

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Bachelor of Divinity

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

6-1-1960

A Comparison of Fourth Century Trinitarian Terminology with the Terminology of Karl Barth

Paul C. Dorn

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_dornp@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dorn, Paul C., "A Comparison of Fourth Century Trinitarian Terminology with the Terminology of Karl Barth" (1960). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 941.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/941>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Divinity by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

SHORT TITLE.

**A COMPARISON OF FOURTH CENTURY THEOLOGICAL TERMINOLOGY
WITH THE TERMINOLOGY OF EARL BARTH**

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Theological Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Theological Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Divinity

KARL BARTH AND THE TRINITY

Karl G. Barth

June 1960

Approved by

[Signature]
Advisor

[Signature]
Reader

**A COMPARISON OF FOURTH CENTURY TRINITARIAN TERMINOLOGY
WITH THE TERMINOLOGY OF KARL BARTH**

**A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity**

by

Paul C. Dorn

June 1960

Approved by:



Advisor



Reader

INTRODUCTION

In general, the problem under investigation is in what way and to what extent Karl Barth agrees to his doctrine of the Trinity with the traditional orthodox trinitarian theology formulated by the ecumenical councils during the first four centuries of the Christian Church as well as those

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE ORTHODOX TRINITARIAN TERMINOLOGY AND TEACHINGS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY	3
III. THE HETERODOX THEISTIC TERMINOLOGY AND TEACHINGS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY	22
IV. THE TERMINOLOGY OF KARL BARTH ON THE TRINITY COMPARED	29
V. CONCLUSION	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	55

2

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In general, the problem under investigation is in what way and to what extent Karl Barth agrees in his doctrine of the Trinity with the traditional orthodox trinitarian theology formulated by representative theologians during the first four centuries of the Christian Church as well as those condemned doctrines formulated by their opposing heretics. Barth has often been accused of Modalism by some and conversely defended against this view by others. We have felt the importance of settling in some way this nebulous debate by addressing this investigation more specifically in the direction of Modalism, and it is mainly within this scope or aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity that we are limiting ourselves. Toward the end, however, it becomes necessary to go somewhat outside our limits in order to get a better perspective of Barth's position within these limits.

In the present analysis we shall first of all examine rather closely the terminology of selected representative theologians up through the fourth century commonly considered orthodox in their teachings on the Trinity with respect to their understanding of unity and person. Secondly, we shall try to analyse those modalistic heresies of the same era on the identical points. Finally, we will analyse as best as possible Barth's teachings, and see what similarity, if any,

there is between his terminology and that of the previous theologians under examination. The conclusions reached are made as a result of careful weighing of the evidence, and any snap judgements have not been intended. We have no knowledge of any previous investigations made in this area, at least any which have really dealt with the present problem in its specifics.

The major sources from which our survey was taken were Aristotle and Philo in the Loeb Classical Library, the Patrologiae: Patrum Graecorum et Latinorum, and the English translation of Barth's Church Dogmatics. The original German edition of Barth's Die Kirchliche Dogmatik is used to show the more important terms which Barth employs. The references are also cited so that the reader may check the translation. The method followed was primarily analytic, especially difficult in Barth because his dialectical style does not lend itself well to analytic treatment. Because of this difficulty in Barth, many of the quotes were left intact and not summarized, lest the impression of an inaccurate summary be given.

The findings in this paper were used primarily in establishing the fact that Barth is not Trinitarian in the traditional orthodox sense.

called one together with CHAPTER II in which the accident or

THE ORTHODOX TRINITARIAN TERMINOLOGY AND TEACHINGS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

The Linguistic Background

Since the doctrine of the Trinity involves the concepts of unity and number, it is necessary at this point to go back to the definitions of these concepts which were generally used or recognized by the early church fathers. Among all the writers of Greek literature, perhaps none had been so careful to lay down the meaning of these terms as Aristotle. The choice of his definitions does not imply an espousal of his philosophy, but is made because he was generally recognized as the Noah Webster of his day, even by those opposed to his type of philosophy.

In his Metaphysics,¹ Aristotle maintains that the term one is a relative term, relative to the term indivisible. Everything that is indivisible in one respect may still be divisible in another respect. Thus everything may be considered one in one way of speaking, yet many in another way of speaking. He considers five types of unity. First of all, any accident or accidents inherent in a thing can be

¹Aristotle, Metaphysics, Books I-IX in The Loeb Classical Library, edited by T. E. Page, et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), pp. 226f. Hereafter The Loeb Classical Library will be referred to as LCL.

called one together with the thing in which the accident or accidents are inherent. This is termed one by accident. Secondly, any number of things can be called one if they are combined in a single collection. He calls this one by continuity. Thirdly, there are two differing liquids which may be called one, e.g. oil and wine, which have a common underlying element, namely water, although in our present day we realize the inadequacy of his example. This he calls one in substratum [ὑποκείμενον] used in the sense of underlying matter. The fourth type of unity is called unity of genus, where three species of beings, e.g. horse, man, and dog, can be called one on the basis that they are all animals. Finally, two individuals of the same species, for instance Plato and Socrates, may be called one because they have one λόγος or definition, being in this instance rational animal, which denotes their essence [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι]. This final type of relative unity is termed one in species [κατ' εἶδος], that is, Socrates and Plato are one because they belong to the same species, namely man. Aristotle, however, does not always treat the last three types of relative unity as distinctively in his other writings.

