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## The Problem: The Mythical Picture of Bultmann

Is it clear to you how things are between us—you and me? It seems to me that we are like a whale . . . and an elephant, who have met in boundless astonishment on some oceanic shore. . . . They lack a common key to what each would obviously so much like to say to the other according to its own element and in its language.

—Karl Barth<sup>1</sup>

For both Barth and Bultmann, following Galatians 4:9, all knowledge of God is included in the being-known-by-God. Just as Bultmann resisted throughout his life the confusion of the encounter with God in the act of faith with a conceptual definition abstracted from this act, so also Barth—though of course in the opposite direction, going from the encounter to the one encountered.

—Hinrich Stoevesandt<sup>2</sup>

1. Karl Barth to Rudolf Bultmann, 24 December 1952, in Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, *Briefwechsel 1911–1966*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, 2nd ed., Gesamtausgabe 5 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1994), 192.
2. Hinrich Stoevesandt, “Basel—Marburg: Ein (un)erledigter Konflikt?” in *Bibel und Mythos: Fünfzig Jahre nach Rudolf Bultmanns Entmythologierungsprogramm*, ed. Bernd Jaspert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 91–113, at 109.

## 1.1. The Myth

### 1.1.1. "One Way or the Other!"

On March 2, 1964, Karl Barth met a group of theology students from Tübingen at the Bruderholz Restaurant for a lengthy conversation. The group consisted of forty Protestants and five Catholics. Their recorded conversation ranged across a wide spectrum of theological topics, including the meaning of Christ's resurrection, the doctrine of analogy, the distinction between "noetic" and "ontic," recent developments in Roman Catholicism, and the history of dialectical theology and the Confessing Church. At one point an unknown student raised the topic of Eberhard Jüngel's recent interpretation of Barth's *analogia fidei*.<sup>3</sup> The student wished to know whether Jüngel's understanding accorded with Barth's own. Barth responded by saying that he had read the essay but he no longer remembered the details. He instead changed the topic to address Jüngel himself as an interpreter of his theology.

I know only one thing that I remember for sure: Jüngel is one of those—and really not one of the worst, but rather a good representative of those who are terribly eager to learn the essentials from me . . . and then comes an "and"! With him it is the "and" of Ernst Fuchs. It's well known that one can also say: Barth "and" Bultmann. Here in Switzerland we have [Gerhard] Ebeling, so that one can also say: Barth "and" Ebeling. I like to compare this theology to a garden of paradise, at the entrance to which stand, on the left and the right, two heraldic stone lions [*zwei steinerne Wappenlöwen*] that bear these names.<sup>4</sup>

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

4. Karl Barth, *Gespräche 1964–1968*, ed. Eberhard Busch, Gesamtausgabe 4 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971), 86; ellipsis in the original.

Somewhat ironically, the Barth known for his dialectical emphasis on both the Yes and the No set himself here against any “both-and” when it came to reconciling his own theology with those of his contemporaries. Such efforts, he implied, are paradisiacal. In a way, though, his denial of the “and” succinctly captured his *modus operandi* throughout the whole of his career: his rejection of the German liberal “Christianity *and* Germany,” his rejection of Przywara and Brunner’s variations on “revelation *and* nature,” and his consistent rejection, in various forms, of the pair “theology *and* philosophy.” It was only natural that Barth should oppose any attempt to unite him with other theologians or philosophers.

Later in the conversation, while discussing the origins of dialectical theology, another student asked about the role of Rudolf Bultmann. In the course of recounting some details about his relationship with Bultmann, Barth again returned to the lions guarding the entrance to the garden of paradise.

I am reminded of the two heraldic lions. Do you really and seriously want, as many do, to combine us, so that Bultmann is one of the lions and I am the other? And do you seriously believe that the way into paradise actually goes through this gate? Or would you perhaps like to make [Friedrich] Gogarten my other lion? Beware of what you’re doing! I would really advise everyone: choose! It is better to choose! Then go this one way consistently to the end! And see which way to the end is worth it! But not through these eternal mediations, the eternal “both-and,” “yes, but.” Rather go through it [on one side]! Even at the risk that it will perhaps become a little one-sided, whether one chooses one way or the other! But I find it a little suspicious, for the good of the whole Bultmann school, that no one simply follows the lines through consistently. . . . Please understand that I do not want to require that you must follow me now through thick and thin. I would only say that if you don’t want to do that, then you should instead follow Bultmann through thick and thin. Just look where you end up! But don’t try to be so clever that you think: since we [i.e., Bultmann and Barth] have grown old with more or less great dignity and have made our effort,

now any young man can come and say: “Yes, of course both are right! One only needs to join them together correctly!” That’s a little bold! I think the whole talk of “decision” could now become relevant again in this sense. Forty years ago we had to make a decision. And it might be promising for the development of theology if it once again came to a decision—as Adolf used to say: “one way or the other!”<sup>5</sup>

Barth speaks here with an obviously exasperated tone, elaborating on his earlier opposition to the paradisiacal “and.” He had no doubt encountered many students who thought themselves quite clever in their ability to join together ostensibly opposed thinkers. In fact, Barth’s successor at Basel was none other than Heinrich Ott, a former student whose 1959 book, *Denken und Sein*, could be aptly summarized as “Barth and the later Heidegger.”<sup>6</sup>

Barth almost certainly had Ronald Gregor Smith in mind, however, when talking about the “young man” who comes along to join Barth and Bultmann. Barth wrote a letter to Smith on June 28, 1963, less than a year before the Tübingen conversation, in which he congratulated him for a fine lecture on Hamann and Kierkegaard on the occasion of receiving a doctorate. But then Barth proceeded to give the same advice he would later give to the Tübingen audience: choose!

You too—et tu, Brute!—are therefore one of the many people who think the future salvation of theology is to be found in some combination between me and the Bultmann-school. For me this is a deeply problematic “salvation history” that needs the sharpest demythologizing. [. . .] Can you not see that today one must *choose* between a . . . not at all improved anthropological ontology—and a consequent return into the darkest nineteenth century (*Honest to God*—O abyss of banality!)—and a seriously improved ordering of the relation between the object and subject of theology—and a consequent advance (beyond fundamentalism

5. *Ibid.*, 124–25.

6. See Heinrich Ott, *Denken und Sein: Der Weg Martin Heideggers und der Weg der Theologie* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1959).

and liberalism!) to a spiritually (πνευματικῶς) enlightened and enlightening evangelical-ecumenical proclamation. No, apparently they are as incapable of seeing this in Glasgow as in the thoroughly reactionary West German Republic. How then can I not utter a deep sigh?<sup>7</sup>

Barth then added, in English, that he has not ceased “to speak to you,” which was a concern Smith expressed in a letter to Barth on June 20.

One can see from Barth’s letter how insistent he was on opposing all attempts to mediate between Basel and Marburg. We see again that he demanded a decision between two paths. Especially illuminating is the way Barth fleshed out the content of these two paths: one leads to the anthropological theology of the nineteenth century while the other leads to an ecumenical and evangelical proclamation of the gospel. In his final lectures at Basel in 1961–1962, Barth named these two theological options “anthropotheology” and “theanthropology”: the former subordinates theology to anthropology while the latter recognizes that anthropology has its basis in theology.<sup>8</sup> Later, in an interview with Carl F. H. Henry on May 30, 1964, nearly three months after his discussion with the Tübingen students, Barth reiterated this distinction when he said that “the serious question for the future of theology is this: Is there a theology that is not anthropolog-

7. Karl Barth, *Briefe 1961–1968*, ed. Jürgen Fangmeier and Hinrich Stoevesandt, Gesamtausgabe 5 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979), 147.

8. Karl Barth, *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1962), 18. Barth previously presented the concept of theanthropology in Karl Barth, *Evangelische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, TS 49 (Zollikon-Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1957), 3, and Karl Barth, “Philosophie und Theologie,” in *Philosophie und christliche Existenz: Festschrift für Heinrich Barth zum 70. Geburtstag am 3. Februar 1960*, ed. Gerhard Huber (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1960), 93–106, at 106. The material content, if not the concepts themselves, was set forth as early as 1949, when Barth presented a paper in Geneva on Christianity’s relationship to humanism, a position he further clarified in his September 1956 lecture on the humanity of God. See Karl Barth, “L’actualité du message chrétien,” in *Pour un nouvel humanisme: textes des conférences et des entretiens* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1949), 37–47, published in German along with further reflections in Karl Barth, *Humanismus*, TS 28 (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1950); Karl Barth, *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes*, TS 48 (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956).

ical but rather ‘theanthropological,’ grounded solely on the word of God in Jesus Christ?”<sup>9</sup>

By 1964 it was clear that Barth saw these two paths as mutually exclusive and irreconcilable options, at least where he and Bultmann were concerned. Of course, by that time the divide between Barth and Bultmann was old news. Twelve years previously Barth had published his essay on Bultmann with the subtitle: “an attempt to understand him.”<sup>10</sup> Two years before that, in 1950, Bultmann published his most pointed mature critique of Barth in the essay, “Das Problem der Hermeneutik.”<sup>11</sup> I will address the content of these writings in due course. For now it will suffice to observe that the difference between the two writings is indicative of their authors’ relationship more generally. Whereas Bultmann’s essay zeroes in on a very specific hermeneutical problem regarding the relation between revelation and history, Barth’s pamphlet is full of half-completed thoughts and hesitant observations, ranging over a large swath of Christian doctrine. Whereas Bultmann views this problem in Barth as a lack of consistency in the latter’s development of dialectical theology, Barth views Bultmann as having fallen back into the throes of liberalism. In these final years of their relationship Barth views his former ally as a heretic and enemy to the cause of responsible Christian theology—though he also admits it may simply be the result of their different confessional commitments, Lutheran and Reformed.

Between them lie not two paths for theology—a view the present work aims to debunk—but rather two competing narratives of dialectical theology. Bultmann sees himself as faithfully carrying on the legacy of the second edition of Barth’s *Römerbrief*, whereas, in his

9. Barth, *Gespräche 1964–1968*, 174.

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

11. Rudolf Bultmann, “Das Problem der Hermeneutik,” *ZTK* 47 (1950): 47–69. Future references will be to the version in *GuV*, 2:211–35.

view, Barth has abandoned the theological vision he inaugurated. Barth, however, sees things in precisely the opposite way. From his vantage point, all the other dialectical theologians fell away: Emil Brunner endorsed natural theology and championed eristic apologetics; Friedrich Gogarten made modern humanity the starting point and embraced, however briefly, the cause of the German Christians; and Bultmann made anthropology and philosophy the presupposition (i.e., the preunderstanding) for theology. At least where Bultmann is concerned, only one of these two narratives can be accurate.

The claim of this work is that Bultmann, not Barth, correctly interpreted the situation. Contrary to Barth, the attempt to reconcile the two theologians is not a salvation-myth needing to be demythologized; instead, it is in fact Barth's *bifurcation-myth* that demands a thorough demythologizing. Doing so will require a reinterpretation of dialectical theology from the ground up. The fruit of such demythologizing will be a rapprochement between Barth and Bultmann—not by eliminating the need for a choice but by *translating* the choice into a new situation wherein it becomes clear that the choice *for Barth* is necessarily at the same time a choice *for Bultmann*.

