of appeal in God’s judgment against humanity’s disobedience. But, in Christ’s resurrection, God has had mercy on all with the same universality with which He pronounced all in disobedience.³³ Barth sums up the atonement as the relationship between Jesus Christ and Adam. “That is the relationship between the offence of men in the person and act of one and the free gift of righteousness and life which comes with the judgment of God in the person and act of this other.”³⁴

As a result, a new history begins, Barth says. It is a history within world history, and a new fellowship begins, namely, the community of believers—the church.

Its members are those who can believe and understand that sentence, and therefore regard as accomplished the justification of man in Jesus Christ. It is not the faith and understanding of its members which constitute the community, but the Word and verdict of God believed and understood, Jesus Christ Himself in whose death on the cross that verdict is pronounced.³⁵

Prayer is the faithful act of the community as it acknowledges the work of Christ whom it represents and in whom it flourishes. The church, in its humanity, is constantly gathering

³¹ *CD*, IV/I, 296.

³² *CD*, IV/I, 358.

³³ *CD*, IV/1, 513.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *CD*, IV/1, 151.

repeatedly praying in anticipation of the promise to come. “A continual awaiting of the Holy Spirit as pictured in its constant gatherings, its ever renewed proclamation of the Word, its repeated prayer, its celebration of baptism; but an awaiting in the certainty of receiving, and therefore of its own life in His presence.”³⁶

For Barth, baptism is prayer to a large extent because baptism, as analogous to invocation, is the act of calling upon the name of God. Barth uses several Scripture passages to support this claim. First, he argues that Jesus’ baptism was His own calling upon the name of God. In this act, Jesus receives a response “this is my son in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11; Matthew 17:5). God responds to His son’s act of baptism, His “prayer” to the Father. Second, Barth points to 1 Peter 3:21 as a witness to viewing baptism as an appeal to God for His saving action and in baptism the believer makes a request for “a good conscience.” “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). Contemporary Christians rarely express baptism as prayer, as a calling upon the name of God and a request. But arguably, Barth makes an interesting point, because baptism as an act represents faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Today, many Christians choose to be baptized in order to acknowledge what God has done in their lives through Jesus Christ. In this way, the act of baptism, as a human act, is an expression of the gift of salvation. Yet the Scriptures support that baptism, like prayer, is a command of God. Jesus commanded His disciples to teach and “baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Barth suggests that baptism is a petition and also an acknowledgement and thus a calling

³⁶ Ibid.

upon God in acknowledgement for His saving grace. Barth sums up his argument as follows:

This act, however, consists in a request and a petition which is directed to the God in whom they believe and to whom they are obedient, and which corresponds to His relation to them and theirs to Him. This request and petition is the active knowledge and confession of their God. In and with this request and petition they affirm the covenant which God has made with them. See Deut. 26:17f.³⁷

Human action, in the form of baptism, is an obedient response to God's command. It is a petition directed to God. These aspects also reflect the nature of prayer. Webster attributes Barth's ideas here to Zwingli's influence. He writes, "Barth was—and would remain—strongly attracted to this aspect of Zwingli: the exposition of Christian baptism and the Lord's Prayer in the ethics of reconciliation is undergirded by a similar sense that divine perfection and human morals alike are disrupted by attempts to find creaturely images or mediations of the divine."³⁸

In connection to the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth regards speech in the form of prayer as an effective form of Christian service as it rights the relationship between God and humanity.³⁹ Barth supports his claim by suggesting that Jesus reduced Himself to serve humanity rather than to be served. He represented humanity at the place where they met divine judgment. Barth uses Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane to make his case. He argues that it reveals the "shrinking" of Jesus in obedience to God's will, the reversal of roles for humanity's sake. As such, the "prayer is, as it were, a remarkable historical complement to the eternal decision taken in God Himself."⁴⁰ The obedience of Christ demonstrates the obedience that God requires. "The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

³⁷ *CD*, IV/4, 45.

³⁸ Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 18.

³⁹ *CD*, IV/1, 1.

⁴⁰ *CD*, IV/1, 238–239.

dead, as a second and new divine act, was the revelation of the meaning and purpose of the obedience demanded from and achieved by Jesus Christ.”⁴¹

Barth’s ideas about correspondence evolve around God’s relationship with His human creation. Barth expresses this relationship as correspondence first on God’s side (divine correspondence) and then on humanity’s side as human correspondence with God. This divine–human relationship or correspondence is worked out in *CD* through the themes of covenant, partnership, and invocation. Barth’s understanding of prayer is as the expression of covenantal relationship with God in which God chooses to partner with human beings because of the work of Christ. Thus, “an active life in obedience must obviously consist in a correspondence to divine action.”⁴² In this relationship, God corresponds to the human act of prayer because of the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The person has no reason to boast or to consider this correspondence as co-regency with God.⁴³ The obedient act of calling upon God (invocation) in and through prayer is one way that human nature reflects the generative nature of the effect of Christ’s death and resurrection on the human life as God’s covenant partner.⁴⁴ “Hence in prayer as a confession of God’s free grace we do not have a purely subjective exercise of piety with only subjective significance” but we become “an active partner in the covenant which He has established.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ *CD*, IV/1, 312–313.

⁴² *CD*, IV/3, 474.

⁴³ Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *CD*, IV/3, 883. Here Barth is referring to the community of believers, but his point applies to the individual equally.

Summary

In this chapter, I discuss the significance of Barth's location of prayer in ethics in the context of God's reconciling actions towards humanity. It is through this reconciliation that Christians can pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ and in the manner that He taught the disciples to pray. My intention has been to describe how Barth explains baptism as a form of divine-human correspondence, wherein it is human action in response to Christ's command that Christians be baptized. Moreover, Barth considers baptism as a form of invocation, that is, calling on the name of God. Barth addresses invocation more specifically in His work on the Lord's Prayer in *CD*, IV/4, to which attention is given in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: The Lord's Prayer

Introduction

The previous three chapters demonstrate that Barth, from the beginning of his theological career, regards prayer as more than a devotional exercise. Prayer is viewed as the ethical task associated with the command of God and the doctrine of reconciliation, equating the entire Word of God with His command. In essence, Barth suggests that the Word of God in its pronouncements is intended to elicit a divine–human relationship of correspondence, which is powered by covenantal responsibility on both sides. God's responsibility is reflected in His faithfulness to humanity, His redemptive grace, and His will to be reconciled to His creation. In doing so, He bridges and forgives the massive divergence brought into the divine–human dynamic by sin. Human responsibility is obedience. Obedience is true or good human action when it is a response to God's command—not because human action in itself is good, but because the source and prototype of the requested action is God, who is *the* good. In chapter 3, I examine *CD* to demonstrate where and how Barth locates prayer in the command of God, highlighting His actions in reconciling humanity to Himself. In addition to the command of God, Barth reveals that it is in the doctrine of reconciliation that divine-human correspondence is made explicit.¹ Moving forward, I consider Barth's ideas on prayer as expressed in the final fragments of his major work to explore his thinking on prayer in the realm of God's reconciliation with humanity. Chapter 4 features Barth's attention to the Lord's Prayer, as an expression of petitionary prayer, with the intent of revealing the act of praying itself,

¹ See Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, 156.

beyond its obvious devotional character, as carrying with it a responsibility to correspond to God as He corresponds with the believer and the community, His church.

Both Barth's final lecture tour² and his failing health pre-empted the completion of *CD, IV/4*. The theologian had intended to write a volume on the ethics of reconciliation as an appropriate close to the place of ethics within the doctrine of reconciliation. *CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments* would have, in some form, been included in that chapter. It is noted, in agreement with Jüngel, that Barth's *CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments* on the Christian life should be treated with caution since it is not clear as to the degree of completion. However, this document is a valuable source in understanding Barth's theology of prayer in the context of ethics, particularly because it establishes anew his ideas from *CD, II/2* with regards to the command of God.³ In the *Lecture Fragments (CD, IV/4)*, Barth discusses ethics as a concept within reconciliation, the command of God, the nature of the Christian life, and the Lord's Prayer (the opening invocation and the first two petitions). In the final section, Barth explores an application of invocation in Christian day-to-day living, namely, the genuineness of the Christian's zeal for the manifestation of God's honour in the world.⁴

The main arguments in *CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments* are as follows. First, Barth revisits, albeit with greater clarity, themes he previously discussed in his discourse *Ethics*, with attention given to ethics as a command of God.⁵ In *CD, II/2* Barth examines ethics as a task within dogmatics because dogmatics helps the church understand the command

² Barth toured and lectured in the United States in 1962, on the state of Evangelical theology, which included a section on prayer, study, service, and love under the rubric of theological work. See Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992).

³ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, 154–156.

⁴ *CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments*, 205.

⁵ See *CD, II*, §36.

of God. He explains that it is God in His grace towards humanity that determines and makes possible the answer to the question that concerns ethics, namely, what is “good” human action? Barth argues in the doctrine of God that:

This, the grace of God, *is* the answer to the ethical problem. For it sanctifies man. It claims him for God. It puts him under God’s command. It gives predetermination to his self-determination so that he obeys God’s command. It makes God’s command for him the judgment on what he has done and the order for his future action. The ethical task of the Christian doctrine of God is to attest this answer to the ethical problem.⁶

Thus, Barth is saying in *CD*, II that good human action is obedience to God’s command. Such obedience is made possible by God’s grace towards humanity.