The question will no doubt arise as to what Aristotle means by the term, individual [τὸ ἄτομον]. In his Categories he describes an individual as that which is one

in number [ἐν ἀριθμῷ],² obviously implying that many individuals are many with respect to number, the difference between individuals being a difference with respect to number. But Aristotle also describes an individual as "a particular thing [τόδε τι]," a "first ousia [πρῶτος οὐσία],"³ and a "hypokeimenon [ὑποκείμενον]."⁴ The latter he indiscriminately qualifies by the term "last [ἐσχάτου]"⁵ or "first [πρῶτον],"⁶ each one of them in the sense of "proximate." Therefore, hypokeimenon so qualified would denote an individual substance constituting the common substratum of accidents. This would be in contrast to a non-proximate hypokeimenon denoting underlying matter in general and hence the common substratum of different individual substances.

Aristotle uses hypokeimenon in yet another sense, that of something which is real and actually exists outside of the mind. This type of hypokeimenon causes a sensation in the percipient. The hypokeimenon is distinguished by the percipient from the sensation itself by the fact that the hypokeimenon exists apart from the sensation on the one hand, but the sensation exists in the percipient only as an

²LCL, "The Categories," The Organon, I, 14f.

³Ibid., p. 28.

⁴LCL, Metaphysics, Books I-IX, p. 240.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 268.

effect.⁷ In other words, the hypokeimenon really exists outside our mind, but the sensation does not really exist outside our mind.

We have noted above that Aristotle terms an individual a "first ousia," or hypokeimenon. Aristotle sometimes uses ousia as meaning either species or genus. This he labels as "second ousia [*δευτέρα οὐσία*]." ⁸

Etymologically, hypostasis primarily means the same as hypokeimenon. The latter means "laid under," and the former, "a standing under." Plato and Aristotle used hypokeimenon in a technical, philosophic sense. The difference essentially between the two terms is that hypostasis gained philosophic usage only after Aristotelian philosophy was in vogue. Therefore, by the time of Origen, hypostasis is used as the equivalent of hypokeimenon in the sense that Aristotle uses it.⁹ There are actually instances where hypostasis is used as the real thing which actually exists outside the mind in the same sense as Aristotle's usage of hypokeimenon described above, specifically in the pseudo-Aristotelian De

⁷ Ibid., p. 194.

⁸ LCL, "The Categories," The Organon, I, 20, 24.

⁹ Harry Austryn Wolfson, Faith, Trinity, Incarnation, Vol. I of The Philosophy of the Church Fathers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, c.1956), p. 319.

Mundo,¹⁰ in Philo,¹¹ and in Irenaeus.¹²

Hippolytus follows along with Aristotle in considering hypostasis the equivalent of individual [ἄτομον]. He comments on Aristotle's division of ousia into genus, species, and individual, and says that the individual is a hypostatic ousia [οὐσία ὑποστατική]. He states that individual is what Aristotle ". . . primarily and especially and pre-eminently calls ousia."¹³

The Trinitarian Teachings of Tertullian

Many of the church theologians who wanted to stay in the apostolic faith were quite concerned in keeping the Scriptural doctrine of one God, but at the same time tried to define the unity of this one God within the framework of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, since Scripture uses these names and attributes them to individuals, or self-consciousnesses. Here is where Aristotle's definitions of individual, hypostasis, hypokeimenon, ousia, and number came to play an important role in defending what Scripture already had

¹⁰LCL, "On The Cosmos," p. 370.

¹¹LCL, "On The Eternity of the World," IX, 247, 250; "On Dreams," V, 396.

¹²St. Irenaeus, Contra Haereses, Part I of Opera, edited by D. R. Massuet (Venetiis: Franciscum Pitterium, 1734), p. 292.

¹³St. Hippolytus, Refutationis Omnium Haeresium (Goettingen: Sumptibus Dieterichianis, 1859), p. 350.

posited in speaking of the Trinity. The orthodox view was thus that the members of the Trinity are real things, substantives, persons, or real individual beings (not human, of course).

Tertullian advocates this orthodox view when writing against the heretic Praxeas. He goes on to say concerning the Son that one is to allow Him

to be considered as a substantive in reality, by reason of a property of His substance, in such a way that He may be regarded as a certain thing and person, and so be able, as being constituted second to God [here he no doubt means second in order], to make two, the Father and the Son, God and the Logos.¹⁴

He adds a supplementary remark concerning the passage, John 10:30, "I and my Father are one," by saying that this does not mean in respect to "singularity of number."¹⁵

In the same writing Tertullian describes the Son, and consequently the other members of the Trinity by the following expressions: (1) The members of the Trinity are substantive in reality [substantivum in re]. (2) Each member possesses a property of its substance [substantiae proprietat]. (3) Numerically the Father and Son are two, but not one, and consequently the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three and not one. (4) Each member of the Trinity is a

¹⁴Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1844), II, 162AB. Hereafter Migne's edition will be referred to as MPL and the corresponding Patrum Graecorum as MPG.