### 1.1.2. "They Lack a Common Key"

The notion that one must choose between Barth and Bultmann—"one way or the other!"—is what I call the *myth of the whale and the elephant*. The language of "whale and elephant" appears in a letter Barth wrote to Bultmann on Christmas Eve in 1952:<sup>12</sup>

12. Barth took the phrase from the work of Franz Overbeck, and it first appears in his 1922–1923 lectures on the theology of Zwingli at the University of Göttingen. See Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Zwinglis: Vorlesung Göttingen, Wintersemester 1922/1923*, ed. Matthias Freudenberg, Gesamtausgabe 2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2004), 448. Cf. Franz Overbeck, *Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie*, ed. Carl Albrecht Bernoulli (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919), 215–16. The phrase appeared more famously, however, in an interview Barth gave for the BBC, conducted by Vernon Sproxtton, with the title: "Viewpoint: Interview with Karl Barth, the great Swiss theologian." The interview was originally recorded on

Is it clear to you how things are between us—you and me? It seems to me that we are like a whale (do you know the wonderful book by Melville, *Moby Dick*? You would find it delightful if only because of its animal mythology!) and an elephant, who have met in boundless astonishment on some oceanic shore. In vain the one sends his spout of water high in the air. In vain the other beckons with his trunk, now amiably and now menacingly. They lack a common key to what each would obviously so much like to say to the other according to its own element and in its language. Riddle of creation, whose resolution in the eschaton I, like Bonhoeffer, am fond of representing to myself in terms of the line from the Christmas hymn, “I will restore it all.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite Barth’s appeal to an eschatological restoration of his relationship with Bultmann—and despite the charming, even winsome, nature of the metaphor itself—we cannot overlook the fact that Barth is here positing an *incommensurability* between the two of them. By describing their relationship as that of animals who do not live in the same kind of habitat and thus cannot actually engage one another, Barth is declaring any understanding between them to be unthinkable. It is not merely that mutual understanding is unlikely; the metaphor he chooses renders any rapprochement impossible on this side of the eschaton. As Barth says elsewhere in the Tübingen con-

October 15, 1960, though it did not air until January 11, 1961. It was published on January 19 in *The Listener* under the title, “Karl Barth on the Christian Church Today.” Charlotte von Kirschbaum then translated it into German for publication in *Junge Kirche* as “Ein britisches Fernseh-Interview mit Karl Barth.” In this interview Sproxtton asked Barth: “What about you and Emil Brunner? Have you moved together or further apart?” Barth then gave the famous answer: “Allow me to answer with a parable. Can you compare a whale, let us say: Moby Dick, and an elephant? The two of them are creatures of God, but they cannot meet, perhaps from far away, but not really meet; they cannot speak together; they cannot fight; they cannot conclude peace, that is so. My friend Brunner may decide whether he prefers to be the whale or the elephant. I hope the day will come when we will see and understand what has been planned—the idea of our good Lord to create these two, the elephant and the whale.” See Karl Barth, *Gespräche 1959–1962*, ed. Eberhard Busch, Gesamtausgabe 4 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1995), 158, 437.

13. Karl Barth to Rudolf Bultmann, 24 December 1952, in Barth and Bultmann, *Briefwechsel 1911–1966*, 192. The line is a reference to the Paul Gerhardt hymn, “Fröhlich soll mein Herze springen” (1653). Bonhoeffer discusses it in a letter to Eberhard Bethge on December 19, 1943. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft*, ed. Christian Gremmels, et al., Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke 8 (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1998), 246.



versation regarding Bultmann, “The good Lord has purposely created us to be somehow entirely different, and this is surely not going to change within this life.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, only a miraculous transformation of their very natures could possibly create the conditions for a unity between them. Certainly, if this is the case, then he is quite right to say that one must choose “one way or the other.” Any attempt to mediate between them would be, in effect, to declare oneself capable of bringing about the redemption of all things!

Barth’s description of the situation—written in a letter to *Bultmann*, we must not forget—is a thoroughly *mythological statement*. I use the word “myth” here in Bultmann’s technical sense, which we will clarify in a later chapter, meaning a metaphysical or objectifying mode of speaking and thinking.<sup>15</sup> Barth has here objectified the relation between himself and Bultmann by rendering the relation between them in static ontological terms. The two of them are, he claims, of essentially different natures; it is in vain that either one tries to communicate with the other. The mythical nature of this description is further confirmed by the fact that Barth applies the same description to Brunner. His appeal to the whale and elephant imagery in each case is thus implicitly an appeal to a timeless metaphysical schema that determines all possibilities in advance; it is an abstract interpretation of an otherwise historically contingent relation.<sup>16</sup> In par-

14. Barth, *Gespräche 1964–1968*, 124.

15. Myth as objectifying thinking is only one aspect of Bultmann’s understanding of myth, which has to be paired with the *positive* aspect of myth as the bearer of existential, theological truth. In isolating the negative understanding of myth, I do not mean to give the impression that Bultmann rejects myth tout court. As will become clear, I argue that the positive aspect has priority for Bultmann and is the actual basis for his hermeneutical project. But that need not prevent us from using the concept in its negative sense where it is an appropriate description, as it is in this case.

16. We should point out that while this particular myth defines the *relation* between Barth and Bultmann in a timeless and fixed manner, the myth itself is of course embedded within a thick historical context. Barth posits this myth after decades of frustration and miscommunication on both sides. For our purposes it is significant that this myth appears within the context of Barth’s final years; it reflects his mature theological position and its polemical relationship with

ticular, this myth forecloses the possibility of finding a “common key” and thus of reinterpreting the situation. Put in hermeneutical terms, it excludes the possibility of translating the genuine intention of this myth—namely, the responsible understanding of Barth and Bultmann—into a new theological context.

### 1.1.3. The Task

The theological world-picture of the relation between Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann is a *mythical* world-picture. According to this picture the world is a two-part structure, with Barth on one side and Bultmann on the other, incapable of meaningful communication. Barth is, to some, the champion of the gospel against the errors of modern liberalism, while to others he was an important figure early on whose theology eventually lapsed into yet another ossified dogmatic edifice. Bultmann is, for a select few, the one who made the gospel meaningful within the modern world, while for most others he was the liberal exegete par excellence who eviscerated the kerygma of any meaningful content. According to the dominant perspective within this picture it was Barth who rescued theology from the clutches of extrabiblical presuppositions and so-called natural theology, while Bultmann was the one who made anthropology—and an individualist, existentialist anthropology at that—the starting point for theological discourse, thus subordinating theology to philosophy. All of this is mythological talk, and the individual motifs can be easily traced to the mythology of Anglo-American neoorthodoxy. Contemporary Christian academic discourse is therefore confronted by

the mature positions of his contemporaries. Any attempt to demythologize this myth regarding Barth and Bultmann must therefore do so on the grounds of their *later* theologies. It is not enough to appeal to an early point of unity, which is just as much an appeal to a mythical “golden age” in their relationship. We must instead address the dispute between them where their own theological developments have reached their highest points, and where the disagreement between them is most pointed.

the question whether, when it discusses these two figures, it is really Barth and Bultmann who are under discussion or whether it is in fact asking people to acknowledge a *myth* about them in place of an actual understanding of their theologies. It has to face the question whether there is a truth about Barth and Bultmann that is independent of the mythical world-picture, in which case it would be the task of responsible theological discourse to demythologize the received message about these two theologians.

It is the claim of this author that there is indeed such a truth, and that we are charged with the task of demythologizing the myth of the whale and the elephant. Bultmann himself always insisted that demythologizing is not the elimination of myth but rather its interpretation and translation. Our task today is to demythologize the relation between Barth and Bultmann, and thus to hear again their joint witness to the gospel within a new theological situation. Moreover, it is impossible to re-pristiniate an earlier world-picture, in which the world was a single story with Barth and Bultmann in a joint alliance against liberalism. We must address the mythical world-picture by *going through* their later writings, not by ignoring them. Such a task cannot be carried out by simply reducing the amount of mythology through picking and choosing which aspects to demythologize. We cannot, for example, reject the notion that Bultmann abandoned dialectical theology and still retain the view that he subordinates the kerygma to Heideggerian existentialism, nor can we reject the claim that Bultmann subordinates theology to anthropology and still retain the idea that Bultmann denies that God acts in history. We can only completely accept the myth of the whale and the elephant or completely reject it. If the genuine theological insights and contributions of Barth and Bultmann are to remain valid for us today, there is nothing to do but demythologize this myth.

## 1.2. Earlier Attempts at Demythologizing the Myth of the Whale and the Elephant

The question is how we are to carry out this task of demythologizing. As Barth's letter to Smith indicates, this is by no means a new task. The present essay is not the first attempt to bring Barth and Bultmann into some kind of agreement. In many ways it is a *testimonium paupertatis* for our present theological situation that this task still has to be done. That it remains necessary is clear from the fact that earlier attempts were either incomplete or inadequate. Most previous efforts have not set out to address the specific myth of the whale and the elephant—that is, to reconcile them in terms of their mature theologies. That being said, there have been two assessments that warrant particularly close attention, namely, those of Eberhard Jüngel and Christophe Chalamet. Both scholars recognize that Barth and Bultmann operate at a basic level of agreement despite their many disagreements. More importantly, each scholar reinterprets the distinction between Barth and Bultmann as a differentiation that is *internal* to a more expansive and foundational unity. Analyzing these previous efforts will both indicate the work that remains to be done and provide critical resources for carrying out our present task.

### 1.2.1. Eberhard Jüngel

Less than a year after Barth's 1964 interview with the Tübingen students, in which he described Jüngel as one of those who approach his own theology with an "and," Jüngel published his concise and incisive monograph on responsible talk of God in Barth under the title *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*. The occasion for this book was a dispute between Herbert Braun and Helmut Gollwitzer over the proper understanding of the New Testament. After publications by each theologian raised the problem, a public debate was finally staged on

February 13, 1964, at the Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität.<sup>17</sup> Jüngel situates his book in the context of this dispute. He begins by acknowledging that this *Auseinandersetzung* was prepared long before by the works of Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Friedrich Gogarten. On the one side, Bultmann and Gogarten were concerned with the question, captured in the title of Bultmann's 1925 essay, "What does it mean to speak of God?" On the other side, Barth asked "in which sense God *must* be spoken of, so that our speaking is of God."<sup>18</sup> The tension between these two approaches—between Bultmann's human-hermeneutical perspective and Barth's divine-revelational perspective—is the same one that plays out between Braun and Gollwitzer. Gollwitzer, who completed his doctorate under Barth and was Barth's first choice to succeed him at Basel, self-consciously positions himself on Barth's side in his dispute with Braun. For Jüngel, however, there is irony in this, for Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik* "renders an implicit critique" of Gollwitzer's *Die Existenz Gottes im Bekenntnis des Glaubens*.<sup>19</sup>

17. Published in Helmut Gollwitzer and Herbert Braun, *Post Bultmann Locutum: Zur Mainzer Diskussion der Professoren D. Helmut Gollwitzer und D. Herbert Braun*, ed. Horst Symanowski and Hans-Werner Bartsch, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Reich, 1965), 1:13–44.

18. Eberhard Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden: Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth: Eine Paraphrase*, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 1.