In *CD*, IV/4, Barth expands on the idea by way of his claim that the Word of God is God’s command “to the extent that in it the sure and certain goodness of God’s goodness confronts the problematical goodness of man’s as its standard, requirement, and direction.”⁷ As a result, Barth argues that human action may be considered “good” insofar as human action is an obedient response to God’s Word. By this line of reasoning, Barth maintains a view of ethics that is within the dogmatics of the church because the context of good human action has no other location than in the command of God, as it is revealed in the Word of God. Barth thinks of ethics as the framework for the relationship between God and the human agent. Moreover, he regards Jesus Christ as the mediator in that relationship. He considers the human agent’s responsibility in this framework as the human agent’s continued obedience, an obedience that has been made possible through the outpouring of God’s grace.⁸ Barth states that “man derives from the grace of God, and therefore he is exposed from the very outset to this question. Before he was, before the

⁶ *CD*, II/2, 516.

⁷ *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 3.

⁸ *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 12.

world was, God drew him to Himself when He destined him to obedience to His command.”⁹ So the human agent’s ultimate response is to act in obedience to the command of God, who is the prototype and *the* “good.”

Second, Barth explains that God, while being *the* good, is also gracious and commanding. In this way, God can be expressed as the commanding God. Barth connects the idea of prayer to the discussion by re-establishing it as invocation, calling upon the name of God. He argues that God is the living God. He has, continues, and will continue to make Himself known in Jesus Christ. This, Barth says, is how God brings Himself into history for and with the human agent,¹⁰ “that among and with and for and to men He acts and speaks as Himself.”¹¹ God takes this action because of His covenant to reconcile humanity to Himself. Barth states that God acts with power, freedom, and grace as He discloses Himself in the form of Jesus Christ. “His powerful action is the great and active Yes of his free gracious address to the world created by him. . . God reigns unequivocally by pronouncing this Yes and putting into action in the instituting, upholding, executing, and fulfilling of his covenant with man.”¹² Barth’s rationale for God becoming flesh in order to be reconciled to humanity is that God freely chooses to both build relationship with, and to include humanity in His act of being God, thereby revealing “his willing in no circumstances to be God merely in isolation and therefore without man.”¹³

Third, included in Barth’s assessment of the being of God as commanding, is the faithfulness of God. Barth makes a similar point in *Ethics* wherein he discusses God’s

⁹ *CD*, II/2, 516–517.

¹⁰ Barth describes the act of God taking on human form in Jesus Christ as the “dawning” of the rude incursion of His kingdom, which services reconciliation. See *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 16ff. See also Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*, 299.

¹¹ *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 13.

¹² *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 15.

¹³ *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 16.

faithfulness in the context of the command of God from the perspective of the human agent's response. Barth suggests that God's faithfulness illuminates human action where that action is obedience to God's command.¹⁴ In *CD*, IV/4, Barth describes the faithfulness of God as entirely consistent with God's actions in relation to His divine being and in relation to the human person. Barth says that God's faithfulness to Himself, His Word, His covenant, His fellowship with humanity, and His command to humanity is inviolable. Barth's aim is to build the case for God's faithfulness revealing that His commands are true. "He makes no mistakes" Barth writes, "his power never fails... There is none that he does not precede from all eternity... The multiplicity of his ways is endless, but his will and resolve in all his ways is one and the same."¹⁵ In sum, God, who is Jesus Christ, "is the one true God . . . who commands."¹⁶ Turning his attention to the human action that corresponds to the command of God, Barth suggests that the human agent's action in calling upon the name of God, or invoking the name of God in prayer illustrates God's faithfulness. Prayer is so important to the Christian life that God ensures that believers receive instruction on how to pray. Christ's teaching on prayer, known as the Lord's Prayer, is that explicit instruction.¹⁷ An examination of the invocation and the first two petitions reveal the rich dimensions in prayer. As divine-human correspondence, therefore, the act of prayer has deeper implications than simply being a devotional aid.

The Lord's Prayer in *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*

The significance of Barth's consideration of the Lord's Prayer underscores his view on divine-human correspondence in his examination of the invocation (our Father),

¹⁴ Barth, *Ethics*, 53, 101.

¹⁵ *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:9-13.

and the first two petitions. The following section shows how Barth understands prayer as ethics—the human action in the context of the Christian life—and reveals prayer to be more significant than its devotional elements, which are commonly understood in the church today. David W. Haddorff summarizes Barth’s attention to human ethical action in prayer by suggesting that invocation directs divine and human correspondence to covenant-partnership, which in turn sets the stage for human ethical action. Moreover, Haddorff affirms, “Christian ethics is an ethics of correspondence between divine and human action, but that correspondence is grounded in God’s covenantal partnership with humanity.”¹⁸

Barth’s attention to the Lord’s Prayer as the primary human action in relation to ethics (the human as ethical agent) demonstrates his practical regard for the nature of human action in relation to calling upon God as Father. Thus, the theologian’s attention to the Lord’s Prayer in *CD*, IV/4 demonstrates his perspective on Christian moral responsibility; namely, the action that has as its outcome, the specific act of praying the Lord’s Prayer. Spencer argues that Barth’s treatment of the Lord’s Prayer is the grounds for the Christian life “where Barth’s ideas on correspondence find its most advanced expression.”¹⁹

Invocation for Christians (those who are in Christ) must address God as “Father,” Barth explains. The mindset is one of speaking *to* the Father rather than *about* Him. Barth continues, “The Father invoked by Christians is not just called such when deep down and in truth he is no more than idea or epitome of fatherhood.”²⁰ What Barth means here is

¹⁸ David W. Haddorff, *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth's Ethics for a World at Risk* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 266.

¹⁹ Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*, 298–299.

²⁰ *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 52.

that at its root, Christian speech should begin with the word “Father.” This speech act should represent what the Christian believes to be true at his or her core, which is, that God is *the believer’s* Father.

Thus, the act of speaking the name “Father” should be congruent with the Christian’s thoughts about God. The speech act of calling God “Father” reflects human thought at its basic level. Barth works out this idea as the primal speech act through his location of invocation, or calling upon the name of God as Father, as the most primary act of obedience—the act of obedience that occurs in the act of praying itself. As a result, obedience becomes the human agent’s response to the primary command to speak and think of God as Father. This is the basic premise of correspondence. Barth says, “It is the primal act of the freedom Christians are given, the primal form of faithfulness with which they may correspond to his faithfulness.”²¹ Scripture tells that Christians call upon God as “Abba Father” (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15). For “the Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to son-ship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” The work of the Holy Spirit, the seal of God’s reconciliation, teaches believers to call upon God as Father. Barth gives particular attention to the New Testament’s reference to Jesus, who stands as the example of calling upon God as Father. Barth says, “Thus our freedom to call upon God as Father is grounded absolutely in the way in which Jesus Christ called upon him.”²² While Barth regards the New Testament witness to Christ’s references to God as Father (Matthew 11:27–29), there are also Old Testament references to God as Father, where God requires His chosen people, Israel, to call Him Father. Deuteronomy 32:6

²¹ Ibid., 51.

²² CD, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 65.

states, “Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?” Also, Jeremiah 3:19 states, “I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me.” God’s own nature and work makes the self-claim and “inescapable demand” that Christians approach Him as Father.²³ Barth makes an interesting point that calling God Father underlines the Christian faith even from its early beginnings “the one miracle which draws people out of all nations . . . as children to their Father.”²⁴ Thus, when Christians approach God as Father with petitions in prayer, they “come to him as petitioners not their own postulate or venture but their due acknowledgement of his being as the Creator who is good to his creatures, as the Lord, King, and Judge who wills and achieves the best for all the members and inhabitants of his house.”²⁵

The Christian approach to God as Father in prayer implies a certain closeness to the one who is addressed; it has a familiar and intimate character. The contemporary idea of prayer as a devotional effort to draw closer to God seems problematic because Christians are already in a position of intimacy with God in prayer. Barth says of these types of teachings, particularly Schleiermacher’s claims, that such teaching is “fatal” because its presupposition could be regarded as an attempt to control God. However, in Barth’s thought, he argues that when Christians pray, they know by faith and Scripture (Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 7:7; Mark 11:24; John 16:23) that God hears and responds. With such confidence, Christians also know that God freely “corresponds to their action with His.”²⁶ Thus, in the act of drawing closer to God in invocation, “by the power of

²³ Ibid., 59.

²⁴ Ibid., 66.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action*, 299.

God the human can transcend the self.”²⁷ Therefore in prayer, whether the act of calling upon God is attended with the semblance or absence of human emotion, the human person is intimately connected to God corresponding with Him and He with the Christian. The act of asking God the Father suggests a deep-seated bond based on the dual response where, in relation to prayer, God the Father hears and responds to the obedient response of His children who pray.