¹⁵Ibid., col. 188A.

certain thing and person [res et persona quaedam].¹⁶

In expressing the common unity of the persons, Tertullian again uses the word "substance." Consequently he explains the verse, "I and my Father are one," with respect to "unity of substance [substantia], not with respect to singularity of number."¹⁷ In addition, "He is the Son of God and is called God from unity of substance with God."¹⁸

Tertullian shows that he is in favor of the fact that "unity of substance" means unity of substratum rather than unity of specific genus when he says that ". . . the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole."¹⁹ Similarly, he states that the Holy Spirit is a ". . . portion of the whole."²⁰ Elsewhere he claims that he himself ". . . derives the Son from no other source but from the substance of the Father. . . ." and similarly derives the Holy Ghost ". . . from no other source than from the Father through the Son."²¹

Another contemporary of Tertullian by the name of Hippolytus did touch briefly on the Trinitarian heresies,

¹⁶Ibid., cols. 161f.

¹⁷Ibid., col. 188A.

¹⁸MPL, "Apology," I, 457B.

¹⁹MPL, "Against Praxeas," II, 164B.

²⁰Ibid., col. 189B.

²¹Ibid., col. 159AB.

but not to the extent that Tertullian did. At this time Tertullian had done a considerable amount of work toward setting forth in clearer light the formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity generally adopted by the fourth century Church.

The Trinitarian Teachings of Origen

Origen, the most prolific of the early Church Fathers, in discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, borrowed much of the terminology of Aristotle. He says that ". . . the Son is different from the Father according to ousia [οὐσία] and hypokeimenon [ὑποκειμενον]." ²² Quite obviously he is using the term ousia in the sense of "first ousia" and hypokeimenon in the sense of "proximate hypokeimenon." We have seen from above that both terms are used by Aristotle in the sense of individual [ἄτομον]. ²³

The term ousia is also used in the Aristotelian sense of "second ousia" by Origen, and hence a designation of the common unity underlying the Trinity, when he criticizes those who deny any real distinction between the members of the Trinity in a passage where he states that they maintain that the Father and the Son are ". . . one not only in ousia

²²MPG, "On Oration," XI, 465A.

²³Supra, p. 5.

but also in hypokeimenon."²⁴ Here he admits that ousia can be used in the sense of "second ousia," but not in the sense of "proximate hypokeimenon," when speaking of the unity of the Trinity. He is actually saying that these heretics do not consider the Father and the Son as distinct individuals, or distinct individual species whose only unity consists in a common ousia, i.e. in a combination of species and genus. Instead, they consider the Trinity one hypokeimenon, i.e. one individual. Here he brings out his own view that the three hypostases are real individuals, or preferably speaking, real individual species, and they are only one with respect to their specific genus. He also uses the term homousios [ὁμοούσιος]²⁵ in the sense of the "second ousia" when he describes the unity of the Son with the Father.

There can be no doubt that Origen upheld the orthodox view of the Trinity insofar that he argues that God and the Logos are distinct beings. His argument is in antithesis to the heretics who contend that the distinction between them is not in number [ἀριθμῶ] but only according to certain thoughts [ἐπινοίας].²⁶ He further contributed toward a definite doctrinal formulation by his emphasis on the

²⁴MPG, "Commentary on John," XIV, 376B.

²⁵MPG, "From the Library of Origen on the Epistle to the Hebrews," XIV, 1308D.

²⁶MPG, "Commentary on John," XIV, 376B.

distinction of the persons, perhaps to such an extent that he was unjustly criticized of tending toward Tritheism, or at least toward a definite disparity between the members of the Trinity. But this tendency was only brought out because he wrote in antithesis to these heretics mentioned above.

The Trinitarian Teachings of Basil of Caesarea

Of the Cappodocians perhaps Basil of Caesarea had formulated the greatest amount of material on the Trinity. By now it was quite evident to most of the theologians what constituted the doctrine of the Trinity. As we shall see, Basil perhaps went farther than any of the other fathers of the Church in defining what actually distinguished the members of the Trinity from one another. His teachings and terminology will be of special importance in considering the orthodoxy of Karl Barth with reference to the Trinity.

At this time the term ousia had generally taken on the coloring of "second ousia" in the minds of the theologians. They used it interchangeably with the term homoousious when speaking of the common underlying unity of the persons of the Trinity. Similarly the term hypostasis, or hypokeimenon in the sense of "proximate hypokeimenon" was understood to mean the three persons or members of the Trinity. Basil illustrates the relation of the unity of the ousia to the plurality of the three hypostases by the example of four individuals named "Peter, Andrew, John, and James" who are

all one in the sense that they all belong to the same species, "man."²⁷ Here we note the Aristotelian unity in species. Again with reference to the same relationship, he says,

Ousia and hypostasis have the distinction that the common [τὸ κοινόν] has with reference to the particular [τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον], for example, just as animal [τὸ ζῷον] has with reference to an individual [δέσνα] man.²⁸

Here we have the same example, except that the genus animal is used in place of the species man. This interchanging of terms can be justified on the grounds that Aristotle states that the genus "animal," just as the species "man," can be predicated of the individual human being.²⁹ It seems here that Basil has actually considered the hypostases as individual species and the common unity as a specific genus.