19. *Ibid.*, 7. The fundamental criticism Jüngel levels against Gollwitzer is that he posits a bifurcation in God's being between nature and will, between essence and existence. In other words, Gollwitzer inserts an ontological separation between "God-in-and-for-Godself" and "God-for-us," between *Deus in se* and *Deus pro nobis*. Jüngel summarizes the issue in the following way: "Gollwitzer stresses . . . that the mode of being [*Seinsart*] of revelation has its ground 'not in the essence of God but in the will of God,' so that it is 'not possible *per analogiam* to infer back' from the understanding of God's being-as-revelation in the mode of being [*Seinsweise*] of an innerhistorical subject 'to the essence of God in the sense of God's constitutive nature [*Beschaffenheit*], but only to the essence of God's will, i.e., from God's will as made known in history to God's eternal will as the will of God's free love'" (*ibid.*, 6). Gollwitzer affirms that God *ad extra* reveals God *ad intra*, but he rejects the notion that God's historical acts reveal God's eternal being; instead, they only reveal God's eternal will. Gollwitzer backs away, then, from the work of theological ontology. He does this in order to preserve God's freedom, which Gollwitzer secures by—as Jüngel puts it—leaving "a metaphysical background in the being of God that is indifferent to God's historical acts of revelation" (*ibid.*). He separates the "essence of God" from the "essence of God's will": the former existing as the ontological ground of the latter,

Jüngel then sets out in his book to demonstrate that Barth actually stands closer to *Braun* than to Gollwitzer.<sup>20</sup> This further requires demonstrating that Barth actually stands in basic agreement with *Bultmann*, despite the apparent divergence between their two methodological questions. Indeed, Barth was right to describe Jüngel as one of those who approach him with an “and,” for that is precisely what this book sets out to achieve. Jüngel frames this “and” in terms of responsible God-talk. While he goes on to elucidate where they disagree, the differences between them are *internal* to a more encompassing unity.

#### 1.2.1.1. Responsible Talk of God

Barth’s central concern, as Jüngel understands him, is that human speech should correspond to God. But how can human language correspond to God if human beings necessarily speak the language of the world? The “problem of *theological language*”<sup>21</sup> is thus the “question regarding the *capacity* of language.”<sup>22</sup> How is a genuine encounter between God and human beings through the media of scripture and proclamation possible?

In order for a real encounter to take place, God must communicate Godself to humanity. For Barth, God’s gracious self-communication in Jesus Christ constitutes the only true presupposition of theology.

though otherwise having no obvious relation to it. The constitution of God’s eternal being is, therefore, static and unaffected by the acts of God in time and space. Unfortunately, in speaking about the “essence of God’s will” Gollwitzer failed to speak correspondingly of the “will of God’s essence” (*ibid.*). By separating essence and will he ends up creating an abstract hidden “God behind God,” in which case there is no guarantee that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is ontologically the same God who exists from all eternity.

20. For more on this debate see Bruce L. McCormack, “God Is His Decision: The Jüngel-Gollwitzer ‘Debate’ Revisited,” in *Theology as Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue in Historical and Contemporary Theology: A Festschrift for Daniel L. Migliore*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Kimlyn J. Bender (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 48–66.

21. *KD* 1.1:360/341.

22. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 17–18.

All other purported presuppositions apart from the communicative actuality of God are false; they are, in fact, forms of human idolatry. Human beings are fundamentally incapable of speaking faithfully and authentically about God on the basis of some starting point in themselves (i.e., “natural theology”). For this reason Barth draws a basic distinction between the *analogia entis* and the *analogia fidei*: the analogy of being claims that language can grasp revelation, whereas the analogy of faith claims that revelation can grasp language. The *analogia entis*—which operates as an *analogia nominum* whereby God is linguistically grasped as a name (*nomen*)—is the “capture” or “conquest” (*Eroberung*) of revelation by language in the form of “logical construction.”<sup>23</sup> This is what Jüngel identifies as metaphysics or mythology, which is premised on the natural capacity of language to speak of God. By contrast, the *analogia fidei*, understood as language captured by revelation, presupposes the actuality of God’s speech as the basis for the possibility of language corresponding to God. And since God’s communicative action *is* the covenant of grace in Christ that forms the internal basis for all creation, the language-capturing event of God’s revelation is an event that “brings language to its essence,” and thus “language is brought to its essence where God brings God-self to speech.”<sup>24</sup>

At this point it might appear that Barth belongs on the side of those who reject the hermeneutical problem in favor of a naïve (neo)orthodox appeal to the self-evident revelation of God in scripture—as if the theologian, by virtue of her faithful receptivity to God, can claim direct access to God’s self-knowledge on the grounds that language has been objectively captured by revelation. Does not Barth’s serene confidence in the communicative action of God lead to a dissolution of all need for interpretation? Is not the exercise

23. *Ibid.*, 22.

24. *Ibid.*, 26.

in hermeneutical inquiry a faithless attempt to capture revelation through human reason and language? Is Barth finally any different from those Catholics and Protestants of the past who claimed that the church has direct access to divine revelation, whether it is in the form of scripture, the *regula fidei*, the sacraments, or the ecclesial institution itself?<sup>25</sup> It could seem—and certainly Barth has been read this way for understandable reasons—that the theologian can bypass the problem of hermeneutics altogether.

Jüngel's central thesis is that, contrary to appearances, Barth's deployment of the doctrine of the Trinity at the opening of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* is not an evasion of hermeneutics but rather a profound *engagement* with the hermeneutical problem. Barth's trinitarian theology is, in fact, a form of hermeneutical theology. This is true in two closely-related respects. First, "revelation is the self-interpretation [*Selbstinterpretation*] of this God," according to Barth.<sup>26</sup> God's self-revelation in the economic Trinity is an interpretation of the immanent Trinity, and thus it is neither an addition to nor a direct presence of the eternal being of God. God's being *ad extra* in the economy of grace corresponds to God's being *ad intra*. The event of revelation is therefore the "self-unveiling" (*Selbstenthüllung*) of the eternal being of God, but it is an unveiling *in and through a veil*.<sup>27</sup> Or as Barth says elsewhere: "the *Deus revelatus* is the *Deus absconditus*."<sup>28</sup> God is hidden *in* God's revelation and not apart from it.<sup>29</sup> That is to

25. For a penetrating analysis of this historical dispute over access to revelation, focusing on the distinctly different approaches of Catholicism and Protestantism, see Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Bedeutung der historisch-kritischen Methode für die protestantische Theologie und Kirche [1950]," in *Wort und Glaube I* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), 1–49. Ebeling argues that the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone leads necessarily to the task of hermeneutics in the form of the historical-critical method.

26. *KD* 1.1:329/311.

27. *KD* 1.1:333/316.

28. *KD* 1.1:338/321. See Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 30–31.

29. See Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Offenbarung der Verborgenheit Gottes: Ein Beitrag zum evangelischen Verständnis der Verborgenheit des göttlichen Wirkens [1984]," in *Wertlose Wahrheit*:



say, there is no divine being-in-itself that remains hidden from or alien to the self-giving of God in history, but neither is the self-giving of God one that grants unmediated access to the divine nature. Jüngel glosses this by simply stating that “revelation is that occurrence in which the *being of God* comes to speech.”<sup>30</sup> Put in hermeneutical terms, “if revelation is the self-interpretation of God, then in it there occurs the fact that God interprets Godself *as* the one whom God *is*.”<sup>31</sup>

Second, the event of revelation, understood as God’s self-interpretation, establishes the creaturely enterprise of interpreting revelation: “*the revelation of God itself is what makes possible the interpretation of revelation.*”<sup>32</sup> The self-interpretation of God not only brings God’s being to speech; it also authorizes and empowers human beings to engage in an ongoing inquiry and interpretation of this divine coming-to-speech. Revelation “captures” language, and precisely in this capture revelation “*demand*s from without” that language share in the “risk” (*Wagnis*) that comes with the interpretation of revelation.<sup>33</sup> For this reason the event of God’s unveiling does not bypass the hermeneutical problem but makes this problem inescapable and essential to responsible God-talk. In fact, the doctrine of God *is* the hermeneutical problem, according to Jüngel:

We face the hermeneutical problem in its most concentrated form in that we turn our attention to the doctrine of God. The being of God is the hermeneutical problem of theology. More precisely, the fact that the being of God *proceeds* is precisely the hermeneutical problem. For only because the being of God proceeds is there an encounter between God and humanity. And the hermeneutical problem is grounded in this

*Zur Identität und Relevanz des christlichen Glaubens. Theologische Erörterungen III* (Munich: Kaiser, 1990), 163–82.

30. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 27.

31. *Ibid.*, 33.

32. *Ibid.*, 27.

33. *KD 1.1:358/339*. See Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 24.

encounter between God and humanity that is the result of the movement of God's being.<sup>34</sup>

Precisely because the God of the gospel is a self-interpreting God—a God who is involved in the contingencies and particularities of history within God's very being—the doctrine of the Trinity, in the hands of Barth, becomes a hermeneutical axiom that “protects the Christian doctrine of God from becoming mythological or lapsing into metaphysics.”<sup>35</sup> To have our God-talk ordered by the trinitarian event of God is to engage in hermeneutically responsible theological speech.

The foregoing interpretation of Barth's dogmatic project leads Jüngel to the conclusion previously quoted:

It is precisely this critical-polemical function of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity that has not been given enough consideration. As paradoxical as it may sound, Barth actually accorded to his doctrine of the Trinity (1932) the same function that the program of demythologizing performs in the theology of Rudolf Bultmann. Difference of methods and results here and there cannot obscure this. This state of affairs ought to give cause for reflection to the rash and superficial among Bultmann's critics, and indeed to critics of Barth who are always ready and willing to accuse the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* of speculation, but who are unwilling and not at all ready to read it. If we understand Bultmann's program as an effort at appropriate speaking of God (and so about humanity), and if we see this effort fulfilled in not objectifying God (or letting God be objectified) as an It or He, but in bringing God to speech as You [*Du*] and thus appropriately, then we cannot fail to see a striking parallel to the meaning Barth accords (and gives) to the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>36</sup>

On Jüngel's reading, Barth and Bultmann are fundamentally on the same side in the dispute over the hermeneutical problem, and this *despite* the fact that Barth himself repeatedly dismissed Bultmann,

34. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 10–11.

35. *Ibid.*, 33.

36. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

Fuchs, and others in the Marburg school who concerned themselves with the task of hermeneutical translation. Jüngel perceives that Barth and Bultmann, notwithstanding their divergent theological positions, are both equally concerned with responsible (i.e., nonobjectifying) God-talk, but they carry out this pursuit of appropriate talk of God in different conceptual idioms. Barth writes in response to what he calls natural theology or metaphysics, which is a mode of God-talk that is, by design, not governed by God's self-revelation in Christ. In speaking about God on the basis of what can be said first about the creature, it fails to say what *must* be said of God. Barth's concern is therefore revelational. Bultmann, however, writes in response to what he calls mythology, which is a mode of God-talk that intends to speak responsibly of God but does not, by virtue of historical-cultural limitations. Bultmann's concern is therefore hermeneutical, but it is no less grounded in the theological claim that language must be captured by revelation to speak appropriately of God. Hence demythologizing has to be understood theologically as "the interpretive repetition of the capture of language through revelation, in which the mythological element of myth is rejected as an attempt to capture revelation through language."<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the historical-critical method, as a task that serves demythologizing, "orients itself (exclusively!) to the *captures* revelation *made* when it *came* to speech."<sup>38</sup> Demythologizing is merely the hermeneutical counterpart to Barth's dogmatic theology.<sup>39</sup>

37. *Ibid.*, 24n34.

38. *Ibid.*, 25n43.

39. In our periodization below, among other places, we will interrogate this claim in light of Barth's later writings against hermeneutical theology. Jüngel is certainly right to see Barth as engaged with the hermeneutical problem at a certain fundamental level, but he does not subject Barth to sufficient critical scrutiny. While it is true that Barth understands the doctrine of the Trinity in opposition to what Bultmann calls objectification, it is not enough to emphasize God's self-interpreting revelation without also addressing the fact that this self-interpreting communication of God occurs at a *specific historical site*. Barth and Bultmann can and do agree that revelation captures language, as Jüngel puts it, but the emphasis in each case is crucially differ-

We will return to Jüngel's reinterpretation of the Barth-Bultmann relation in later chapters. Suffice it to say that the present work seeks to be little more than a gloss on (and, at best, a vindication of) Jüngel's insightful understanding of both Barth and Bultmann.