Prayer then is not a “shot in the dark, an experiment or a gamble.”²⁸ Christians call upon God as Father in a corresponding partnership. Barth states that this partnership is one of sharing in the history that God has created where He participates with the human agent. Barth suggests, therefore, that in Christian prayer, the requestor is speaking with God with a confidence “that their calling upon him does not fade away in the void and is not just heard but is also answered.”²⁹ At this point, a question must be posed: Does God always answer the Christians prayer? Barth says yes; he argues further that the only unanswered prayer is “one uncertain of an answer.”³⁰ I agree with Barth on this point. The nature of God’s answer may not be a response with which one agrees or in the “timely” manner that one might hope. However, God commands men and women to call on Him as Father and promises that He will hear and act on their behalf. It is perhaps the absence of what God does with the Christian’s prayer that may lead to the assumption that He does not answer. In response, I propose that if God asks the human to pray, and to pray in a specific way to which our actions correspond, then He will respond. He has assured the believer in Scripture that He will hear and respond (Psalm 50:15; 91:15;

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments*, 104.

²⁹ Ibid., 105.

³⁰ Ibid.

Isaiah 58:9; 65:24; John 15:7; Matthew 18:19; 21:22; Mark 11:24). “And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:15). Praying with confidence that God hears and responds is an act of service.³¹ On the divine side God makes use of the human person’s service in prayer. This, Barth argues and I agree, does not mean that God is in any way limited by Christian prayer, nor that the human agent can manipulate God into acting outside of His will. It is more to the extent that God allows Himself to be “touched and moved”³² by the action of prayer. Because He understands the human person to a greater extent than they know themselves, Barth says. God does not consider the quality of the Christian’s prayer. Rather, “his divine hearing always consists of the fact that in corresponding to it, he understands it infinitely better than they understand themselves and therefore gives place to their invocation in an infinitely better sense than that in which even at their best they can perform it.”³³ The significance of Barth’s point is that in prayer, God’s corresponding action adds value to human obedience. As the human agent obeys by praying then, God blesses the words of the prayer. Thus, God responds to the Christian’s stumbling and mumblings in the act of prayer with His full understanding of the totality of the needs of the human person. God lets Himself be moved by Christian prayer because of His covenant in Jesus Christ. As Christians petition God in prayer, “their weak and dissonant voices are sustained by the one strong voice of the one by whose Eucharist the inadequacy of theirs is covered and glorified in advance.”³⁴ In this Christological context, prayer is fulfilled.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 106.

³⁴ Ibid.

Barth argues that every prayer of the Christian is fulfilled because God has a better knowledge of the needs, wants, and desires of the human person. He knows a believer's meaning even when his or her intent, words, and expectations are unclear. Christian prayer reflects the believer's hopes and dreams for others and for themselves. As limited beings, human prayers cannot see the full picture. Christians pray with the best of intentions. Every prayer to the Father by His children is fulfilled in the sense that as a request God will correct, amend, and transform it as the one to whom the request has been brought.³⁵ Barth suggests that as children of God, it would be unwise to expect that prayers be fulfilled precisely as they are spoken. The best hope is that prayer is transformed into accordance with God's will and that having fulfilled the believer's request, "He will correspond to it more surely and more gloriously in this corrected and amended form."³⁶ Accepting that as children of God, the believer's prayers are amended with a view to being transformed requires not only faith, but also humility. Humility in the acknowledgement that human words in prayer are not and never will be completely comprehensive. The Christian's assurance, however, is that only He knows what the true needs or wants. Humbling oneself therefore in prayer, according to the words God commanded His people, Israel comes with a covenantal promise of God's correspondence, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Moreover, humility is responding in obedience to His command for Christians to perform the act of praying itself.

³⁵ Ibid., 107.

³⁶ Ibid., 108.

The act of praying for the Christian attests to the work and word of God in the world. Christians pray to glorify God. Barth considers this glorification as an “attestation to the work and word of God.”³⁷ It is a testimony to honour God’s name as holy by living the Christian life in a manner congruent with honouring God’s holiness. Barth calls this zeal or passion “the sacred fire of Pentecost, which one hopes will not be confused with emotional and rhetorical enthusiasm. . . . There is also a resting of the Christian life in God.”³⁸ Passion for the hallowing of God’s name results in rest.

Hallowed Be Your Name

Barth’s approach to the first two petitions of the Lord’s Prayer seems eschatological to the extent that the petitions suggest a list of the areas that God has deemed it appropriate to partner with His children on the future of His kingdom. Barth focuses on the world as being adversarial to God. He views the calling for the “hallowing of God’s name” as a call for God to bring in the future promise. In addition, Barth presents this world as problematic to the Christian’s life. He argues that the Christian is in the world but not of it. He views “Hallowed be your name” as petition because it reveals the Christian’s cry to God to remove disorder caused by darkness in the world brought on by the failure to hallow God’s name. This disorder is also a struggle against the Lordless powers and their “false lights.”³⁹ For Barth, it is analogous to three intertwined spheres of relationship with God: the world system, the church, and the Christian.

³⁷ Ibid., 112.

³⁸ Ibid., 115.

³⁹ Ibid., 233. Barth states that these Lordless powers are rebellion against God. The outcrop of this is disorder of all kinds in the individual’s life and society at large. He considers these powers to be demonic in origin.

The Christian and the community of believers enjoy a unique relationship with God based on His covenant of grace. The world knows about God and of His name but has not yet or will not hallow His name and thus has a different relationship (or lack thereof) with God. The result is a division of “light and darkness.”⁴⁰ Barth suggests that the petition for the hallowing of God’s name is a call for God to remove that division, “that darkness of ignorance of thyself! Let there shine wholly, unequivocally, and exclusively the light of thy countenance and therefore the knowledge of thyself! This is the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer.”⁴¹ In other words, God is being asked to sanctify His name Himself.⁴²

I do not agree entirely with Barth that this petition for the hallowing of God’s name is a call for God to act in obliterating darkness. The destruction of the powers of darkness is in God’s domain without His children’s active participation. While Christians may “wrestle” with these forces as a consequence of being God’s children, the battle is clearly God’s alone. From the very beginning, God alone separates light and dark (Genesis 1:3–4) and tends to these matters without corresponding human action.

Further, God has revealed Himself to us as Creator, Redeemer, and Reconciler. His name is holy; He has called His children to be holy as He is holy. He is Holy and God. Asking God to do what He is in His being does not appear to be the focus of this petition. Whether or not the world agrees, it has already been accomplished that in God’s being, in the totality of who He has revealed Himself to be, His name is hallowed. In addition, God’s being is in no way limited by whether or not the world attests to His

⁴⁰ Ibid., 122ff.

⁴¹ Ibid., 153.

⁴² Ibid., 158ff.

name as holy. Nowhere in the Lord's Prayer does it imply that the world is the focus. In fact, it is explicit that the believer's invocation is to the "Father" located in heaven. His relationship with the world is through His Son (who is God), Jesus Christ.

I do agree, however, with Barth that this phrase is a petition about struggle. Others have argued that this expression in the Lord's Prayer is a pronouncement, a declaration for God to be who He is. Jüngel argues that Barth's interpretation of the hallowing of God's name is the Christian's zeal and passion for God's word. Jüngel sums up his assessment of Barth's ideas on invocation by suggesting that the Christian's zeal for God's word is Barth's approach to bringing ethics to speech. Jüngel states, "By interpreting the word 'Father' as a word of invocation and correspondingly the Christian life as a life in the act which lifts itself up in invocation. Barth brought to speech the 'basic act of the Christian ethos.'"⁴³ As Jüngel addresses the basic act of prayer as the ground and basis for ethics with regards to prayer as evidences in this petition of the Lord's Prayer, Webster considers Barth's attention to the intercessory element in this petition. For instance, he emphasizes Barth's ideas on the struggle with the world and against its influences, suggesting that the battle necessitates God's children's passionate cry for assistance to resist these forces because He hallows His name. Webster's viewpoint on Barth's interpretation of this petition is that it is reflective of Barth's treatment of human agency in general. Webster suggests that Barth is setting the limits to human action in God's eschatological plan by noting that humans can act according to limits God sets. Therefore, Webster argues, Barth defines the limits of human action in his anthropology through how he addresses this petition. Human action occurs "in our

⁴³ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, 163.

human place and our human manner, only within the limits of our human capacities and possibilities.”⁴⁴ Therefore, the Christian’s petition for the hallowing of God’s name evidences the Christian’s agreement that God’s claim is granted as He so chooses in all the implications He desires for the world.

Moreover, while I agree with Barth’s attention to ethics as human action in this petition, for God commands His children to be holy as He is holy,⁴⁵ I do not think that “Hallowed by thy name” is calling God to act on behalf of the world who does not yet know Him. I think that “Hallowed be thy name” relates to the ethics and the Christian’s life insofar as it is a petition to God to bring about the only good human action possible. That is, to participate in and contribute to the believing community, which lives fearing (respecting that God’s name is holy) the Lord and lifting up the needs of the world to Him in prayer.

Finally, the words to hallow God’s name presume that the speaker is aware that there is a requirement that his or her new life (redeemed by God’s grace) is a daily witness to God’s name being honoured, which he or she knows, by faith, is a work in progress. This activity requires God’s empowerment by His Holy Spirit. Christians need to live continually hallowing God’s name. This part of the Lord’s Prayer is a consistent and powerful reminder to His children that they need the Lord’s help in every way to live the Christian life of holiness. It is the primary concern of God’s children and it becomes the petition above all other petitions when the believer invokes God the Father so that they might live uprightly before Him as His children. 1 Peter 1:15–21 sums these ideas up well:

⁴⁴ Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 196.

⁴⁵ See Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Peter 1:16.