Aristotle says that ". . . all things that are many in number have matter."³⁰ Basil seems to draw on this statement when he says that ". . . every number signifies those things which have received an enmattered and circumscribed nature."³¹ From this he infers that ". . . we confess one God, not in number but in nature. . . ." ³² and ". . . he who

²⁷MPG, "Letters," XXXII, 325B; cf. 328A.

²⁸Ibid., col. 884A.

²⁹LCL, "The Categories," The Organon, I, 18f.

³⁰LCL, Metaphysics, Books X-XIV, p. 160.

³¹MPG, "Letters," XXXII, 249A.

³²Ibid., col. 248C.

confesses the Son of God or the Holy Spirit as number or creature, unwittingly introduces an enmattered and circumscribed nature."³³ Of course he does not mean here that the members of the Trinity are not to be enumerated and that the number "three" cannot be applied to the Trinity. On the surface it would seem that Basil denies what the other Fathers have stated with respect to the distinction of the members of the Trinity being in number, i.e. each member of the Trinity being one in number. But it can be seen upon further examination that both Basil and the Fathers are thinking of each of the members of the Trinity as being individual species, but not mere individuals who have ". . . an enmattered and circumscribed nature," the implication on Basil's part being that each member or person of the Trinity is one "in nature" but not one "in number," i.e. one as individual species, but not one as mere individuals.

Basil maintains that a principle of differentiation [λόγος διαφορᾶς]³⁴ must be set up between the hypostases to distinguish them from one another. But this principle must apply both to individuals and to species since he considers the persons individual species. Aristotle terms that which belongs uniquely to both a species and an individual

³³Ibid., col. 249AB.

³⁴Ibid., col. 328C.

a "property [$\acute{\iota}\delta\iota\omicron\nu$]." ³⁵ Now Basil adopts this term and uses it as the principle of differentiation between the hypostases of the Trinity. He also uses many derivatives of the word instead of merely the word itself. For instance, as the equivalent of the term $\acute{\iota}\delta\iota\omicron\nu$, he uses the term $\omicron\acute{\iota}\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$, ³⁶ and in connection with Hebrews 1:3 where Christ is called the "character" of God's "hypostasis," he uses the term $\chi\alpha\rho\alpha\kappa\tau\eta\rho$, ³⁷ and for this in turn he even substitutes the word $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\eta$ ³⁸ meaning "form" or "shape."

He then goes on to specify what are the distinguishing properties of the persons of the Trinity. The distinguishing property [$\acute{\iota}\delta\iota\omicron\nu$] of the Father is that He is ungenerated [$\acute{\alpha}\gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma$], ³⁹ that of the Son is that He is generated [$\gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma$], ⁴⁰ and that of the Holy Spirit is that "He is known after the Son and with the Son and has His substance from the Father." ⁴¹ Elsewhere he describes the Holy Spirit as ". . . being sent from God and sustained by the Son." ⁴²

³⁵ Aristotle, Topica, edited by M. Wallies (Leipzig: R. G. Teubner, 1923), pp. 83f, 100f.

³⁶ MPG, "Letters," XXXII, 328BC.

³⁷ MPG, "Against Eunomius," XXIX, 637B.

³⁸ MPG, "Letters," XXIX, 850A.

³⁹ MPG, "Letters," XXXII, 332A.

⁴⁰ Ibid., col. 329C.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² MPG, "Against Eunomius," XXIX, 668C.

The distinguishing mark of the three hypostases is thus to be found mainly in the manner or cause of their existence, and he describes the property of each of the persons as its "peculiar property of existence [*ἰδιότροπον ὑπάρξεως*],"⁴³ or its "mode of existence [*τρόπος ὑπάρξεως*]."⁴⁴ A causal relation is then evident between the hypostases in that the Father has no cause for His existence, the Son is the cause of the Father's existence, and the Holy Spirit is partly the cause of the Son's and the Father's existence. Aristotle calls this causal relation [*πρός τι*] of "the active to the passive," where he uses the illustration of a father who is ". . . called father of his son. . . ." because ". . . the one has acted and the other had been acted on in a certain way."⁴⁵

At first glance one may think that Basil is guilty of Modalism when he uses the term *τρόπος ὑπάρξεως*, or "mode of existence." But Prestige shows that this Greek expression has the meaning connected with it that designates beginning of life or existence. It is always connected with the origin or cause of existence, e.g. the mode of existence of the Son is a causal one, that of being begotten of the

⁴³ Ibid., col. 338A.

⁴⁴ Ibid., col. 872C.