### 1.2.1.2. Analogy and Paradoxical Identity?

Jüngel does not rest content with a rapprochement of Barth and Bultmann. He probes the matter further in the next chapter of his book, this time offering his own account of where the two theologians diverge. Jüngel situates the conflict between Barth and Bultmann in the context of "the problem of the being-objective [*Gegenständlich-Sein*] of God in the knowledge of God."<sup>40</sup> God's self-revelation, for Barth, entails God's "objectivity" or "objective being," that is, God's determination to be available as an "object" (*Gegenstand*) of human speaking and thinking. To be sure, this "objectivity" (*Gegenständigkeit*) of God has to be strictly differentiated from any notion of God as being "objectified" (*objektiviert*). As one who "stands over against" (*gegenstehen*) the human subject, God is a *Gegenstand*, not an

ent: for Barth revelation *captures* language, whereas for Bultmann revelation captures *language*. Bultmann recognizes that the event of revelation takes up a specific cultural-historical situation (i.e., "language"), and that any interpretation of revelation has to attend to the differentiation between revelation and the language it has captured. Failure to do so is implicitly to objectify God, since it conflates divine revelation with the linguistic-historical site in which God comes to speech. This is why hermeneutical translation is necessary: it preserves the critical differentiation between creator and creature that preserves the freedom of God's word. Translation is essential to any opposition to natural theology, and yet it is precisely translation that Barth consistently opposes in his later years, particularly in the 1950s. Jüngel does not address this problem because, as a constructive paraphrase, he focuses in this passage strictly on the presuppositions and positions operative in *KD* 1.1, where Barth is attacking the natural theology of the *analogia entis* (a matter he and Bultmann agree on). But this material precedes Barth's later doctrine of election, which provides the dogmatic basis for his dispute with the hermeneutical theologians. So while we will embrace Jüngel's take on Barth, we must at the same time (a) place these texts in their broader historical context to see how Barth's thinking develops and (b) examine the lacunae in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* in order to see how Bultmann extends and corrects Barth's theological project in fruitful and necessary ways.

40. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 55.

*Objekt* that is available for investigation. Even though we speak of the divine object and the human subject, God is always “the subject of God’s being-known and becoming-known.”<sup>41</sup> For this reason God’s objectivity, according to Barth, does not in the least mean “some kind of realism or objectivism” with respect to God.<sup>42</sup> God differentiates Godself from all other objects and in so doing differentiates human subjectivity from the kind assumed in human relations with other objects.<sup>43</sup>

In that God establishes a distinct mode of human subjectivity, God’s becoming an object of human knowledge is an event of the greatest anthropological relevance. Jüngel elaborates this claim under the heading of “God’s being-objective as an anthropological *existentiale* [*Existential*].”<sup>44</sup> The concept of an *existentiale* is a Heideggerian term referring to the *ontological* structure of *Dasein*, as opposed to a particular *ontic* mode of existence.<sup>45</sup> In other words, to speak of an *existentiale* is to talk about the essence of human being-in-the-world. This is, to say the least, a highly surprising and unusual move. In a way it is Jüngel’s most constructive and, at least ostensibly, most

41. *Ibid.*, 54.

42. *KD* 2.1:12/13.

43. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 55. According to Jüngel, God’s being-objective thus involves no abrogation of the ontological differentiation between God and the human person. God remains as different from humankind as from all other objects of human inquiry. There is “no *unio mystica* of or identity between the subject and object of the knowledge of God” (*ibid.*, 58). At the same time, this differentiation between God and world is itself essential to the relation between them, since “God differentiates Godself as God from human beings precisely where God reveals Godself to human beings as a human being” (*ibid.*, 59). But the relation is not simply one-sided. Just as God’s self-interpretation elicits the human work of interpretation, so too “God and the human person remain in this relation of counterparts only insofar as they give themselves to this relation” (*ibid.*). This further supports Jüngel’s claim that God’s being-objective makes the work of interpretation necessary. By engaging in the hermeneutical task, human beings are actively giving themselves to the divine-human relation God has initiated in the event of God’s coming-to-speech in Christ.

44. The material contained in these five brief pages is not only some of the most difficult in the book but also perhaps the most widely overlooked. Jüngel’s highly creative connection of Barth and Bultmann via Heidegger deserves serious scholarly attention.

45. The distinction between ontological and ontic corresponds to the distinction between the German terms *existentiale* and *existentiell*, translated “existentialist” and “existential” respectively.

rebellious moment, in that it appears to contradict the positions of both Barth and Bultmann. On the one hand Barth is resistant to anything that smacks of anthropocentrism, and that conviction would certainly seem to rule out the claim that God is an “anthropological *existentiale*.” On the other hand Bultmann insists that the relation to God occurs on the level of the ontic only, not the ontological—that is, on the level of the *existentiell*, not the *existentia*—and therein lies its differentiation from philosophy.

Jüngel addresses both concerns in a small-print section.<sup>46</sup> He speaks to Barth’s worry by appealing to the latter’s distinction between God’s primary and secondary objectivity, arguing that God is an anthropological *existentiale* only in God’s *secondary* objectivity. “God’s being is not as such an anthropological *existentiale*.”<sup>47</sup> His response to Bultmann, however, moves in the other direction; though it is thoroughly Barthian in character, it is not for that reason opposed to Bultmann. Jüngel allows that, judged philosophically, *existentia* are neutral structures of human being-in-the-world. For example, love and fear are neutral possibilities of existence. However, according to the judgment of the *theologian*—and this is Bultmann’s own position—there is no neutral human relation to God: one either loves and fears God or one rejects the love and fear of God. For instance, in a 1926 sermon Bultmann speaks of the new beginning within history inaugurated by the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus, an event that always demands our decision as to whether we will let it be the new beginning of our lives. But then he adds:

In truth, this event . . . is in fact always the beginning for us, whether we want it to be or not. We *choose* always only in which sense it will be the beginning for us. For ever since this event took place, all history has been marked by it. The one who chooses it has chosen life, and the one

46. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 70–72.

47. *Ibid.*, 70.

who spurns it has spurned nothing less than life itself; that person has chosen death. Each person has chosen. One cannot ignore this beginning, and even to ignore it is to take a position; the one who spurns love remains in hate.<sup>48</sup>

From a theological perspective, each person has already responded to God; one's existence is essentially related to God, regardless of whether one acknowledges it on the *ontic-existential* level. Jüngel thus identifies God in God's being-objective as an anthropological *existential* in this theological sense. God's being-objective is the condition for the possibility of human existence. God simply *is* the one who cares or is concerned about human beings (*der für den Menschen Sorgende*) existing in love and fear of God, while human beings are essentially those who live in relation to God, whether they acknowledge it or not.<sup>49</sup> Jüngel certainly goes beyond Bultmann (in the direction of Barth) by engaging in theological ontology, but he does so in a way that remains faithful to Bultmann. In fact, he already here subtly engages in a further rapprochement between them. Ostensibly the two theologians diverge on anthropological grounds, with Barth understanding humankind as *ontologically* defined by God's act in Christ and Bultmann seeing humankind as *ontically* defined by God's act in Christ (since the ontological structures are neutral). Jüngel, however, effectively interprets Barth's "ontological" position as an "ontic" perspective regarding the structures of human existence. Barth's position does not compete with Bultmann's but remains wholly within the theological view of humankind, whereas Bultmann acknowledges that there is a nontheological view (which he calls "ontological").

48. Rudolf Bultmann, *Das verkündigte Wort: Predigten, Andachten, Ansprachen 1906–1941*, ed. Erich Grässer and Martin Evang (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984), 237–38.

49. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 70.

This small-print analysis of Barth and Bultmann sets up the chapter's lengthy concluding paragraph, where Jüngel turns to consider the real divergence between them. He begins by restating his claim regarding the fundamental unity in their understanding of theology. The difference between them does *not* consist in the notion that Barth's theological statements "abstract from the anthropological relation given in revelation" and thus fail to thematize the existential dimension of our relation to God, while Bultmann "dissolves theological statements into anthropological statements." In Jüngel's judgment "such claims label the theology of both theologians superficially and so fail to understand them at all."<sup>50</sup> That being said, Jüngel offers a reinterpretation of their divergence in terms of the *relation* between divine revelation and the anthropological *existentiale*. If both theologians thematize the anthropological as necessarily related to the divine object of theology, they diverge, so Jüngel claims, in terms of how this divine object is related to the question of existence.

Jüngel presents his claim regarding the distinction between Barth and Bultmann in a series of suggestive comments without any clarification or elaboration. Each of the various ways of distinguishing between the two theologians circles around the same issue, namely, the relation between eternity and time, between the eschatological and the historical. The first example Jüngel gives is rooted in the doctrine of God: "Barth believes that one must differentiate the being-objective of God in God's revelation as a 'secondary objectivity' from the 'primary objectivity' in the innertrinitarian being of God, which makes possible this 'secondary objectivity.'" In other words, Barth believes that God's revelatory action *ad extra* allows the theologian to derive statements about God's being *ad intra*, since God's historical acts correspond to God's eternal identity. God *is* what God reveals

50. *Ibid.*, 72.



Godself to be. Bultmann, however, maintains that “the question of the possibility of revelation (grounded in God) is forbidden.”<sup>51</sup> Jüngel is aware that this distinction is misleading, though perhaps not as much as he ought to be. He quickly defends Barth from the “Bultmannian” objection that Barth is trying to reach behind revelation or that he is positing a theology without anthropological relevance. Barth is only drawing the ontological implications for God that are given in revelation itself, and while this means theology is grounded in the eternal being of God, this does not deny that all theological statements are thereby anthropologically relevant. But Jüngel does not go on to clarify and defend Bultmann from the usual “Barthian” criticisms, and this lack of balance manifests itself in the statements that follow.

At this point Jüngel makes a misstep in his analysis, for he proceeds to restate the distinction between Barth and Bultmann in terms of what serves as the *criterion* of the truth of theological statements. The criterion for Barth, he claims, is that “the freedom of the subject of revelation is protected,” while the criterion for Bultmann is the “anthropological relevance” of theological statements.<sup>52</sup> As a kind of surface-level analysis this kind of distinction is not entirely incorrect: Barth indeed appeals to divine freedom and Bultmann to anthropological credibility. But things are quite a bit more complicated than Jüngel lets on. Here we see clear evidence in support of McCormack’s criticism that Jüngel is not sufficiently aware, at least in this early work, of the difference between Barth’s earlier and later dogmatic theology.<sup>53</sup> Under the conditions of Barth’s earlier (i.e., pre-*KD*

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. See McCormack, “God Is His Decision,” 61–65. McCormack points to what he calls an “unresolved problem” in Jüngel’s analysis due to the presence of statements that imply “an ontological priority of Trinity over election.” McCormack does not point to this particular passage, but he indicates others in which Jüngel seems to ground revelation in a prior divine being-for-itself. Of course, Jüngel does not intend to posit a nonhistorical or prechristological origin in God,

2.2) theology, the appeal to divine freedom serves to support someone like Gollwitzer in differentiating between an eternal divine being (the immanent Trinity as the locus of God's freedom from creation) and a historical act of divine will in the economy of grace. Such a view of God's freedom leaves open "a metaphysical background in the being of God that is indifferent to God's historical acts of revelation," in direct conflict with Jüngel's intentions.<sup>54</sup> Under the conditions of Barth's later theology, however, in which the being of God is determined by the history of Christ, Barth's appeals to divine freedom take on a radically different character. There he can even posit "the inner necessity of the freedom of God."<sup>55</sup> That the former version of divine freedom is what Jüngel has in mind is evident from the fact that he contrasts it with Bultmann's criterion of anthropological relevance. The later Barth denies any such contrast, since all theology is for him "theanthropology," such that anthropological rel-

since the whole trajectory of the book consists in rejecting precisely such a notion. The problem, as McCormack points out, is that Jüngel believes the early Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is already "christologically grounded" (Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 30). But the truth is that Barth developed his account of the Trinity on the basis of a doctrine of revelation that sought to protect the freedom and sovereignty of the divine subject. The doctrine of the Trinity in *KD 1* remains consistent with the position elaborated in the Göttingen dogmatics: "God is in God's revelation simultaneously . . . an accessible object, a human being, and . . . not an object, not a human being. . . . God is λόγος ἔσαρκος and λόγος ἄσαρκος!" See Karl Barth, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion, 1: Prolegomena 1924*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, Gesamtausgabe 2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 196–97. Barth's early doctrine of the Trinity, and thus his early doctrine of divine freedom, is not wholly determined by his christology—something that only becomes possible on the grounds of his later doctrine of election. The consequence of this later theology is that Barth relocates the dialectic: it is no longer a "vertical" dialectic between the eternal being of God and the historical person of Jesus but is now instead a "horizontal" dialectic between the veiling of Christ's identity in his historical flesh and the unveiling of Christ's identity in his historical acts through the gift of faith. Barth no longer places a gap between deity and humanity, between the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos ensarkos*. In contrast to his Göttingen dogmatics, Barth now says that "we must not here refer to the second 'person' of the Trinity as such, to the eternal Son or the eternal Word of God *in abstracto* and therefore to the so-called λόγος ἄσαρκος," for "we do not have to reckon with *any* Son of God in *himself*, indeed with any λόγος ἄσαρκος, with anyone *other* than the Word of God that was made flesh" (*KD 4.1:54–55/52*).

54. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 6.

55. *KD 4.1:213/195*.

evance is indeed the criterion of theology's truth for the same reason that Christ's human existence is the criterion of revelation as such.<sup>56</sup> The freedom of the divine subject is the freedom to be anthropologically relevant. But given his overall understanding of both Barth and Bultmann—arguing as he does that both are concerned with ensuring that revelation captures language and not the converse—Jüngel should have refrained from giving the question of anthropological relevance any significance in interpreting the distinction between them.

In the course of presenting his understanding of Bultmann's account of anthropological relevance Jüngel segues into a more creative, but not finally any more persuasive, line of reasoning. He begins by noting that the criterion of anthropological relevance stems from the fact that Bultmann identifies the eschatological event with a historical "that" (*Dass*). A paradoxical identity obtains between the historical and the eschatological, such that a *historisch* occurrence becomes meaningful as a *geschichtlich* event. This much is certainly true, though his attempt to contrast this to Barth is less successful. He again appeals to Barth's distinction between primary and secondary objectivity. "God comes on the scene," according to Barth, "but 'only' in God's work, which refers to God as a sign."<sup>57</sup> Even Jesus' humanity functions for Barth as a "sacramental reality" or "parable" (*Gleichnis*). Jüngel then attempts to illustrate this point by drawing the distinction between Bultmann and Barth in terms of sacramentology, with Bultmann accepting and Barth rejecting Luther's account of divine presence in the eucharist.<sup>58</sup> This, too, is unpersuasive, for the same reason that the criteriological argument above was unper-

56. Barth, *Einführung in die evangelische Theologie*, 18.

57. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 73.

58. Regarding Barth's sacramentology, Jüngel cites "Ansatz und Absicht in Luthers Abendmahlslehre (1923)" in Karl Barth, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922–1925*, ed. Holger Finze, Gesamtausgabe 3 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), 248–306, and "Die Lehre von

suasive, namely, the lack of attention to the distinctiveness of Barth's later theology. Jüngel appeals, in particular, to two writings in support of his claim: Barth's 1930 study of Anselm and *KD* 2.1.<sup>59</sup> Both precede Barth's historicization of christology following his revised doctrine of election, which permits neither the characterization of Jesus' humanity as a sign or parable nor the notion that God only comes on the scene in God's "work," as opposed to God's eternal being itself. Moreover, the pages Jüngel references in these two writings do not provide support for his interpretation.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, one gets the strong impression that Jüngel is reading into Barth something of his own theology at this point, for it is in his own constructive christology, developed at length in *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, that we find the declaration: "the man Jesus is *the parable of God*."<sup>61</sup> Matters become still more confusing when we discover that this parabolic account of Jesus is actually a form of Bultmann's account of paradoxical identity. Jüngel's doctrine of analogy claims

den Sakramenten (1929)" in Karl Barth, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925–1930*, ed. Hermann Schmidt, Gesamtausgabe 3 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1994), 393–441.

59. Karl Barth, *Fides quaerens intellectum: Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes im Zusammenhang seines theologischen Programms*, 2nd ed. (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958), 22, and *KD* 2.1:42/39.
60. The page cited in the Anselm essay is simply a discussion of the norm of theology, while the passage cited from *KD* 2.1 affirms that God is knowable because God has made Godself an object of human knowledge in God's own existence. Presumably the "only" to which Jüngel refers in the latter appears in the statement: "Knowledge of God always only proceeds from the knowledge of God's existence, in the twofold sense: that we always already *have* this knowledge and that we must have it *from God Godself*, in order to know God as a result" (*KD* 2.1:42/39). This is the only statement in this section that even approximates Jüngel's position, but of course everything hinges on how we define "God's existence." Jüngel's appeal to Barth in support of something contrary to Bultmann's paradoxical identification of history and eschatology in the sheer *Dass* of the Christ-event would require positing the very bifurcation between essence and existence in God that Jüngel has been seeking to oppose throughout his "paraphrase" of Barth's dogmatics. In short, this is a paradigmatic instance of Jüngel undermining his own best insights in an attempt to make a distinction between Barth and Bultmann, or at least to explain a distinction he has already taken for granted. It also further confirms McCormack's criticism of the "unresolved problem" in Jüngel's analysis.
61. Eberhard Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), 394.

that “the parable, although it speaks the language of the world, speaks at the same time in truth and genuinely of God,” such that “the reign of God comes into language in the parable as parable.”<sup>62</sup> Parable thus “gathers God (the ‘reign of God’) and human beings into one and the same event, precisely in the parable itself.”<sup>63</sup> It is difficult to conceive of a better description of paradoxical identity than this. And certainly Jüngel does not have Bultmann in mind as a target of criticism when he says that the “word-event of the parable [*Gleichnis*]” involves no “equation [*Gleichsetzung*] of God and the world,”<sup>64</sup> since the non-equation of creator and creature, as Jüngel is well aware, is exactly what Bultmann means to reject in speaking of *paradoxical* identity. It is therefore rather ironic that Jüngel then follows this statement in *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt* with a footnote in which he cites the very same 1923 essay by Barth regarding Luther’s doctrine of the eucharist that he previously cited in support of the *divergence* between Barth and Bultmann in *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*. Of course, in the context of this later writing the contrast is framed rather differently: “Karl Barth sought to assert the parable (the analogy) against the equation [*Gleichung*].”<sup>65</sup> Whether this should be taken as a change of mind or not, it is nevertheless clear that this statement undermines Jüngel’s position in *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*. The differentiation between Barth and Bultmann simply cannot be framed in terms of a contrast between parable (or analogy) and paradoxical identity. The two concepts are themselves paradoxically identical!

The final lines of Jüngel’s long paragraph in *Gottes Sein ist im Werden* acknowledge that both Barth and Bultmann are guided by the same antimetaphysical-antimythological conviction regarding

62. *Ibid.*, 403.

63. *Ibid.*, 406.

64. *Ibid.*, 401.

65. *Ibid.*, 401n23.

responsible God-talk, and yet their “ways of thinking” remain “fundamentally different.” He concludes: “The problem of the relation of Karl Barth’s theology to that of Rudolf Bultmann is sufficiently posed through a systematic contrast between ‘analogy’ and ‘paradoxical identity.’”<sup>66</sup> To be sure, there is a measure of truth in this claim. Barth clearly does think in terms of analogy; in a way, the distinctive contribution of his theology consists in a systematic integration of the doctrine of analogy into every doctrinal *locus*. Likewise, paradoxical identity is the dominant concept in Bultmann’s later hermeneutical theology. So Jüngel definitely exhibits an insight here. What that insight is we will specify below in the periodization of the Barth-Bultmann relationship.

In the meantime it is worth pointing out that things are, as always, more complicated than Jüngel appears to allow. We will see in chapter 7 that Bultmann’s account of paradoxical identity is at the same time a theological account of analogous speech about God. Demythologizing, we will argue, is a kind of *analogia fidei*, as Jüngel himself indicates. Conversely, Barth’s doctrine of analogy has paradoxical identity at its heart.<sup>67</sup> We can briefly substantiate this point. From the point of his discovery of God’s wholly-otherness Barth consistently holds that “God and the human person, the one as the creator and this other as the creature, do not exist on the same level. There is no competition between divine and human freedom.”<sup>68</sup> His earlier theology bases such a view on the diastasis between time and eternity, while his later theology grounds this noncompetitiveness christologically. If the man Jesus himself is definitive of divine and human freedom, then the two magnitudes, divine and human, coin-

66. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*, 73.

67. For a further discussion of this point see W. Travis McMaken, *The Sign of the Gospel: Toward an Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism After Karl Barth* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 240–57.

68. KD 4.2:855/753.

cide noncompetitively within a single history. Furthermore, his later doctrine of election, according to which Jesus Christ in his divine-human unity is the *subject* of election, identifies this singular history as the very history of the eternal God. Barth thus claims that “[Jesus Christ’s] existence as a human being is identical [*identisch*] with the existence of God in God’s Son.”<sup>69</sup> And he further speaks of “the *act* of God, in which the Son of God becomes identical with the person Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>70</sup>

The christological starting point has wider implications elsewhere in Barth’s theology, particularly wherever he relates divine and human action. In the context of his ecclesiology, for instance, he says:

We conclude that there is a *real identity* [*reale Identität*]<sup>71</sup>—one that is never and nowhere given by *God* as something that exists and is “available” [*vorhandene*] *in abstracto*, but that occurs in the powerful work of the Holy Spirit—of the one holy people, of the kingdom of God perfectly established in him with the community of saints on earth, which is as such also a community of sinners.<sup>71</sup>

On this basis Barth is able to posit a kind of paradoxical identity between Spirit and water baptism. The work of the community and the work of God coincide in a single occurrence, while remaining qualitatively distinct. The absolute transcendence of God is precisely what enables divine action to occur *in* creaturely action without abrogating the differentiation between God and the world. Barth makes this point most radically in his doctrine of providence, specifically in his account of the divine *concursum*:

In that the creature acts [*wirkt*] in time, the eternal God also acts “simultaneously” in the whole sovereignty and supremacy of God’s activity. The *concursum divinum* is also a *concursum simultaneum*. . . . The consequence

69. *KD* 4.2:99/90.

70. *KD* 4.2:118/107.

71. *KD* 4.2:743/656.

of this first insight consists in the fact that the activity of God and that of the creature have to be understood as *a single action*.<sup>72</sup>

The divine accompaniment of the creature consists in the fact that God's sovereign agency occurs "in, with, and over" the creature's activity. Barth can therefore say that world history and salvation history are one and the same. He explicitly rejects the notion that the two histories or agencies operate like "two parallel lines," in which there is a divine reality that stands behind and above the creaturely world. Instead, "God Godself does what Moses and David do. . . . God Godself speaks to the communities when Paul writes his letters to them. . . . In that God acts, creaturely events occur." This is the case even down to "every movement of each leaf in the wind."<sup>73</sup> God's will is directly, though paradoxically, realized in worldly occurrences and events. While we of course can only speak analogically, Barth's *analogia fidei* is oriented toward and bears witness to the surprising paradoxical identity of divine and human action.