Be holy, because I am holy. Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Since according to the Scriptures, Christians live as foreigners, traveling through this world to a better place, they do not need to call upon God in order to bring about destruction of darkness in the world. Rather, the believer must live in the hope of newness of life made possible by Christ's demolition of the division between the darkness of the penalty of sin (death) and brought those who believe into His resurrected life. Living in this new life is difficult. Hence, the cry to hallow God's name is the primary petition, to sanctify His children to be holy as He is holy. Ultimately, I agree with Tertullian's interpretation of this clause when he says, "when we say, 'Hallowed be Your name,' we pray this; that it may be hallowed in us who are in Him, as well in all others for whom the grace of God is still waiting."⁴⁶

In my understanding, the first petition is a request to continue in obedience. Barth does not disagree with this viewpoint; however, he considers it incomplete. He believes that it focuses attention on human action against an action that he believes only God can accomplish.⁴⁷ I argue that only God can sanctify His children to be holy as He is holy. In sanctifying His children, God is hallowing His name. First, a person has no understanding of the depth of holiness that God expects. Second, any human effort to work out "holiness" falls short of God's command. Third, only God knows how to enable His

⁴⁶ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, Its Founder, Tertullian, Three Parts (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 682.

⁴⁷ *CD*, IV/4. Lecture Fragments , 157.

children to be holy. Barth counters this point with a new perspective. He suggests that this petition is eschatological, “looking beyond all present future human zeal, volition, ability, and achievement to a work whose subject God alone can be and which will be that of his own volition, ability, and achievement.”⁴⁸ Barth is referring to his contention that this petition calls for God to take charge and demolish the world’s desecration of His name. I suggest that God can handle any aspersions cast on His name.

Also, the first petition is a request from God’s children for protection under His name. Recall that when Jesus prayed for His Disciples He made a similar request. John 17 records Jesus’ prayer: “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.” The name of God brings protection to those who believe. Jesus prayed that His disciples would continue to be protected by the power of God’s name, the name that Jesus came to reveal for God’s glory. It is also interesting to note that Jesus makes this request while still on earth. There seems to be something appropriate that comes from seeking the protection of God’s name while on the earth. It is perhaps also worth noting the reasons that Jesus asked for the name of God to continue to protect the disciples was to glorify God, to attest to the work of Christ, and so that they might be “one.” The unity of Christians as “one” as God is one, stems from the hallowing of God’s name through the protection that comes from being a people called by the hallowed name of God.

Therefore, I submit that this first petition calls God to establish the hallowing of His name in the present circumstances of His children for their divine protection. Not that

⁴⁸ Ibid., 156.

His children may achieve so called “holiness,” but that He might establish a people called by His name and protect them by His name for His glory. In essence, in the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer, God is being asked to establish His name according to His covenant in and through Jesus Christ. Christians pray out of obedient need and because God commands it. Our obedience corresponds to His covenant. In this way, God hallows His name in correspondence with the obedience of His children and in response to their request. God’s response to the believer’s prayer in this way affects life in general. Thus, this first petition reveals that prayer, beyond devotion, seeks God’s protection in all of the Christian life.

Your Kingdom Come

The second petition, “your kingdom come,” draws the attention of the prayer from his or her present circumstances to consider and request the fruition of the kingdom of God, the capstone to God’s reconciliation plan. Barth’s attention to the second petition reveals how he connects reconciliation with eschatology. He says that Christian prayer for God’s kingdom reveals two things: (1) that Christians are aware that the human sphere has its limits and that believers are looking to another kingdom, “that other kingdom is obviously if conceivably confessed and known;” and (2) that here is an “open looking in the direction of this kingdom.”⁴⁹ Barth’s suggestion that the kingdom is known implies the knowledge about the kingdom has been revealed in God’s Word (Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2). Barth says that this petition is a looking forward to a new reality in which Christians will experience true peace.⁵⁰ “This peace on earth, actualized when God

⁴⁹ Ibid., 236

⁵⁰ Ibid., 237.

himself comes as King and Lord and creates and establishes it, is the kingdom of God.”⁵¹ Barth admits that since the kingdom of God is a new thing and outside the limits of our comprehension, it is difficult to describe what the term means apart from what is known in the Scriptures. Thus for Barth, the kingdom of God, for which Christians pray, breaks through humanity’s present reality in order to point to a real kingdom wherein God is Ruler and King of all creation. In this case, only He can respond to this petition. Barth says, “The second petition looks toward this special dynamic reality, to the coming of God’s kingdom as the coming God himself, to its breaking forth and breaking through and breaking into the place where those who pray the petition are, to encounter with them and therefore all creation.”⁵²

But, Barth notes that there is a trichotomy in what is known about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God as revealed in the Scriptures describes that it has come (Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20), is yet to come (Mark 9:1), and is an everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:11). Scripture also gives a picture of what the kingdom of God is “like” (Matthew 13; Luke 13:18), but not what it is specifically. It is now and not yet. It is a mystery (Luke 8:10). Praying “thy kingdom come” calls for God to act in His own freedom, Barth suggests, “Which in its purity and freedom is God’s gracious, reconciling, and finally redeeming action. As such it is to be gratefully, joyfully and humbly affirmed in Christian faith.”⁵³ In other words, God the Reconciler has revealed the continued primacy of His kingdom through His redeeming action.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 236.

⁵³ Ibid.

With regard to God's redeeming action and the kingdom of God, the Scriptures identify Christ with God's kingdom. "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5). And, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). Moreover, Jesus states explicitly that His mission on earth was to proclaim the kingdom of God: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). God's revelation of the kingdom of God is found in Jesus Christ, His person, and work. When the Christian prays the second petition, he or she affirms Christ's completed mission and looks forward to the new reality to come in His kingdom. As the writer of Revelation records:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."⁵⁴

Barth argues, and I agree, that Christ is the "new thing," the kingdom of God. "He is the mystery that cannot be imprisoned in any system of human conceptuality but can be revealed in parables. He is God acting concretely within human history...He at that time was in his history, on the path that he trod to the end in his time, the imminent kingdom of God."⁵⁵ Barth makes an interesting point that the second petition can also be stated as "come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20) or "Our Lord come" (1 Corinthians 16:22). Barth

⁵⁴ Revelation 21:1–3.

⁵⁵ CD, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 252.

believes that these expressions have the same meaning as the second petition. He makes this point to substantiate his idea that this second petition was not an addition to Christianity, but “an ancient and even, it would seem, a particularly venerable tradition.”⁵⁶ Therefore, when the believer prays “thy kingdom come” they are praying in unison with the many that have gone before in the Christian faith, including those who were alive at the time of Christ. Barth suggests that those who believed Jesus’ words during the time of His ministry on earth witnessed the dawn of the kingdom of God. “Jesus Christ being its beginning, he who was, and also its goal, he who is to come.”⁵⁷ When the second petition is prayed, the individual joins with the voices in an ancient cry for the coming of God’s kingdom. Barth says that praying for and speaking about God’s kingdom *is* the gospel, it is telling the story of Jesus, “his life and word and work and passion and death.”⁵⁸ Barth notes the influence of the Blumhardts on his ideas on the kingdom of God. He explains that although the work is his own effort, “it could not have been stated and developed as it has without the impulse they gave and their influence through other mediations and modifications.”⁵⁹

The significance of Barth’s attention to the first two petitions of the Lord’s Prayer in divine–human correspondence is his contention that “the prayer for the coming of God’s kingdom, like that of hallowing God’s name, is pure prayer.”⁶⁰ Barth considers pure prayer to be prayer offered with a certain attitude. The appropriate attitude is as children of God, invoking the Father in obedience to His command. It is pure because it

⁵⁶ Ibid., 255.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 254. See Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 33:13.

⁵⁸ *CD*, IV/4: *Lecture Fragments*, 253.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 257.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 245.

is an authentic relationship between God and His children. “Prayer in this relationship finds the criterion of its authenticity as invocation of the Father by his children in that the fact that it is pure prayer.”⁶¹ This mindset has the following parts. Barth says pure prayer is unavoidable because it is uttering this cry for God’s kingdom to come because God frees His children to turn to Him, to respond to Him in this way. Their prayer then is in free obedience to pray to God. Pure prayer rises out of a confidence in the absolute superiority of God’s name, word, and kingdom over the vicissitudes of the human situation in the world.⁶² The prayer for the coming of God’s kingdom is pure because the action required to affect the coming of God’s kingdom rests exclusively on God. Barth says, “it is also pure prayer because in it they turn to God, with whom alone rests that his kingdom should come, that is, that he himself should come as King and Lord, by his intervention putting an end to human unrighteousness.”⁶³

Pure prayer, Barth says, “carries with it the unreserved certainty of being heard.”⁶⁴ Barth suggests that doubt and concern with regards to God not answering this prayer does not enter into the prayer for the coming of God’s kingdom because these words, when addressed to God as Father, carry their own answer that comes from being heard. In addition, as the prayer is made in obedience to God’s command, “it has an objectively and subjectively solid basis that is protected against all doubt.”⁶⁵ Barth says that when God commands that His children request something of Him, inherent in that command is the provision for His fulfillment of that request (John 13:13–14). In this way, God

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 246.

directly corresponds to the action of the human agent in the act of praying “thy kingdom come.” “‘Thy kingdom come’ should anticipate and reflect, without ceasing to be human prayer, the answer of the reality and truth of the coming of God’s kingdom.”⁶⁶

Barth’s idea of pure prayer in the doctrine of reconciliation seems to advance his earlier description of “true” prayer in his doctrine of God. For instance, he describes true prayer in the doctrine of God as follows. First, true prayer is not the act of praying out of necessity. Instead, the Christian who prays a true prayer wants to utter the prayer. Then he argues that the words of true prayer “want to be taken in hand and carried through as an act” of factual appreciation for the free gift of God and His grace. The words of true prayer acknowledge the certainty of the presence of God. True prayer carries its answer within. “It is pure seeking knocking and asking, ‘Come Lord Jesus, come.’”⁶⁷

Elsewhere in *CD*, Barth’s idea of true prayer advances his exposition of it in *CD*, IV/4 in two ways. First, it demonstrates a movement away from Calvin’s rules of right prayer where prayer builds Christian faith to an understanding of prayer as a command of God.⁶⁸ His treatment of pure prayer propels his ideas towards eschatology, unlike Calvin’s rules of right prayer. With regard to his views on the Reformer’s perspective of the Lord’s Prayer, Barth says he hopes to bring a “corrected” viewpoint. Furthermore, he says that “We must go a little further than the Reformers, who have not discerned here, or elsewhere, the eschatological character of the reality of God’s kingdom.”⁶⁹ Second, Barth adds to the idea that prayer not only carries the answer within it (true prayer) but pure

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *CD*, IV/4, 209.