⁴⁵ LCL, Metaphysics, Books I-IX, pp. 260, 264.

Father from eternity.⁴⁶ We shall consider a similar expression used by Karl Barth in his doctrine of the Trinity.

A later theologian, John of Damascus, who is actually outside of the historic era to which we are devoted, seems to have borrowed much from Basil when he distinguishes between the hypostases in terms which Basil and the Cappadocians used as "mutual relationship [*ἡ πρὸς ἀλλήλα σχέσις*]" or "mode of existence [*ὑπάρξεως τρόπος*]."⁴⁷ Note how he uses the term "relation" as the equivalent of the expression "mode of existence," which seems to imply that like Basil he was no Modalist, nor did he misunderstand Basil as being a Modalist, but he definitely shows that he favors this type of expression as definitive of the causal and mutual relationship between the hypostases.

The Trinitarian Teachings of Augustine

Although St. Augustine died in the fifth century, yet he can nevertheless be considered as a theologian bridging the fourth and fifth centuries, and as a result is the last theologian of our fourth century survey who was influential in solidifying the doctrine of the Trinity for the Church.

In translating the Trinitarian formula from the Greek

⁴⁶G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Thought (London: Billing and Sons Ltd., c.1952), pp. 245-249.

⁴⁷MPG, "On the Orthodox Faith," XCIV, 837C.

to the Latin, Augustine is careful in pointing out that as the Greek reads, "one ousia, three hypostases," the Latin should read "one essence or substance, three persons," and not "one essence, three substances." He objects to the latter because ". . . with us the usage has already obtained, that by essence we understand the same thing which is understood by substance."⁴⁸

Augustine expresses a definite preference for an analogy of "substratum" when he describes the unity of God rather than an analogy of "species" or "genus." He gives three possible ways of explaining the formula "one essence, three persons." First of all the three persons could be considered as three species and the one essence as one genus. Secondly, the three persons could be thought of as three individuals and the one essence as the one species. Finally, the three persons could be considered as three individuals, but the one essence as one substratum.⁴⁹

Augustine is not splitting hairs here as it would seem on the surface, but because the persons are neither a species nor a mere individual strictly speaking, they are each an individual species in the same sense that Basil of Caesaria considered them.⁵⁰ Therefore a correct choice of the three

⁴⁸MPL, "On The Trinity," XLII, 917f.

⁴⁹Ibid., col. 943.

⁵⁰Supra, p. 12.

alternatives which he posits must be made. of the three par-
 Augustine rejects the first two alternatives on the
 following grounds: First of all, three horses are called
 three horses or can be called three animals. That is,
 "horse" would be the equivalent of species, and animal the
 equivalent of genus. In the same way one could say that
 the three persons of the Trinity are the equivalent of
 three gods. Secondly, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are three
 individuals, and in species therefore, three men. If God
 were to be considered as the equivalent of species, then there
 would be three Gods as there are three men. Augustine fi-
 nally settles on the last explanation and compares the
 Trinity with three statues made of gold.

We do not therefore use these terms according to genus
 and species, but as if according to a matter that is
 common and the same. Just as if three statues were
 made of the same gold, we should say three statues one
 gold, yet should neither call the gold genus and the
 statues species, nor the gold species and the statues
 individuals.⁵¹

Augustine does recognize a weakness in this analogy and goes
 on to say,

yet we say "three persons of the same essence" or
 "three persons, one essence"; but we do not say "three
 persons out of the same essence," as though therein
 essence were one thing and person another; for there
 it is one thing to be gold, another to be statues.⁵²

Augustine has been criticized in his doctrine of the

⁵¹MPL, "On The Trinity," XLII, 944.

⁵²Ibid., col. 945.

Trinity on the charge that the distinction of the three persons has been weakened or that he is in reality a modalist but disguises his position by clever distinctions between different ideas. That these charges are unwarranted is defended by Wolfson, a Jew, who has no theological axe to grind.

There is no evidence that the reality claimed by Augustine for the distinction between the persons is in any way different from that claimed for it by other orthodox Fathers. To Augustine, the three persons, each of whom is God, are as real individuals as are the three statues, each of which is gold, in his analogy, except that God does not exist apart from the persons as does gold apart from the statues and except also that, while in the case of the statues, which exist in time and place, the distinction between them is sensibly visible, in the case of the persons, who do not exist in time and place, the distinction between them is only conceptually discernible. This is exactly what all the orthodox Fathers contended in their opposition to Modalism.⁵³

We must maintain that in the face of further opposition there is no doubt that Augustine did sharply distinguish the persons from one another with the traditional distinction that the Father is unbegotten,⁵⁴ or alone begot,⁵⁵ that the Son was alone begotten,⁵⁶ and that the Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son.⁵⁷

⁵³Wolfson, op. cit., pp. 358-359.

⁵⁴MPL, "On The Trinity," XLIV, 936, 1095; "Letters," XXXIII, 1039.