We will have occasion at a later point to come at this from the other side and demonstrate the similarity of Bultmann to Barth. For now it must suffice provisionally to conclude that a contrast between analogy and paradoxical identity is in itself unsatisfyingly vague. Jüngel's insight is nevertheless quite illuminating, and its value will become clearer when resituated dogmatically—in particular, soteriologically. In any case, given that he was writing in 1965, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden* is a remarkably potent interpretation of both Barth and Bultmann. His clarification of their respective projects in terms of responsible God-talk remains unsurpassed and will form the nucleus of our reinterpretation of demythologizing in chapters 7 and 8. Before we can turn to that project, however, we must look at a

72. *KD* 3.3:149–50/132.

73. *KD* 3.3:150/132–33.



second attempt to demythologize the myth of the whale and the elephant.

### 1.2.2. Christophe Chalamet

Christophe Chalamet's 2005 monograph, *Dialectical Theologians*, a revision of his 2002 dissertation at the University of Geneva, is a major achievement. His work is the most significant challenge to Bruce McCormack's account of Barth and Bultmann's theological development. Two central theses are worth noting here: first, that Wilhelm Herrmann was the original dialectical theologian, so that there was never a truly "predialectical" period in Barth's development, and, second, that Barth and Bultmann diverge in terms of how the dialectic of law and gospel (or criticism and realism) is ordered. Chalamet's lasting contribution has been the reframing of the entire debate, even though his endeavor to make Herrmann the original dialectical theologian is not entirely successful. Moreover, while his study is largely accurate in its broad strokes, his attempt to relate Barth and Bultmann in terms of law and gospel softens or obscures aspects of Bultmann's theology that are still closer to Barth than even Chalamet acknowledges.

#### 1.2.2.1. The Herrmannian Origin of Dialectical Theology?

Chalamet's basic claim is that Barth and Bultmann are both dialectical theologians because their common teacher, Herrmann, was already himself a dialectical theologian. Herrmann's theology is "thoroughly dialectical" in the sense that it exhibits "the presence of resolved or unresolved tensions between two contradictory theological aspects, for instance God hidden and revealed, Law and Gospel, God's judgement and grace. These dialectical tensions presuppose a clear understanding of God's radical otherness."<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Chalamet argues,

Herrmann locates the basis for this dialectical approach to theology in the divine subject matter itself, the reality of God. In this regard the label “liberal” is inadequate and misleading when applied to him. For Chalamet this is because “a liberal theology is . . . a theology which loses sight of the reality of God’s revelation,” and this is simply not the case with Herrmann. He is only a liberal if dialectical theology is defined exclusively (and anachronistically) in terms of Barth’s mature dogmatic theology, such that even Barth’s earlier theology would have to be labeled “liberal.”<sup>75</sup>

Chalamet supports his thesis by examining various dogmatic topics for which Herrmann employs a dialectical method. These include divine hiddenness and revelation, God as absolute and personal being, theology as objective and subjective, and most importantly, the dialectic of law and gospel. Many of these ideas and themes anticipate the work of later dialectical theologians. Like Barth and Bultmann, Herrmann emphasizes the absolute uniqueness of divine revelation, its hidden character apart from faith. Against both psychologism and historicism Herrmann argues that “faith does not need any exterior verification. It has its own ground and certitude, and a most solid one: God’s revelation for us.” For this reason, faith, like God, “cannot be objectified and contemplated”; neither God nor faith can become an object of scientific inquiry.<sup>76</sup> Instead, the proper mode of relation to God’s revelation is experience (*Erlebnis*), which is not a psychological factor (*pace* Barth) but rather Herrmann’s way of describing the participatory nature of faith. Hence, according to his 1887 work, *Der Begriff der Offenbarung*, “one must experience Christ before one can speak of God’s revelation.” No matter how many “beautiful things

74. Christophe Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005), 11.

75. *Ibid.*, 12.

76. *Ibid.*, 55.

are said about God—God remains hidden from them anyway.”<sup>77</sup> On this basis Herrmann criticizes both liberal and orthodox theologians, distancing himself most notably from the ideas of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Harnack. The liberals lack a sufficient sense of God’s transcendence and hiddenness apart from faith, while the orthodox lack a sufficient emphasis on the importance of one’s experience of Christ. According to Chalamet, therefore, “Herrmann’s theology is neither liberal nor conservative. It is both at the same time.”<sup>78</sup> Chalamet thus argues that while there are similarities between Herrmann and the mediating school of theology (*Vermittlungstheologie*), Herrmann is more properly identified as a dialectical theologian who has both critical and positive elements but does not attempt to mediate between them.<sup>79</sup>

With this interpretation of Herrmann, Chalamet is then able to explain what is distinctive about Barth and how he differs from Bultmann. Chalamet argues that Barth’s new way of thinking that began in 1914–1915 was not a discovery of dialectic but instead a new *order* of the terms in the dialectic.<sup>80</sup> Using Henning Schröer’s terminology, taken up by Michael Beintker, Chalamet contrasts Herrmann (along

77. Wilhelm Herrmann, *Der Begriff der Offenbarung* (Giessen: Ricker, 1887), 21. Cf. Wilhelm Herrmann, *Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott im Anschluss an Luther dargestellt*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart and Berlin: Cotta, 1903), 164: “This act of God [that establishes communion] is revelation. . . . Religion is created in those persons who stand in this experience of revelation.”

78. Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 59.

79. *Ibid.*, 60. This is somewhat ironic, since McCormack has actually put forward the claim that Barth should be read as a *nineteenth-century* theologian, and furthermore as a kind of “mediating” theologian. He suggests that Barth’s dialectical theology could be understood as a nonfoundationalist form of mediating theology, and that this form is “not altogether without precedent in the nineteenth century.” Indeed, reading Barth in this manner “is a task well worth undertaking.” See Bruce L. McCormack, “Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth’s Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition,” *Journal of Religion* 78, no. 1 (1998): 34.

80. According to the introduction, “Barth continued to work with what I call the two sides of Herrmann’s theology, the positive side (the Gospel) and the critical side (the Law). But what dramatically changed was the way Barth dealt with these two sides: the order was reversed and both sides went through a thorough revision” (Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 13).

with Bultmann) and Barth, respectively, in terms of a “complementary” and “supplementary” dialectic.<sup>81</sup> For Herrmann the divine No and Yes, the veiling and unveiling, exist in an unresolved dialectical tension; for Barth, however, “the two sides of the scale are no longer in balance,” Chalamet writes.<sup>82</sup> As a result,

There can be no balance between the thesis (God) and the antithesis (the world of man). To put it differently, the “critical aspect” was losing its autonomy (*Selbständigkeit*). As Barth’s new orientation unfolded, it became more and more carefully wrapped in the positive or realistic aspect. . . . The critical side is undoubtedly still present, but it is included in the positive side. And since Barth wishes to “begin with the beginning,” the positive side also takes precedence over the critical side.<sup>83</sup>

Barth discovers a version of dialectical theology in which the realistic, positive, and evangelical dimension takes precedence over the critical and legal dimension.

In the context of the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* (hereafter *RI*), Chalamet argues that Barth develops a “three-dimensional dialectic” in which the supplementary *Aufhebung* of the divine Yes stands above and beyond the complementary dialectic of the No (critical veiling) and the Yes (positive unveiling).<sup>84</sup> Whereas Herrmann presents these as a balanced tension, Barth destabilizes this dialectic in *RI* in favor of God’s positive Yes. This supplementary dialectic is so strong in *RI* that “Barth’s theology, at one point, ceases to be dialectical.”<sup>85</sup> The positive Yes is directly manifest within history for faith, in such a way that “the power of God is no longer a mystery to us.”<sup>86</sup> Barth’s “realism” and “universalism,” which abandon the dialectic of veiling

81. *Ibid.*, 49, 94, 97, 106.

82. *Ibid.*, 96.

83. *Ibid.*, 98.

84. *Ibid.*, 111.

85. *Ibid.*, 112.

86. Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Erste Fassung) 1919*, ed. Hermann Schmidt, Gesamtausgabe 2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 558.

and unveiling, thus constitute “a departure from Herrmann.”<sup>87</sup> What occurs in the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* (hereafter *RII*), however, is a correction in favor of the critical aspect. Barth moves “closer to Herrmann” but his dialectic remains teleologically ordered toward the divine Yes,<sup>88</sup> and thus he remains in continuity with the first edition. The critical aspect comes radically into view here, while always being “rooted in the indicative.”<sup>89</sup> The main difference between *RI* and *RII* is that the *Aufhebung* is relocated from being something available within history (*RI*) to something that is absolutely beyond history in God (*RII*). The truth of the gospel reveals the “the limitation [*Begrenzung*] and sublation [*Aufhebung*] of human beings by the unknown God.”<sup>90</sup> While Bultmann for a time in the 1920s shared the *Aufhebung* of *RII*, Chalamet presents him as holding to a dialectic much closer to Herrmann’s. Barth’s mature theology, however, moves away from the critical dialectic of *RII* back toward a much stronger emphasis on the positive *Aufhebung* of God’s Yes, though this time it is located concretely in Jesus Christ.

The case for Herrmann as a dialectical theologian is, clearly, a strong one. It has great explanatory power and it makes much more sense of the historical development of dialectical theology than those readings that seem to posit a total *novum* in the work of Barth. If nothing else, Chalamet’s study advances the cause of scholarly charity. Barth was all too quick to write off virtually every theologian who either inspired or was inspired by Ritschl as a “liberal.” While Herrmann was certainly complicit in the cause of *Kulturprotestantismus*,<sup>91</sup> his theology cannot be dismissed *in toto* for his failure of

87. Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 109.

88. *Ibid.*, 132.

89. *Ibid.*, 133.

90. Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung) 1922*, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Katja Tolstaja, Gesamtausgabe 2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2010), 71. Cf. *ibid.*, 129: “We stand before a comprehensive and irresistible sublation of the world of time, things, and human beings.”

judgment with respect to the First World War. Chalamet shows us why, and in doing so he problematizes, in the best way, the tendency of many today to violently oversimplify German theology into two camps: the good and the bad. At the same time, we must ask whether Chalamet really accomplishes what he advertises. Can we truly claim that Herrmann is a dialectical theologian? What actually *counts* as dialectical theology? We can raise this concern from two main perspectives, that of McCormack and that of the present study.

McCormack's own analysis of dialectical theology is somewhat ambiguous and potentially quite confusing. Let us begin by noting that, in principle, McCormack acknowledges the possibility of different versions of dialectical theology. In the preface to his pioneering work he states that Barth's "mature theology is best understood as a distinctive form of 'dialectical theology' which I will refer to throughout as 'critically realistic dialectical theology' (to distinguish it from the more nearly idealistic form set forth by Rudolf Bultmann, for example)."<sup>92</sup> Again, in his 1997 essay on postliberal and postmodern readings of Barth, he writes: "The adjective 'critically realistic' is meant to get at the uniqueness of Barth's version of dialectical theology—that is, that which distinguishes it from the more nearly idealistic versions advanced during the course of the 1920s by Bultmann and Tillich."<sup>93</sup> So far, so good. On the grounds of this statement Chalamet's thesis would seem to be quite compatible with McCor-

91. This is at least Barth's perspective, given that he saw Herrmann's signature in support of two particularly inflammatory manifestos in support of the First World War, a topic we will examine in chapter 3. For an alternative reading of Herrmann that sees his later theology as a deconstruction of *Kulturprotestantismus* as a social theory (regardless of his actual political activities), see Hermann Timm, *Theorie und Praxis in der Theologie Albrecht Ritschls und Wilhelm Herrmanns: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Kulturprotestantismus* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1967), esp. 126–53.

92. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), ix–x.

93. Bruce L. McCormack, "Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth: Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology [1997]," in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 159.

mack's position. Chalamet only claims that Herrmann and Bultmann are dialectical theologians who speak of law and gospel, immanence and transcendence, according to a dialectical method. Whereas Bultmann, according to Chalamet, places law before gospel, Barth places gospel before law. The result is that, in his own way, Chalamet is able to accommodate McCormack's distinction between idealist (law before gospel) and critically realist (gospel before law) forms of dialectical theology.

But McCormack seems to find himself caught in an aporia, for he wants to differentiate Barth simultaneously from Herrmann on the one hand and from Bultmann and Tillich on the other, and these two differentiations conflict, depending on how they are construed.<sup>94</sup> First, McCormack wants to locate Barth's break with liberalism (i.e., Herrmann) and his turn to dialectical theology *before* *RI*. This entails, he argues, a break with *idealism*. According to McCormack, Herrmann was a "religious individualist and anti-historicist, a stern opponent of metaphysics and apologetics in theology."<sup>95</sup> While Herrmann differentiated the object of faith from the objects of other sciences—insisting that the historian *qua* historian does not have access to divine revelation—he did so at the expense of affirming genuine knowledge of God. Herrmann retained the necessity of faith but gave up the possibility of *Gotteserkenntnis*. McCormack draws on the criticisms leveled against Herrmann by Ernst Troeltsch, especially the latter's claim that Herrmann advocated a radical agnosticism with respect to religious knowledge. McCormack shares this criticism, and he traces it back to what he identifies as Herrmann's

94. More recently—and in my judgment, more accurately—McCormack has more strongly differentiated (the later) Barth from (the early) Barth, a matter upon which we will touch briefly.

95. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 66. Whether this reading is accurate is not a question I will take up here. Christophe Chalamet has already probed that question in depth, arguing that Herrmann is properly understood as a dialectical theologian himself.

idealism.<sup>96</sup> God functioned in his theology as an “answer” to a “question” posed by human experience. Herrmann certainly believed in a real deity, but his starting point in human experience provided no guarantee that he was really speaking about *God*. The key point in McCormack’s account is that Barth’s break with *liberalism* was a break with Herrmann’s *idealism*: “When Barth’s break with Herrmannian theology would finally come, the focal point would be the latter’s idealism. The idealistic theology of Barth’s youth would be replaced by what will here be described as a ‘critical realism.’”<sup>97</sup> Later he makes it clear that this break with idealism is a “break with Herrmannian liberalism.”<sup>98</sup>

One begins to see the problem: if the break with idealism (i.e., liberalism) constitutes the origin of dialectical theology, then how could there be an idealistic form of dialectical theology, as McCormack claims is the case with Bultmann and Tillich—given that these two theologians stand in continuity with the Barth of *Der Römerbrief*? Would that not be equivalent to speaking of a “liberal dialectical theology”? Is that not a contradiction in terms? At this point it is conceivable that McCormack would appeal to the variety of idealisms that are at play in Barth’s development. He opens his review of Johann Friedrich Lohmann’s *Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus* with the following:

96. “There was one final problem in Herrmann’s thought which is of the greatest importance here because it marks the point where Barth would finally have to depart from the theology of his teacher. In spite of the realistic overtones in Herrmann’s talk of a divine Reality lying beyond all that to which science . . . has access and in spite of his stress on the need for faith to be grounded in the Self-revelation of God alone, at the crucial point in his debate with Hermann Cohen, he reverted to an idealistic attempt to justify belief in God. He posited God as the answer to the existential and ethical problem of how one can be truthful while believing in the existence of one’s self. The effect of this move was to reduce ‘God’ to an Idea, postulated in order to account for a particular human experience. This fundamental commitment to idealistic modes of thought was only further exacerbated by the agnosticism pointed to by Troeltsch” (ibid.).

97. Ibid., 66–67.

98. Ibid., 425.



Theology, Karl Barth wrote in 1929, moves in “the same sphere” and along the same “tracks” as the idealistic mode of thinking: indeed, idealism provides theology with “a most important tool” for the presentation of Christian truth. . . . [T]here can be no question but that Barth found in idealism an ally, a fellow traveler for at least part of the way in which he, too, wished to travel. But *which* form of idealism did he have in mind? The “dogmatic idealism” of the speculative philosophers, Hegel, Fichte, and others? No, the form of idealism in whose school Barth entered as a student and by which even his mature theology was nourished was the “critical idealism” of Herrmann Cohen, Paul Natorp, and Heinrich Barth (the so-called Marburg Neokantians).<sup>99</sup>

We now have three distinct forms of idealism: there is the Kantian idealism of Herrmann, the critical idealism of Marburg Neokantianism, and the speculative (or “dogmatic”) idealism of German philosophy.<sup>100</sup> Barth’s break with one form of idealism does not mean

99. Bruce L. McCormack, “Review of Johann Friedrich Lohmann’s *Karl Barth und der Neokantianismus*,” in *Orthodox and Modern*, 305–7, at 305. McCormack is quoting from Karl Barth, *Ethik II: Vorlesung Münster, Wintersemester 1928/1929, wiederholt in Bonn, Wintersemester 1930/31*, ed. Dietrich Braun, Gesamtausgabe 2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), 94.

100. Several things are worth noting. First, McCormack’s description of Hegel and others as advocating a “dogmatic idealism” is premised on a certain traditional reading of Hegel as reinstating metaphysics in contrast to Kant. This reading has come under serious critique in recent years, though the details of that controversy will not be taken up here. For more on this topic see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Terry P. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Simon Fisher refers to this position rather as “Absolute Idealism,” which is a bit more neutral. See Simon Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism? Barth’s Earliest Theology and the Marburg School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

Second, the term “critical idealism” is here differentiated from a simple Kantian idealism and is associated with a specific form of Neokantianism. McCormack seems to derive the term from Heinrich Barth. This is because Heinrich Barth himself uses the term in a piece from 1953 that McCormack cites to show the former’s distinctiveness vis-à-vis Marburg Neokantianism. See Heinrich Barth, “Grundzüge einer Philosophie der Existenz in ihrer Beziehung zur Glaubenswahrheit,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 9 (1953): 100–17, quoted in McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 219. The difference between Herrmann’s idealism and Heinrich Barth’s critical idealism seems to come down to this: Herrmann posits God as the *answer* to a question posed by human experience, while Heinrich Barth posits God as the “epistemic principle of critical negation” that represents the presupposed limit of all knowing. See Heinrich Barth, “Gotteserkenntnis,” in *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, 2 vols., ed. Jürgen Moltmann (Munich: Kaiser, 1962–1963), 1:221–55, at 236. It should be immediately obvious,

that other forms are not still active in his thinking. Indeed, Marburg Neokantianism makes itself felt most strongly in *RII*, and there is even some German idealism at work there, by way of Hermann Kutter.<sup>101</sup>

This means that an idealistic dialectical theology could be based on these other two versions of idealism, elements of which Barth would only come to discard later—initially in his Göttingen dogmatics, and then fully with his revised doctrine of election in *KD* 2.2. Certainly a strong case for this can be made with respect to Paul Tillich, whose

however, that McCormack's use of the term "critical idealism" is problematic. To put it simply, he equivocates about the meaning of the adjective "critical," for the word functions differently in critical realism and critical idealism. The latter term would seem to be redundant, since the word "critical" in critical realism simply means "idealistic," that is, it refers to the residual presence of a Kantian epistemology within Barth's theological realism. By that definition there would be no material difference between idealism and critical idealism. Given that McCormack does posit a difference between these terms, the word "critical" becomes ambiguous. It appears to function rather as an intensifier, so that critical idealism just means a hyper-idealism, one shorn of any remaining intuition in human cognition.

It is therefore interesting that Chalamet uses idealism and critical idealism synonymously. He says, for instance, that "Barth never ignored Kant's critical idealism," and he follows this by referring to "(critical) idealism" in contrast with realism (Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 16–17). Later he says that the aim of the Marburg Neokantians was "to go beyond the traditional critical idealism," which places critical idealism and Neokantianism in conflict, in clear contrast to McCormack (*ibid.*, 36). Chalamet does not differentiate between different kinds of idealism; he focuses instead on the basic contrast between the "dogmatic" or "realist" moment and the "critical" or "idealist" moment. This is more in keeping with Barth's own texts, particularly the highly significant lectures from February and March of 1929, published as "Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie." Chalamet cites George Hunsinger's translation, where it would appear that Barth uses the term critical idealism: "Classical realism is itself the best witness that in theology at least the second word needs to be that of critical idealism." See Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology [1929]," in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments*, ed. Martin Rumscheidt (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), 25–61, at 47; cf. Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 225n2. This would seem to lend support to Chalamet's use of idealism and critical idealism as synonyms. In truth, however, based on the original German the line should actually read: "Indeed, classical realism is itself the best witness that at least the second word in theology must be the idealistic word of critical sublation [*Aufhebung*]." See "Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie" in Barth, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925–1930*, 344–92, at 375. Barth's discussion of idealism and idealistic theology in this context is neither about the traditional Kantian idealism of Wilhelm Herrmann nor the Marburg Neokantianism of his brother Heinrich, but in fact the speculative idealism of the German philosophers after Kant! Barth himself goes on to confirm this when, several paragraphs later, he explicitly mentions the right-wing Hegelian theologian Alois Biedermann, whom he refers to as an "idealist theologian."

101. Bruce L. McCormack, "Why Should Theology Be Christocentric? Christology and Metaphysics in Paul Tillich and Karl Barth," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 66.

work stands everywhere under the influence of Schelling. But things are not so simple with Bultmann. For one thing, it was precisely Barth's heavy use of Neokantian concepts that he criticized in his review of the commentary's second edition.<sup>102</sup> Bultmann's relation to Neokantianism is wholly antithetical.<sup>103</sup> If Bultmann is idealistic—a notion we will strongly contest—then it can only be the idealism of Herrmann. But this means one of two things: either Barth did not truly break with liberalism before 1923, or Herrmann was already a dialectical theologian, so that Barth's break with Herrmann was only a partial one. The former option seems strongly implied by some of McCormack's more recent writings. The latter is Chalamet's position, and we will not evaluate it here, since Herrmann's theology is beyond the scope of this study. In the end, however, Bultmann's status as a dialectical theologian does not stand or fall with Herrmann at all. Even if Herrmann *was* a liberal-idealist thinker, it is our contention that Bultmann was certainly *not*. This is because, contrary to McCormack, he was not an idealist, and contrary to Chalamet, he was not a Herrmannian, or at least not primarily and decisively so. We will explore this more below and in the chapters that follow.

If Herrmann's status as a dialectical theologian is somewhat ambiguous in light of McCormack's analysis, it is equally so in relation to the definition of dialectical theology I will propose in chapter 3. There I will endeavor to be much more specific and concrete regarding the essential thesis or core idea at the heart of Barth's project. The result will be a definition that excludes Herrmann as a

102. Rudolf Bultmann, "Karl Barths 'Römerbrief' in zweiter Auflage [1922]," in *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, 1:141.

103. Barth himself is critical of Neokantianism, as McCormack points out. The elder Barth (Karl) diverges from the younger (Heinrich) in that the God of the *Römerbrief* is no mere God-concept. Barth remains more Kantian than Neokantian, according to McCormack, since he is committed to an account of "intuition" that understands knowledge to arise from the perception of empirical reality. See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 226.

dialectical theologian, though without thereby accepting Barth's (or McCormack's) label of him as a liberal. The purpose of that exercise is not to exclude Herrmann but to demonstrate more concretely why *Bultmann* counts as a genuinely dialectical theologian *on Barth's terms*.