⁶⁸ John Kelsey, “Prayer and Ethics: Reflections on Calvin and Barth,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 2 (April 1989): 169–84.

⁶⁹ Karl Barth, *Prayer*, ed. Don E. Saliers (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 35.

prayer has the certainty of being answered. Therefore, true prayer is the Christian's free act before God, an act he or she has been freed to do because of God's grace. True prayer is primarily petition and worship. Worship defines the limits of the petitions of prayer. Barth suggests "that we can only worship as we ask means that our asking must be directed to this God, to the One who gives us the wonderful freedom, permission and summons to do so."⁷⁰

Barth did not complete his analysis of the Lord's Prayer in his doctrine of reconciliation, but in an earlier publication where he explicated this prayer according to the great Reformers, Calvin, and Luther. However, he does refer to the Lord's Prayer throughout *CD*. For example, he considers that the love of God is His divine self-offering to humanity, and the human act that corresponds to God's divine offer of love is human obedience in giving himself or herself fully to God. Barth says that this human self-giving corresponds to the divine gift as God fulfills His will as revealed in the petition of the Lord's prayer "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Barth explains further,

the eternal love which is in God, and with which He has turned to man, there corresponds the fact that man may love God. Is not the mystery of reconciliation almost greater on this human side, from below, than it is on the divine? It is at least as great. For how can it be true, possible and actual, that a man loves God as God loves him?⁷¹

This is the will of God, and it takes place in fulfilment of His will—which is done on earth as it is in heaven. God wills that this should take place, and He sees to it that He acquires that which He does not need, which adds nothing to Him, which does not make Him richer, which He might just as well do without, but which He does not will to be without—the self-giving of man, and therefore man as the one who imitates and copies him, and the action of man as the echo of His own.⁷²

⁷⁰ *CD*, III/4, 100.

⁷¹ *CD*, IV/2, 790.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 791.

As Christians give themselves in obedience in prayer by praying “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” they demonstrate obedient human self-giving to God.

Second, he summarizes the prayer as a total human act of freedom in light of God’s grace. Barth’s use of freedom here seems to hinge on the fact that in all the petitions and invocations of the Lord’s Prayer, there is nothing that the human agent can do for himself or herself. Christians have all been directed to pray the same prayer; they have this in common. Therefore, when Christians meet they ought to pray. The Lord’s Prayer is both a picture of the total admission of all Christians concerning the glory of God and expressions of the Christian faith and hope in God. In sum, Barth’s comments demonstrate the unique quality of his theology of petitionary prayer and therefore its significance for the church today. He illustrates throughout the doctrine of reconciliation that the language event Christians call prayer is analogous to the nature of human relationships with God and God with humanity. Prayer rebuilds or revisits the relationship that humanity once had with God in the beginning. There is no mention of prayer in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. However, evidence exists of God’s relationship with Adam, both in the fact that He sought a mate for him and allowed Adam to seek that mate in His creatures and that God called to Adam in the cool of the day. God also expresses His command to Adam in that he not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus, the relationship with God from the beginning has been one of language on both sides, divine and human. Original correspondence was affected by humanity’s sin. Jesus was the covenant worker, God’s elect who paid the penalty for sin in humanity’s place. In God’s command to pray, Barth is suggesting that God has given the language of prayer as the event through which He rebuilds relationship with His

children, who have been reborn in Christ. The language is a correspondence to which God responds. By consequence, the value of the Lord's Prayer in Barth's theology is his contention that prayer is human action analogous to the relationship humanity once had with God in the beginning. The Lord's Prayer as the task of the human agent—the Christian believer—is performed, not out of need, but in faith, love, and hope in obedience to God's direction. Jüngel suggests that for Barth invocation is a partnership of freedom to love that “the human person for his or her part to correspond to these imperative through love for God.”⁷³ Prayer is ethical action because it encourages Christians to examine their existence in the context of God's will for His children. In the Lord's Prayer, His children invoke Him with the words “our Father.” Christ has given the Lord's Prayer not to the individual but to those related to one another in Him. The body of Christ is unique. Scripture explains that Christians “are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). Prayer is ethical action because in prayer, “we discover a purpose in and for relation, a discovery which aids in moral development.”⁷⁴ Barth's explains:

Where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, they are called by Him to pray with one another. Those gathered by the revelation of His name are men who are wholly referred and directed to God. That they are referred to God is something that they have in common with all men. But they are also directed to Him. They know that in the last resort they are not in their own hands and under their own control. They know that they are only creatures and not the Creator. They know also that they are God's sinful creatures; that because of their own corruption their activity is a corrupt activity. They thus know that they cannot avert the sorrow and suffering of the world; that they cannot avoid their own misery; that they cannot alter the human situation; that they cannot accomplish the reconciliation of the world with God as a genuine transformation; that they cannot

⁷³ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, 158.

⁷⁴ David L. Reinhart, *Prayer as Memory: Toward the Comparative Study of Prayer as Apocalyptic Language and Thought*, vol. 186, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012), 63.

hallow God's name as they should; that they cannot bring in the kingdom of peace and salvation; that they cannot do His will. Hence they know that they cannot and will not of themselves receive their daily bread, know the forgiveness of their debts, withstand temptation and overcome evil and the evil one. They know that they can only pray that these things should happen. They will do so in faith and love and hope.⁷⁵

Jüngel argues that to the extent that humans correspond to God, they “remain human among others, becoming ever more human through them and for them and so with them.”⁷⁶ Praying in chorus with the family of God in the Lord's Prayer helps the believer understand humanity in the way that God intends fellowship with one another and with Him. Jüngel suggests that in prayer, as Christians invoke “our Father,” they are lifting up not only the community of believers, the children of God, but are bringing the whole world before God. Such an act is analogous to humanity's primal speech act in obedience to God and is in stark contrast to the world's propensity for individual uniqueness, that is, “its uncompromising way . . . to absolute itself.”⁷⁷

Summary

In the first two petitions of the Lord's Prayer Barth seems to suggest that prayer, beyond its devotional aspect, has meaning. It is divine and human action in correspondence. It is this correspondence that is the vehicle through which Christians address God as Father. When Christians pray they self-identify as members of God's family. On God's side, He is the architect of prayer, He commands its use, and He implements the believer's petitions according to His will. God's correspondence with the human agent through prayer accents His redemptive claim on humanity. The following

⁷⁵ *CD*, IV/2, 704.

⁷⁶ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, 153.

⁷⁷ Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, 162–163.

chapter brings together Barth's treatment of prayer as human moral action and examines how his ideas contribute to an understanding of Christian prayer in daily life.

Chapter 5: Prayer as Divine-Human Correspondence

Introduction

Thus far I have demonstrated that in selected sections of Barth's *CD* he presents petitionary prayer as correspondence between God and the human agent in that it is *action* in response to God's command. In the final chapter, I examine how and in what ways prayer is action—action that is a consequence of this divine–human correspondence. I attempt to tease out the various forms of action that prayer takes in Barth's *CD*, linking them to prayer in the Christian life as a whole. Ultimately, I demonstrate that prayer, as human action, is a state of being, predicated in the human's identity in Christ as Saviour, Lord, Redeemer, the archetype of prayer itself. Such a conception of prayer reveals that human nature (being) or identity (in Christ) and humanity's doing (responding to God's command to pray) is the significance that Barth's ideas of prayer contribute to the understanding of the nature of prayer as a command of God in correspondence with Him. Prayer defines the limits of who humans are as Christians in terms of how they are to respond both to God and to their community, the world, and God's overall plan. At the same time, prayer is the vehicle through which God corresponds with humanity to reveal some aspects of His divine being.