⁵⁵Ibid., col. 458.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

We may conclude that by the end of the fourth century the doctrine of the Trinity had been explored to the point of exhaustion so that there was no doubt in the thinking of the theologians as to what constituted this doctrine. Not that the Trinity in itself is in any way intelligible to the human mind, for who can understand the mind and nature of God, but at least the doctrine of the Trinity was delimited to the extent that the corresponding heresies rampant at the time were stamped out quite effectively. At this point, however, it will be of importance to explore the rejected and unorthodox theistic terminology for the purpose of determining whether there is any resemblance of Barth's teachings to the heretical teachings of this era.

CHAPTER III

THE HETERODOX THEISTIC TERMINOLOGY AND TEACHINGS OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

Introduction

As one examines the heterodox theistic terminology up through the fourth century, he soon discovers that there is really very little material extant from any original source, and that most of the material acquired is of secondary nature. So completely did the Fathers stamp out these heresies and burn their authors' books that an original text of Gnostic, Arian, Dynamic Monarchian, or Modalistic nature is a rarity indeed.

The quest of this era is not going to be divided evenly, but is intended to lie in the direction of Modalism rather than the other heresies simply because Barth's teachings are seen by many to tend in this direction, and a more thorough examination of them will render a more accurate analysis of Barth's teachings. The only heresy which we shall consider briefly other than Modalism is Arianism by reason of contrast.

Arianism

In short, Arius and his disciples based their theology on the absolute uniqueness and transcendence of God. God could in no way be divided, but He did create the Logos as

an inferior being, not from eternity, and the Logos logically had no real direct communion with God the Father. Consequently the Son was not really God, but a demigod. The Holy Spirit suffered a similar fate.

In the case of Arianism, examining more specifically the terms ousia (in the sense of first ousia) and hypostasis, we have found that Origen uses them as a description of the members of the Trinity in the sense of individual species, and ousia in the sense of "second ousia" describing the underlying unity of the three persons.¹ Not so with Arius, but he maintains that the three members are generically different beings with no underlying unity. He describes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as different ousiai² or three hypostases.³ One might be so bold as to say that Arius was a refined type of Gnostic in his concept of God.

There is really little more to observe other than the fact that Arius was quite the opposite of Modalist. Where Arius separated the persons, the Modalists fused them into one person.

¹Supra, pp. 10f.

²Athanasius, "Oration Against Arius," Patrologiae: Patrum Graecorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1887), XXVI, 24B. Hereafter Migne's edition will be referred to as MPG and the corresponding Patrum Latinorum as MPL.

³MPG, "On Synods," XXVI, 709B.

It can be seen here that Praxeas considered the members of the Trinity as unreal and merely nominal.

The Modalists were somewhat akin to the Dynamic Monarchianists in that they both tried to preserve the monarchy or rule of God. The latter school was largely represented by Paul of Samosata, and we shall include some of his terms merely in passing with the observation that they are similar to those of the Modalists. The teachings of the Modalists are largely represented by three heretics, Praxeas, Noetus, and Sabellius, who generally produced the view that God's unity is preserved by making the distinction between the three persons of the Trinity not real, but only nominal. Thus the names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit become mere predicates or attributes with no reality. The Apologists, on the other hand, contended the very opposite, namely that the distinction between the persons is real (in the sense that Aristotle meant "real") and not merely nominal.

Tertullian condemns Praxeas and his disciples when he contends that they will not allow the Logos

to be really a substantive being, by having a substance of His own, in such a way that He may be regarded as an objective thing and a person, and so be able, as being constituted second to God the Father, to make two, the Father and the Son, God and the Word, for you will say, what is a word, but a voice and sound of the mouth, and (as the grammarians teach), air when struck against, intelligible to the ear, but for the rest a sort of void, empty, and incorporeal thing.⁴

⁴MPL, "Against Praxeas," II, 162AB.

It can be seen here that Praxeas considered the members of the Trinity as unreal and merely nominal.

That there was a definite blurring of the persons of the Trinity is clear when Tertullian states that ". . . they will have the two to be but one, so that the Father shall be deemed to be the same as the Son. . . ." ⁵ because "He himself, they say, made himself a Son to himself." ⁶ Although Praxeas, as far as we know it, never uses the term "mode" or "mode of being," yet here he implies that the Father and the Son are actually one and the same and that the difference is only in appearance or nominal.

Noetus had a similar belief, but seemed to add the concept of God appearing now as Father, now as Son, and now as the Holy Ghost. Hippolytus charges that Noetus

thinks to establish monarchy by asserting the Father and the Son so-called are one and the same, not another from another, but himself from himself, and that He is called by the name of Father and Son according to the change of times. ⁷

In other words He is called Father or Son depending on the time. He thus limits the persons of the Trinity, whether consciously or unconsciously, we do not know, to the element of time. Here again the distinction is cast aside and only

⁵Ibid., col. 159C.

⁶Ibid., col. 164D.

⁷St. Hippolytus, Refutationis Omnium Haeresium (Goettingen: Sumptibus Dieterichianis, 1859), p. 450.

the shell of a nominal distinction remains.