Finally, we will see in the historical periodization below that Herrmann's influence is perhaps overstated in Chalamet's study with respect to Bultmann, given that most of the key elements in the latter's theological training were put in place *before* he studied under Herrmann. Moreover, Herrmann did not have an immediate effect on him as he did for Barth. Bultmann was initially unimpressed, and it was only in subsequent years that he came to appreciate Herrmann's theology. Equal if not greater significance for Bultmann's theological development should be ascribed to Johannes Weiss.

#### 1.2.2.2. Two Kinds of Criticism

As we have already indicated, Chalamet differentiates between Barth and Bultmann in terms of the relation between law and gospel in their thinking. The terms law and gospel correspond to the terms critical and positive/dogmatic, hidden and revealed, human and divine. According to Chalamet, whereas Bultmann posits the priority of law in relation to gospel, Barth posits the priority of gospel in relation to law:

The theological model of these two theologians was a direct consequence of their particular understanding of the subject matter of theology. For Bultmann, this subject matter is human existence as it is determined by God, in other words existence in faith. His model was in correspondence with his conviction that the Law precedes the Gospel. For Barth, the one and only subject matter of theology is the Word of God, God's revelation in Jesus Christ, which is addressed to his creature. His model develops an inclusion of the human subject in the object, i.e. the Word of God.<sup>104</sup>

Using Chalamet's other terminology, we can say that Bultmann begins with the critical and human and moves to the positive and divine, whereas Barth begins with the positive and divine and moves to the critical and human. By and large, this reading has much to commend it. Bultmann does indeed begin his theological work by clearing the ground via critical historical inquiry; historical research serves faith negatively by identifying what is *not* the object of faith.<sup>105</sup> He further accepts that phenomenology serves theology by providing a neutral account of human existence (the ontological), in which faith is a determinate mode of existence (the ontic).<sup>106</sup> He can therefore say that "the gospel presupposes the law, which is given as such with my historical existence."<sup>107</sup> All of this (and more) lends substantial support to Chalamet's interpretation, which is certainly more nuanced than a single passage can indicate.

Nevertheless, we need to raise some questions about this analysis. Internally, it is by no means clear that the "critical aspect" means the same thing with respect to Barth and Bultmann. As to Barth, the critical side—as evinced by *RII*, in distinction from the realism of *RI*—concerns the hiddenness of God, the veiling of revelation, the radical impossibility of grasping God, and the total *Aufhebung* of time by eternity. In short, it pertains to the *invisibility* of the divine, which demands a theological critique of all human religion. But this

104. Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 252.

105. See Rudolf Bultmann, "Die liberale Theologie und die jüngste theologische Bewegung [1924]," in *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 4 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933–1965), 1:1–25, at 4; hereafter cited as *GüV*.

106. Most famously expressed in his 1930 essay: Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins und der Glaube: Antwort an Gerhardt Kuhlmann [1930]," in *Neues Testament und christliche Existenz: Theologische Aufsätze*, ed. Andreas Lindemann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 59–83, originally published as "Die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins und der Glaube: Antwort an Gerhardt Kuhlmann," *ZTK* n.s. 11 (1930): 339–64. Future citations will have the 1930 reference in parentheses.

107. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, ed. Eberhard Jüngel and Klaus W. Müller (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984), 153.

is almost the exact opposite of what the “critical aspect” means in Chalamet’s discussion of Bultmann, for there the word “critical” concerns Bultmann’s work as a “historical-critical” researcher. The critical aspect in that context does not mean the invisibility of God but the general *visibility* of humanity: “In Bultmann’s theology, the critical side is the aspect of the word or phrase, which anyone can understand, while the positive side expresses the event, which only faith perceives. Philosophy belongs exclusively to the critical side. But this critical side is not what theology is all about! Theology leads to the other side, to the Gospel, which is beyond the reach of philosophy.”<sup>108</sup> Chalamet finds the law-gospel contrast more useful in explicating Bultmann (whereas the critical-positive is more useful for Barth), since that terminology is more apposite to Bultmann’s contrast between the general (philosophy or ontology) and the particular (theology or the ontic). But does this distinction have anything to do with the distinction between critical and positive in Barth? Does not the latter operate *within* Bultmann’s category of the ontic-theological moment? It seems that Chalamet, in the interest of comparative analysis, has confused the dialectics in Barth and Bultmann as if they were parallel structures, when in fact Barth’s dialectic between the Yes and No is an entirely *intratheological* dialectic that ignores (or even excludes) the dimension of the general and philosophical.<sup>109</sup> Barth and Bultmann both reject the quest for the historical Jesus, but Bultmann still understands historical-critical scholarship, like philosophy, as *internal* to the dialectic that shapes theological thinking, while for Barth it remains absolutely *external*. This difference cannot

108. Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 213.

109. Christopher Asprey makes a similar judgment in his study of the early Barth, where he says that Chalamet’s argument “suffers, however, from a rather formal use of the term ‘dialectical,’ so that the attempt to suggest the continuities between Barth and Herrmann never quite pierce through the surface of the way in which each of them elaborates Christian doctrine.” Christopher Asprey, *Eschatological Presence in Karl Barth’s Göttingen Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21n81.

be explained simply in terms of how the two theologians order the relation between law and gospel; different conceptions of the gospel itself are in play.

The conceptual inconsistency manifests itself most clearly in Chalamet's discussion of the debate over *Sachkritik* (material criticism). We will review the key moments in the periodization below, and I will offer my own interpretation of their dispute in the final chapter. Here I simply want to indicate the difficulties with Chalamet's approach. The debate took place in 1922 in response to the methodology that Barth outlined in the preface to *RII*. Briefly, Barth argued there that exegesis involves identifying the "real" gospel or subject matter in distinction from the "whole" gospel or the text as such.<sup>110</sup> Bultmann, who saw in this an indication that Barth shared his methodology of *Sachkritik*, then criticized Barth for not carrying this method out consistently. A consistent *Sachkritik* would necessitate a critical analysis of where the New Testament, in this case Paul, obscures or contradicts the intended message of the gospel. In all the biblical writings, "other spirits come to expression besides the *pneuma Christou*. And therefore criticism can never be radical enough."<sup>111</sup> In his famous response in the preface to the third edition Barth insisted that *nothing* comes to expression besides these "other spirits," and precisely on these ostensibly *more* radical grounds Barth argued that we cannot lay our finger on the spirit of Christ as a spirit that competes with these other spirits.<sup>112</sup>

Any analysis of this debate itself must be postponed for now; however, here it should be said that it is quite confusing for the reader of Chalamet's book that the respective positions of *both* Barth and Bultmann are identified under the name of the "critical aspect." Barth's

110. *RII*, 20.

111. Bultmann, "Karl Barths 'Römerbrief' in zweiter Auflage," 1:142.

112. *RII*, 26.

critical moment appears in his denial that human beings can ever grasp hold of the divine message itself, while Bultmann's critical moment, according to Chalamet, appears in his claim that human beings *can* lay hold of the divine message—at the general level of the law, which leads to the gospel. Naturally, given his thesis, Chalamet attempts to read this dispute in terms of the law-gospel (Bultmann) and gospel-law (Barth) order, as if the whole debate comes down to how one orders the critical and positive aspects. But it fails, most clearly in the following passage:

Barth grounds the *Krisis* in the positive side, which is the “beginning” with which the theologian must begin. The critical side, rooted in the positive side, becomes as radical as it can be, but the positive side is even more radical than this, since it is its source. The “legal” side is not neglected, but it is decisively outweighed by the other side, i.e. by the Gospel, the first and the final Word.

Bultmann is as much interested in the “legal” side as in the side of the Gospel. Faith is not only an “impossible possibility,” it is also a “possible possibility.” Faith is a human “process,” and not just a miracle coming from above. The Law is the way which leads man [*sic*] to God. The believer can “lay his finger” on verses through which the Spirit of Christ speaks. The theologian must remember this “legal” side, in this case the *litera*, without ever forgetting that no one can have God's Word at his disposal.<sup>113</sup>

That Barth grounds the *krisis* in the positive side is certainly true, but it does not explain his conflict with Bultmann on *Sachkritik*. Barth does not oppose Bultmann on the grounds that the latter does not begin with the positive Yes. On the contrary, he opposes Bultmann for being *too confident* in the Yes, for not being clear enough about the divine *No* that veils this Yes from us.<sup>114</sup> That Barth's criticism of Bultmann is based on the critical and not the positive aspect is made

113. Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 203.



clear on the previous page, where Chalamet says that this debate shows that Barth is “more consistent in preserving God’s veiling in the midst of his unveiling.”<sup>115</sup> But the divine *veiling* is precisely what Chalamet has previously identified with the critical No.<sup>116</sup>

There are really two kinds of “criticism” or “law” on offer here in Barth and Bultmann. This is apparent already in the equivocal use of the word “legal” in the two paragraphs quoted. I mentioned above that the critical–positive binary works best with Barth, while the law–gospel binary is more appropriate for Bultmann. The constraints of Chalamet’s argument require that he connect the two. He does so subtly in this passage, speaking about the critical and positive at the start, then transitioning with the line about how “the ‘legal’ side is not neglected.” In the second paragraph we only find the law–gospel schema. But the “legal” side that Chalamet finds in Bultmann—viz., that he begins with the general human level before moving to the theological—is not at all what the word “legal” means in the first paragraph with respect to Barth, where it has nothing to do with faith being a human possibility. We could possibly salvage Chalamet’s schema if we reduce the No/critical/law and the Yes/positive/gospel to simply “human” and “divine,” respectively. At this most formal of levels the comparison may work. But then it loses all real explanatory power. A better and more honest approach would be to acknowledge that Barth and Bultmann are simply operating with different conceptions of the critical law that imply, and are the consequence of, different conceptions of the positive gospel.

114. One could even make the case that it is *Bultmann* who actually emphasizes the positive Yes in this interchange, not Barth. What else is *Sachkritik* but the critique of texts in light of the *gospel*, that is, the *Sache*?

115. Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 202.

116. See *ibid.*, 111.

1.2.2.3. Bultmann's Law-Determining Gospel

The more pressing question is whether it is in fact true that Bultmann's theology proceeds from law to gospel, that is, whether "the Law is the way which leads [humanity] to God."<sup>117</sup> Chalamet's thesis depends to a considerable degree on the claim that Bultmann's divergence from Barth can be explained in terms of the order of law and gospel. But is this actually the case? I submit that it is not. In truth, Bultmann's position, normatively speaking, places gospel before law, even though he at times moves from law to gospel in terms of his analysis. The essence of my claim can be outlined in five points, though it is an issue to which we will return repeatedly in subsequent chapters.

Before we begin, it should be noted that Chalamet's overall argument does not depend on the validity of the law-gospel schema; he uses it for heuristic purposes but many of the other concepts stand independently. For instance, the distinction between Barth's supplementary dialectic and Bultmann's complementary dialectic remains largely valid. Even so, the question of the law-gospel relation is an issue worth addressing regardless of how important it may (or may not) be for Chalamet's thesis. Chalamet's work is the occasion for clarifying a problem that has broad theological relevance.

1. One of the ostensibly clearest pieces of evidence in favor of Chalamet's claim, though it is not cited by Chalamet himself, appears in Bultmann's posthumously published lectures in the *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, where he declares, in material written in 1926, that "the gospel presupposes the law, which is given as such with my historical existence."<sup>118</sup> Like many of Bultmann's claims, when pulled out of context this appears to be an open-and-shut case. In the eyes of some,

117. *Ibid.*, 203.

118. Bultmann, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, 153.