God is incomprehensible and unexplainable. However, He has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity, His creation through His Word by the power of His Holy Spirit. God's being with regards to prayer unfolds a three-fold action: His spoken command to call the human agent to prayer, His hearing, and His answering prayer. God's being as revealed to us in His word can be classified as God Creator, God Redeemer, and God Reconciler. He calls the human agent to prayer under His authority as Creator. He

responds to prayer through His relationship with believers via His Son, Jesus Christ, Redeemer, through whom He has elected to reconcile Himself to the Christian in prayer. The Lord's Prayer reveals both elements of God's identity and human identity as His children in Christ. In the Lord's Prayer, God has revealed the boundaries of this relationship with Him highlighting the essential themes that should concern humans in daily Christian living (that is, our daily bread, forgiveness, temptation and God's protection).

Prayer as human action in relation to God defines the nature of the Christian life in relation to God. Because, Barth says, "the very highest honour that God claims from man and man can pay Him is that man should seek and ask and accept at His hands, not just something, but everything he needs," that is, petitioning God in prayer.¹ Such a special form of human action is also quite natural according to Barth.² He argues that prayer is the natural posture in the relationship between God and the human agent. Barth supports his contention by suggesting that on the human side one can approach God only as "suppliant . . . and is directed to do so."³ Thus, Barth is suggesting that God is granting permission for the human agent to act in such a way that reveals God's covenant partner relationship with redeemed humanity.⁴ Barth further suggests that supplication and asking of God is the very core of the covenant between God and the human. "It is so superior, so majestic, so clear that it makes man's prayer immediately necessary. It is the basis,

¹ *CD*, III/4, 87.

² *Ibid.*, 93.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ William Werpehowski, "Narrative and Ethics in Barth," *Theology Today* 43, no. 3 (October 1986): 334–53, 341.

permission and necessity of prayer, the basis which the man who is free before Him cannot escape.”⁵

Webster suggests that “in linking prayer to ethos, Barth’s interest is not in cultic or liturgical formation or moral dispositions, but in prayer as a human venture.”⁶ Webster suggests that human action has the attribute as a “pure gift of grace.” He argues that “human action is that of a servant, servant in the sharp sense of slave, of one who no longer owns himself but is owned by another. Human action is now good when it takes place within this bondage.”⁷

William Werpehowski suggests that in Barth’s ethics, there is no human action outside the command of God because the divine command is “*absolutely* binding” and “there can be no human action which does not stand under the divine command.”⁸ Werpehowski further suggests that the nature of Barth’s pattern of human action in relationship with God in Christ is really his anthropology, as it ascribes Jesus as the basis and pattern of the history of the Christian.⁹ Werpehowski states that Barth’s ethics reveal a relationship between God and the human agent and the human agent with God. On the human side, the human agent has changed (born again) and is being changed (sanctification). Growth-in-continuity is the history of the relationship between God and the human agent. Werpehowski states,

This is just a less interesting way of saying that Barth incorporates a conception of “history” which grounds reasons for action, character, and growth-in-continuity in his category of “history of relationship with God.” The everyday conception of history, remember, explains the changes through self-expressing actions of a

⁵ *CD*, III/4, 93.

⁶ Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸ William Werpehowski, “Command and History in the Ethics of Karl Barth,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* no. 9 (1981): 298–321, 301.

⁹ Werpehowski, “Command and History in the Ethics of Karl Barth,” 303.

continuous subject. As *continuous*, Barth's Christian person stands loyal to the cause of Jesus Christ. As *changed* through his or her actions, he or she comes to a deeper self-understanding through a deeper understanding of God's plans for him or her. And as *changing*, he or she approaches concrete ethical events...which help to frame and limit the possibilities of obedient action.¹⁰

Prayer is concrete action because it is consistent, repetitive, and active in the life and history of the Christian. Prayer, Barth suggests, and I agree, is "the content of particular moments in the history of biblical man."¹¹ Prayer marks the events of human life and particularly so when that life is lived in Jesus Christ as "Christian." Thus the act of praying is no small thing. Each prayer, each moment of prayer, is a significant moment in the Christian life. It is invaluable. Over and above the precious nature of prayer in the individual Christian's life, prayer of the Christian community as one whole is also significant. Barth suggests that prayer is the basic act, the main force of the whole Christian community past present and to come. "Prayer is, therefore, the acknowledgment that the community which exists in time, as it has performed and does and will perform its ministry, has lived and does and will live by the free grace of God addressed to it rather than by the inner meaningfulness and power of its own action."¹²

Prayer as Effective Action

Prayer is effective human action in as much as prayer is not a lonely event. It includes other members in the family of God and first and foremost Christ as the ultimate pray-er accompanying the believer in prayer, and it calls upon the family of God to petition God as Father together as each one of us prays the Lord's Prayer. "Because Christ's prayer is his action 'for others,' we may also pray with him."¹³ Webster suggests

¹⁰ Ibid., 316.

¹¹ CD, III/4, 88–89.

¹² CD, IV/3.2, 882–883.

¹³ Ibid.

that Barth's attention to the multiplicity of ways in which Christian life is associated, linked, and espoused to the life of Christ is not merely Barth using literary emphasis through "reduplication as an emphatic device; rather they are means of identifying the range of ways in which we are to conceive of the relationship of Christ's humanity to our own."¹⁴ The range of ways includes the act of asking, which evidences in petitionary prayer and arises out of the gift and will of God through Jesus Christ. Other ways include the grace of God directed to humanity "as distinct from himself," and the hearing of God's word/command actualized in the Christian's response (by asking) in freedom.¹⁵

Prayer is effective action when Christians pray with assurance, as a community/church. The assurance lies in the promise given to the church, which is received continually by its members. The promise is the ability to make direct appeals to God's free grace and that He will hear and respond. "He speaks individually to each individual, again for its own sake it cannot take away from the individual the calling on this Lord, the direct appeal to His free grace."¹⁶ In prayer the community of believers opens to love of their neighbor and to casting of cares upon God. Barth suggests that loving one's neighbor and casting away individual cares can come only through prayer. He states,

In the last resort we can only love the neighbour by praying for ourselves and for him: for ourselves, that we may love him rightly, and for him, that he may let himself be loved; which means that either way prayer can have only one content and purpose: that according to His promise Jesus Christ may let His work be done for and to ourselves and to our neighbour. Praying, asking of God, can consist only in receiving what God has already prepared for us, before and apart from our stretching out our hands for it.¹⁷

¹⁴ Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 185.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁶ *CD*, I/2, 453–454.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Prayer is effective action also because it is a willingness to receive. Barth states that God gives the gift of prayer. Prayer is a gift because God, by His grace, grants humanity the freedom to approach Him and to ask. As prayer is a gift, so too is receiving from God in response to prayer and asking, knowing that God hears the prayers of His children and promises to act. Thus, prayer on all sides involves the giving and receiving, both on the human side and on the divine side. God gives the gift and receives the human's prayer. The human agent prays as he or she is commanded, seeking and receives from God what only He can do. Barth sums it up by saying, "perhaps the very highest honour that God claims from man and man can pay Him is that man should seek and ask and accept at His hands, not just something, but everything that he needs?"¹⁸

Divine–Human Action in Petitionary Prayer

God makes His being known to the human creature in such a way that the creature may recognize Him through Jesus Christ. Humans derive their existence from God's action, the fulfillment of His own actions through creation, redemption, and reconciliation. Barth claims that God's action must be by the vehicle of correspondence because God's response is the divine work. Divine work, Barth suggest, centres on the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ where "God speaks His Word to which man must reply and to which his active life must correspond if lived in obedience."¹⁹ In this sense, petitionary prayer seems to connect God's plan of salvation to human action. Such a concept does not imply that Barth believes that human effort is involved in accepting Christ as Saviour. What I think he is suggesting, however, is that the act of petitionary

¹⁸ *CD*, III/4, 87.

¹⁹ *CD*, IV/3, 474–475.

prayer is an obedient response that centres on God's work in the life of the believer. Barth's word for this response is "application." Barth states that the Christian, in prayer "acts in the form of what we might call an application. If he is a man free before God, he is free to will and therefore to do this too—to present himself before God wholly and utterly as an application directed to Him."²⁰ Application can come in the form of confession.

Barth suggests that one cannot seek God in prayer and not find Him and for that reason prayer incorporates confession and praise. First, for Barth any type of prayer includes confession, as a part of "confession" seeking God. "And conversely, he cannot really seek God in prayer without finding Him and for that very reason being called upon to confess."²¹ Confession in prayer points to one's knowledge of God. The human action of applying human reason to arrive at the idea, by faith, that God is Father and Creator is the basic act of human reason. Therefore, calling upon God as Father in prayer (including but not limited to the Lord's Prayer) expresses a confessing knowledge of God grounded and won in prayer. Barth argues that this knowledge of God makes the believer God's witness, a confessing witness expressed in fresh newness each time one calls upon God as Father. He says, "the knowledge of God is newly grounded and won in prayer. One becomes God's witness only by becoming 'anew' which is what happens in prayer."²² In prayer, one finds God afresh each time. Barth says God is gracious; He has found the human agent, but calls them to come to Him repeatedly.