We have evidenced that Tertullian uses the term persona⁸ in the sense of real individual being, and thus each member of the Trinity as a persona. Hippolytus uses the Greek equivalent prosopon in exactly the same sense when he describes the Father and Son as two prosopa.⁹ Sabellius and his disciples were charged with taking these terms in the sense of "appearance," as we can determine when Eusebius attributes the formula to Marcellus of Ancyra, "one hypostasis of three persons [*τριπρόσωπον*],"¹⁰ who was beyond contention a Sabellian heretic. Basil concurs with Eusebius when he attributes the formula to the Sabellians ". . . one thing [*πρᾶγμα*] of many persons [*πολυπρόσωπον*]." ¹¹ That there was a hopeless confusion of the one God according to ousia with the three persons as hypostases is beyond dispute.

Athanasius describes Sabellius' view that "Father and Son are the same"¹² and "in hypostasis one."¹³ Sabellius further maintained that ". . . the Father is Son and again

⁸ Supra, p. 8.

⁹ MPG, "Against the Heresy of Noetus," X, 813A, 821A.

¹⁰ MPG, "On Church Theology," XXIV, 1016A.

¹¹ MPG, "Letters," XXXII, 772B, 288C.

¹² MPG, "Oration Against Arius," XXVI, 469C.

¹³ Ibid., col. 505C.

the Son Father, in hypostasis one, in name two."¹⁴ Again we see the incorrect use of the term hypostasis. A very interesting observation on the part of Epiphanius is that he criticizes Sabellius because he considers the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as mere actions [ἐνέργεια] or names [ὀνομασία] and can be illustrated with ". . . the light and the heat and the circular form in the sun."¹⁵ Again, Basil shows Sabellius' view to be the following:

The same God, though one in substratum [ὑποκειμένον], is transformed [μεταμορφούμενον] on every occasion according to the necessary circumstances, and is spoken of now as Father, and now as Son, and now as Holy Spirit.¹⁶

Sabellius was perhaps the most interesting of the Modalists in that he made his views more plausible to the Church and seems to have refined the modalistic beliefs of his predecessors. There may be an element of doubt, nevertheless, whether the above views are strictly those of Sabellius since the available evidence was written about a century or more after his lifetime. On the other hand we may assume that his heretical writings, although banned and burned by the Church, were available to some of the Fathers.

There was one other heretic, Paul of Samosata, who, although not a Modalist in the strict sense, nevertheless had

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ MPG, "Against Heresies," XLI, 1052B.

¹⁶ MPG, "Letters," XXXII, 776C.

views similar to the Modalists. He maintained that "God's Logos and His Holy Spirit are eternally in God [the Father], just as man's own reason [λόγος] is in his heart; the Son of God has no subsistence of his own; it subsists in God [the Father]."¹⁷ In addition his view is described as follows: "God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God,"¹⁸ or one person.¹⁹ That there is a similarity of views with the Modalists is evident in that he considers the difference between the members of the Trinity to be not real, but only nominal.

¹⁷MPG, "Against Heresies," XLII, 13A.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., col. 16B.

CHAPTER IV

THE TERMINOLOGY OF KARL BARTH ON THE TRINITY COMPARED

The Doctrinal Basis of the Trinity

In comparing the terminology of Karl Barth with the theology of the fourth century there is one precaution which we must observe. The terms which Barth uses are not always to be considered identical in meaning with those that the theologians of the fourth century used, even though he uses them in the original language, simply because there is over a millenium of theological and philosophical thought which has colored these terms. With this in mind we look toward his teachings for analysis.

First of all Barth maintains that it is impossible for the concept of the Trinity to have been revealed in nature. The only place it could have been revealed is in Scripture.¹ Of course, it is not the purpose of this paper to go into detail what Barth means by Holy Scripture, nor his understanding of the concept "Word of God." In his typical dialectical style in another passage he confirms this, only

¹ Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Vol. I, 1 of Church Dogmatics, translated from the German by G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh, England: T. & T. Clark, c.1936), pp. 392f. Hereafter Barth's Church Dogmatics will be referred to as CD. Die Lehre Vom Wort Gottes, Vol. I, 1 of Die Kirchliche Dogmatik (Zurich, Switzerland: Evangelischer Verlag A. G. Zollikon, c.1944), pp. 359f. Hereafter Barth's Die Kirchliche Dogmatik will be referred to as KD.

substituting the term "revelation" for Scripture (this would of course not mean that he would equate "revelation" with Scripture) as follows:

But from the doctrine of the Trinity we actually gather who the God is who reveals Himself and therefore we let it find expression here as the interpretation of revelation [Offenbarung]. By that then we do not mean that revelation [Offenbarung] is the ground of the Trinity, as if God were the Three-in-one only in His revelation and for the sake of His revelation. But, of course, we say that revelation is the ground [Grund] of the doctrine of the Trinity; the doctrine of the Trinity has no other ground than this.²

Assuming, then, that he is attempting to base his doctrine of the Trinity on revelation (whatever that may be, and we can assume that he may be trying to base his doctrine on Scripture) we shall go on to his basic description of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Modes of Being

Barth begins his section on the Trinity with the following passage (in bold faced type):

The God who reveals Himself according to Scripture is One in three of His own modes of existence-[Seinsweisen], which consist in their mutual relationships, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this way He is the Lord, i.e. the Thou who meets man's I and unites it to Himself as the indissoluble Subject, and who actually thus and thereby becomes manifest to him as his God.³

Here we note a similar expression used by Basil of Caesarea,

²CD, op. cit., p. 358; KD, op. cit., p. 329.