That God loves man is the meaning of His command on this side too. Because He is gracious to him and regards him as His own, God wills that even when he has already found Him he shall seek Him and find Him again. On this side, too, God's

²⁰ *CD*, III/4, 87.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

command is proof of the fact that He has made common cause with man and wills to do so again.²³

Praise is another form of action in prayer. Praise, in this sense, is not equivalent to the common perception of a response by song and hand clapping. Prayer is inward praise of God. By this, Barth means that prayer is a free willing acknowledgement of God that is meant for His ears alone. In his expression of praise, Barth is referring to the hiddenness of prayer. Prayer is not a demonstration of faith, disguised preaching, or an instrument of edification. Prayer is not prayer, Barth says, when addressed to anyone else but God.²⁴

Matthew 6:5–6 reads:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

In this way, the action of prayer, as inward praise, is twofold: it promises a quiet rest in God the Father in the Christian's secret (physical and spiritual) place and a promise of "reward" from God for this internal readiness and act of praise. I agree with Barth that both praise and confession suggest the act of honouring God through prayer. Barth states, "Even he who leads the congregation in prayer can only want to summon them to their praise of God as intended for His ears alone. From this standpoint we must say that no less in prayer than in confession we are concerned with the honour of God."²⁵ This inward praise is free from concerns about how and what is said, its gift is the act of going to God as an offering. Inward praise, in this way, is free from the concern to pray a certain way. I like Barth's comment that prayer simply has to be the Christian's concern

²³ Ibid., 88.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

only with God. He says, “It does not have to be beautiful or edifying, logically coherent or theologically correct...Its formation can be determined only by its own inner law, where man is concerned only with God.”²⁶ Here Barth suggests that Christians need not be overly spiritual or ethereal because prayer is a Christian responsibility before God; and as such, is a responsibility that he or she chooses freely to honour.²⁷ In all this, prayer is sincere correspondence with God.

Therefore, God’s divine action, the first of which is His command to pray, should propel one to God when in need and prompt one to reject any alternative (for example self-reliance or works). For, “If prayer really has its basis in the order and command of God, all the difficulties which arise apart from this basis are dispelled.”²⁸ Barth says that in receiving from God, one knows the giver and source of provision. Thus, one continues to pray in all things and for all things with thanksgiving because each occurrence of one’s request to God and receipt from Him necessitates the understanding that, “everything is from the hand of God even that perhaps which one may take because of one’s work or other circumstances.”²⁹ Not only does God’s command to pray propel believers to Him, He also assists them in the act of praying itself. In fact, when Christians pray the Lord’s Prayer, Barth says they are also recalling their need, in every instance, to know how to pray. Recall that the Lord’s Prayer, as it is often termed, was Jesus’ response to the request of the disciples to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1–13).

Secondly, divine action, in prayer, not only teaches one how to pray, but also teaches that when believers pray, they do so because they do not know what *to* pray, the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *CD*, III/4, 89–90.

²⁸ Ibid., 95.

²⁹ Ibid., 95–96.

Holy Spirit (Intercessor and Translator) interprets and intercedes for them. Necessarily it is a continual part of prayer. However, it does not mean that the Christian does not pray at all while waiting and hoping that the Holy Spirit will make a more eloquent entreaty on his or her behalf. Rather, I agree with Barth that “in prayer one must do what one can in one’s own weakness and allow God Himself to speak by His Spirit the true and decisive Word...It is for this feeble performance that the Spirit intercedes.”³⁰ Always weak in its relationship to God, this human speaking is what He “forestalls and helps.”³¹

Thirdly, divine action in prayer occurs when God answers prayer as part of the making of human history. The Bible describes prayer in the midst of or as a precursor to defining moments in the history of the children of God, which takes concrete form in the prayers of individual people in the biblical narrative. The first example of a prayer and its significance in the history of God’s people is Hannah’s prayer for a son (1 Samuel 1:10–12). God answered her prayer and she gave birth to Samuel. Hannah kept her covenant to God and gave Samuel to God. Samuel became one of God’s prophets and a judge in Israel. The second example is Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46) wherein He submitted to the Father’s will His life for the sins of the world. I believe that in each moment Christians spend in prayer, they recall and call upon this relationship with Christ as they live in this new history that His sacrifice alone made possible. Thus, each moment of prayer marks a moment of life in this new history as a believer in Christ Jesus. Moreover, the act of praying connects humanity to one another (believers and non-believers) and to the community of believers past, present, and future as intercession is made for the needs of God’s kingdom.

³⁰ Ibid., 90.

³¹ Ibid.

While prayer marks moments in the history of individual lives, the overarching human action in prayer is correspondence with God. Barth indicates that what God wills of humans is that they bring their requests in their simplicity, their complexity, their urgency to Him as a natural consequence of the covenantal bond between the gracious God and His people, a bond He created from creation and set in motion for humanity's benefit.³² From God's side, Barth says, it is God's will; His covenantal relationship laid out in creation. "He is the God who lets man come to Him with his requests, and hears and answers them. He is God in the fact that He lets man apply to Him in this way, and wills that this should be the case."³³ On the human side, it is the purest form of human action on a daily basis. As a result, the life of prayer can be described as a necessary action of human existence in relation to God. Barth argues, and I agree, that the children of God are called to prayer as the single human act to which God promises to correspond (Jeremiah 29:12, 33:3) and to respond. It is necessary because God makes Himself available in an urgent way to the human agent through prayer: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."³⁴ Prayer is necessary because it keeps the Christian close to the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ in the present time and "unto eternal life" (Jude 1:21). But when the Christian says, "I cannot pray," Barth says this is untrue because God calls men and women to pray and in the calling lies the enabling to pray. Thus, "it is no good lying, for what one really means when one says one cannot pray is . . . I will not to pray."³⁵ However, if praying makes humans free before God then the first component of that "freedom" is obedience. As Barth suggests:

³² Ibid., 93.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See also *CD*, III/4, 93–94.

³⁵ Ibid., 96.

The first criterion, then, to be noted in regard to prayer is whether it is an act of obedience and can stand as such before God. It cannot stand before God except when it has its basis in His command, the commandment of His grace.³⁶ Thus, when the bolt of disobedience is pushed back, anyone can pray.³⁷

I agree with Barth that prayer is a task to be undertaken by all believers. There are specific dimensions of prayer that Barth has covered in some lesser detail than his focus on prayer as ethics. They are prayer as devotion, private prayer and church liturgies, prayer as thanksgiving penance and worship, prayer on behalf of and participating in the community of believers. They are worth noting because these dimensions of prayer fold in on the main theme of prayer as correspondence between God and the human agent.

Prayer as Devotion

Prayer as devotion—that is a focus on private individual prayer as a means to cleanse oneself—is as Barth suggests, perhaps contrary to God’s command to pray. Prayer begins, Barth says, “neither in the collected man nor the distraught, neither the deepened nor the superficial, neither the purified and cleansed nor the impure, and not even the clear and strong, has anything whatever to represent or offer to God, but everything to ask of Him.”³⁸ In sum, one can never be purified enough to come to God on one’s own. The approach to prayer that God commands is twofold: to come to Him and to ask. For Barth says, this is the only way one can come to God. In prayer, there is no camouflage or mask; one must step out of one’s roles in life. In prayer one cannot give oneself in “service.” God has already offered Christ as the ultimate servant.

Barth suggests that prayer books and church liturgies are useful if they position

³⁶ Ibid., 97.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 98.

the prayer before God in supplication and nothing else.³⁹ Barth is suggesting that prayer books, of which the contemporary church has a vast number, need only present the Christian with the information necessary to realize that prayer is a simple expression of need to God in response to command.

Barth argues that prayer includes thanksgiving, penitence, and worship. He suggests that Christians pray with the mindset that there is a great chasm between God and them. Barth suggest that one's thoughts about that distance between God and the human agent lead to giving of thanks for the freedom to pray, penitence for sin, and worship for the grace of God to cleanse them by the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, the believer is thankful in all actions particularly in prayer because it is God who chooses to respond to human action in prayer. Barth says, "We certainly cannot pray gratefully without realizing the abyss between God and ourselves, and therefore confessing to ourselves and God that, as we are unworthy of His grace and blessings in general, so we do not deserve to be summoned and required to come before Him with our requests."⁴⁰

Commonly understood dimensions of prayer such as thanksgiving, repentance, and worship, are dimensions of seeking, thanking, and worshipping God at His request.⁴¹ Barth seems to be suggesting the devotional aspects of prayer when he speaks of pure prayer in the order of penitence, thanksgiving, and worship. However, his focus is to point the reader to something far greater. He builds on prayer as devotion or pure prayer by suggesting that petitionary prayer is something quite different, while it has its roots in these forms of prayer. For example, Barth suggests that while devotional prayer focuses

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁴¹ Ibid., 101.

on the nature of human reaching for God in obeying His command in the present time, petitionary prayer is a looking forward to God's action in relation to humanity in the dimension of prayer for the community.

Prayer for the community should be entered into confidently, Barth suggests that prayer as a part of and for the community of believers is confident human action. The individual who upholds his or her community of faith in prayer, trusts that God will be faithful to His word and that He will be consistent in maintaining His covenant not only in the present but in His kingdom to come in the future. Interestingly, Barth seems to suggest that communal prayer "keeps God to His Word...It keeps Him to the fact that its cause is His. Appealing to His free grace, it expects quite simply that He will let Himself be kept to His Word."⁴² Barth seems to be suggesting that God chooses to define Himself by His Word. In fact, Barth notes elsewhere that God accepts community prayer and prayer for the community as an offer of free action, which He presents to the human agent as a way to partner with Him in His fulfillment of His covenant with humanity.

Summary

Prayer, as effective human action, is inherent to human correspondence with God. It also describes how God's action in regards to prayer corresponds with humanity in revealing some of His divine attributes. Barth's contribution in teasing out this theme of prayer, in my view, is ground breaking for today's Christian as he or she calls upon God as Father in prayer.

⁴² *CD*, IV/3.2, 883.

Conclusion

The Significance of Barth's Theology of Prayer

The Christian act of praying to God as Father is effective because it is action between God and the human agent predicated on God's act of divine grace in permitting (commanding) prayer followed by His corresponding action to hear and act on prayer. Throughout his theological career, Barth attempts to locate prayer within this notion of effective human action. More precisely, his ethical ontology sets prayer as *the* human activity that positions Christians at the heart of God's covenant action with humanity. He thus expresses prayer as action beyond its devotional dimension to its impact on the whole of the Christian's life. Barth's idea of locating prayer in ethics is why I believe that the *CD* makes a significant contribution to the theology of Christian prayer. Barth's ideas on prayer reveal that prayer is more than an act of devotion.

Barth draws attention to the Christian act of prayer as ethics, that is, the basis of overall human action. He suggests, and it is significant to his contribution to theology, that prayer is a correspondence between the divine and the human. The action is first and foremost God's work, through His Word, solidified by His will for humanity and reconciling us to Himself through the elected One, the Christian's true hope, Jesus Christ. As a result, prayer takes on a new light in Barth's ethics; it suggests that God commands in all of His Word that Christians pray. God gives this gift of renewed relationship in keeping with His plan and purpose for the human creature. Thus, the act of praying itself carries importance to the Christian life both as effective action in the sense that it can be considered good human action because of God's role as the giver who is the only true good, and in its assurance that God hears and answers.

Prayer carries its own reward as it imparts a new freedom by building faith, by sanctifying the believer, by fuelling human relationships in the Christian community, and by lifting up the world's needs to God as Christians cry "our Father" in unison throughout the history of Christianity. Prayer in the context of ethics under the command of God gives the Christian life the attributes expressed in Psalm 1. The author of that Psalm eschews the virtues of the person whose actions are directed to the thinking, doing, and regarding for God's law/word against behaviour in juxtaposition to those virtues. The psalmist's division of these attitudes and actions emphasize their value on the one hand in the life of God's followers, and on the other hand, the negative consequences implied for all those who follow "the path of sinners."¹ By extension, the act of prayer, that is, the command of the Word of God, sanctifies us by the giving of the gift of new lives as children of God.

Barth's examination of Christian prayer is multi-dimensional. He explores prayer as invocation, petition, and Sabbath rest (which includes his ideas on the ethical dimensions of prayer, specifically, his ethical ontology).

Prayer as invocation, calling upon the name of God in prayer is eschatological in its perspective of God in relation to human action with regards to prayer.² The Lord's Prayer presupposes the coming of God's kingdom, of the second coming of Christ and of the *parousia*. Invocation becomes not only a prayer of individual assent to the will of God, but a prayer of watchful expectation of the promised time to come. "They pray like the watchmen on the walls of sleeping Jerusalem ... to the glory of God and the salvation

¹ Benjamin J. Segal, *A New Psalm: The Psalms as Literature* (Springfield, NJ: Gefen Books, 2013), 3.

² Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, 172.

of all who dwell within the walls.”³ Prayer as invocation is prophetic and can be a looking forward to the fashioning of the world in the light of what God has declared is to come for all.

Prayer as petition is one of Barth’s primary points in his analysis of the Lord’s Prayer from his early work to the *CD*. In his sermons, he explains the Lord’s Prayer as petition.⁴ In his mature work, *The Holy Spirit and the Christian life* (and perhaps, *CD, IV/4: Lecture Fragments*). Prayer, however, in the example of the Lord’s Prayer is also a sample of the way believers should pray. Each “petition” in the Lord’s Prayer can be itself a prayer. As the believer prays “give us this day our daily bread,” an entire prayer is sought for the wellbeing of all that requires the believer to receive from God’s hand the support needed to live in the way of food, clothing, and shelter for the community.

By praying in the manner of the Lord’s Prayer, believers join their voices with all the saints past, present, and future for the community and for the world. Thus, in prayer one may be praying in an individual closet as Barth observes, but in reality they are never alone in their petition, they are praying in the manner of the many who believe in Jesus Christ—praying in the manner divinely taught to the community.

Why Prayer Matters to the Church

Petitionary prayer is not an individual human action. Consider the Lord’s Prayer as *the* example of petitionary prayer and note first that it is a prayer of all Christian believers as one. The group is entirely comprised of believers in Jesus Christ, the elected One. Here is where I add to Barth’s ideas on human action. His argument seems to suggest that humans can be individually focused, specifically, an individual act of

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Barth’s *Come Holy Spirit* for details.

obedience to God's command. However, I argue that petitionary prayer is speech of the whole community as one voice before God. God's command to prayer calls for His children (plural) to call upon Him. "If my people who are called by my Name" in this verse God calls the children of Israel as a group to prayer. The verse continues to explain the blessing that God imparts when His people approach Him as one voice, as commanded, namely that He will hear and moreover, He would heal their land. When Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them to pray, He speaks to the group and responds with a prayer that calls for the community of disciples to invoke God not as individuals but as the children of God, as one voice calling upon their Father in heaven.

Moreover, when the Christian community comes together as one voice, Christ's sacrifice is commemorated. A formal expression of this observance is the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, or Communion. Therefore, I am suggesting that calling upon God as Father (invocation) in prayer as one voice (that is, the community of believers, the family of God) is an expression of the observance of the Eucharist. What, I mean here is that prayer not only forms part of the Eucharistic element of a church service (for example, opening with a word of prayer), but that the totality of the meaning of "Eucharist" is expressed in prayer, specifically the Lord's Prayer. Because in partaking of the "bread" which God provides (in response to the prayer "give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11)), the Christian community acknowledges the giver of that bread, the sacrifice He made (the breaking of His body for sinners (1 Cor. 11:24)), His promised return and the eternal kingdom to come. "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Finally, prayer, as a concrete activity, is an act that repeats and represents the holy day, the Sabbath. Barth says,

If prayer is to become and be the underlying note and basis of all human activity, it needs to be continually exercised in particular. Prayer as a particular act in some sense repeats and represents the holy day in the midst of the week. In these sayings, then, Paul was not merely pointing to a perennial attitude of prayer, but also to the fact that the concrete activity of the community and of each individual Christian in observance of the holy day may and must have its continuation and concrete correspondence on the work-day.⁵

It is also a Sabbath resting in God. Barth says,

But so long as it is a request brought before God, God will hear it and understand it, and He will accept it as right, as the prayer demanded by Him, as an act of obedience, infinitely preferring it to the sublimest liturgy which does not fulfill this condition. It is as well to recall the primary meaning of the Sabbath commandment. In the supreme sense to pray is to observe a Sabbath rest from all one's cares, even the best.⁶

Barth considers this rest God's fulfillment of His promise in the salvation that came through Jesus Christ. Barth says, the Sabbath is "the day of God's rest and of the rest also promised to His people, is fulfilled 'after so long a time' in the day of Jesus."⁷

The Sabbath rest brought in by the work of Christ is a consummation between God and His chosen people, what Barth calls God's will to preserve the believer in Jesus Christ. Barth says that Christ "became and was, is His overflowing goodness in the preservation of the creature. We must reiterate that it is His free and unmerited goodness."⁸ Thus, prayer can be considered a covenant consummation between God and His children in Christ through grace as He hears and responds to their petitions.

⁵ *CD*, III/4, 89.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷ *CD*, I/2, 52.

⁸ *CD*, III/3, 71.

Moreover, it is an assurance that brings about a “rest” or confidence in God’s Word because of what Christ has done on the human’s behalf.

Prayer is also rest, Barth suggests, in that it is a looking forward to something new and wonderful in humanity’s coming redemption when Christ returns. This rest is a future hope, which has been promised to the children of God through Christ. Barth combines the ideas of prayer as consummation and the return of Christ suggesting that Christians pray each day for a fresh revelation of this hope that is to come. Barth says,

What we have to do is simply to take this consequence as our starting-point, to enjoy this Sabbath rest with Him as those who hear the message of Easter Day and are obedient to the verdict of the Holy Spirit pronounced there, praying that it may daily be disclosed afresh to us, looking forward in hope to the consummation of His *parousia*.⁹

Sabbath rest in relation to prayer suggests developing a heart of compassion through praying. Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8) desires compassion more than the obedience to the letter of the law. Responding to God’s command to pray, particularly when Christians pray the Lord’s Prayer, reveals Christ’s heart of compassion. Christ is Lord of the Sabbath. As Lord, He contains the meaning and scope of what it means to show compassion. Therefore as Lord, He is compassionate to us as He comes along side us praying with us and for us.

In conclusion, the Christian first walks uprightly before God in the act of prayer in service to God. Then he or she stands with the righteous, invoking God as “our Father,” steadfastly following *the* way brought about by God’s covenantal reconciliation through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. And at the same time he or she rests in the assurance that the act of prayer encapsulates its own reward by virtue of it being effective

⁹ *CD*, IV/1, 345–346.

and obedient human action in the Christian life in correspondence with God. In prayer the Christian, the child of God in Jesus Christ, is never freer than when he or she leaves the vicissitudes of this life behind, if even for a moment, and attempts to grasp and communicate with the divine.

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