³CD, op. cit., p. 400; KD, op. cit., p. 367.

"modes of being" or "modes of existence." The question arises whether Barth is using these terms in exactly the same sense as did Basil. The only way we can determine this is by examining other passages in which he uses the same terminology and where he attempts to define what he means by "modes of being or existence." There is another way to determine whether he is truly a Modalist, namely by analysing those passages where he treats of Modalism itself.

In the above passage we observe that the modes of existence consist ". . . in their mutual relationships, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." By this does Barth mean that the distinguishing property of the members of the Trinity consist in their causal relationships in the same sense that Basil intended? Barth does emphasize the fact that the three members of the Trinity or "modes of existence" stand in relation to each other. In fact the concept of person is entirely meaningless in and by itself with reference to God in the mind of Barth, but it gains its full meaning only when the three persons are considered together. In other words the divine persons are subsistent relations.⁴ This would seem on the surface to agree partly with Basil when he contends that the distinguishing property of the persons is found chiefly in their causal relations. But whether Basil would agree to Barth's contention that the term "person" is

⁴CD, op. cit., p. 420; KD, op. cit., pp. 385f.

meaningless in and by itself with reference to God is simply out of the question since we have discovered that Basil, as in all the rest of the Fathers, held significantly to the term "person." In order, then, to clarify what Barth thinks of modes of being, it would be well to examine how he considers the definitions of person and substance with relation to the Trinity.

Person and Substance

Barth pointedly denies any possibility of the Trinity being developed from ". . . a greatly broken up polytheism or the like," and to be considered pragmatically as Modernism did.⁵ He thus revolts against considering the Trinity as a development of polytheism. He is against any form of Tri-theism as is evidenced when he says,

Three-in-oneness in God does not mean a threefold deity, either in the sense of a plurality of deities or in the sense of the existence of a plurality of individuals or parts within the one deity.⁶

He takes issue with Tri-theism or any form of Arianism when he asserts the importance of ousia in the formula of the Trinity as follows:

"Of one essence," i.e. of identical essence, is the meaning of ὁμοούσιος, consubstantialis, become dogma.

.

⁵CD, op. cit., p. 355; KD, op. cit., p. 326.

⁶CD, op. cit., p. 402; KD, op. cit., p. 369.

"Of one essence" means firstly and obviously a safeguard against the Arian view of Jesus Christ, as of a "demigod from below," a superman, similar indeed to God, but because similar, ultimately and in the last resort distinct from Him; it underlines and intensifies the $\chi\epsilon\nu\nu\eta\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\alpha\ \acute{\omicron}\nu\ \pi\omicron\iota\eta\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\alpha$, it puts Jesus Christ over against every creature, even the highest, on the side of the Creator.

But "of one essence" also means secondly a safeguard against the idea of Jesus Christ, so current from the time of Origen, as of a lower degree, a lesser quantity within the godhead itself, as a "demigod from above": it underlines and accentuates the $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\theta\iota\nu\acute{\omicron}\nu\ \theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\nu$.

.

But "of one essence" also means thirdly a safeguard against the differentiation or multiplication of the essence of God by the distinction of the modes of existence [Unterschied der Seinsweisen], i.e. a safeguard against polytheism. It forces us really to regard the "Persons [Personen]" as modes of existence [Seinsweisen], i.e. not as two subjects, but as the same subject twice (in indissoluble twiceness, of course; that follows from the context of the symbol!), as two who are two, only in their mutual relationships [gegenseitigen Beziehungen] and not in themselves, not in their essence [Wesen].⁷

Barth takes considerable exception to the term "person" or prosopon and considers it inadequate when he says,

The concept persona, $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\sigma\omega\pi\omicron\nu$, originates (like the concept trinitas, supposed to have been used first by Tertullian) with the struggle against the Sabellian heresy, and was therefore meant to indicate the being in and for themselves of Father, Son and Spirit respectively. But did not persona, $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\sigma\omega\pi\omicron\nu$, also mean "mask"? Did not the concept give fresh support to the Sabellian idea of the three mere phenomenal forms, behind which stood a hidden fourth [verborgenes Viertes]? In consideration of this the Greek Church largely preferred to translate persona by $\upsilon\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ rather than by $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\sigma\omega\pi\omicron\nu$. But on the other hand if by $\upsilon\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ Westerners of necessity thought of substantia in the

⁷CD, op. cit., pp. 502, 503; KD, op. cit., pp. 461, 462.

sense of natura or essentia, they could not but regard themselves as threatened by the proximity of tritheistic ideas. If the West, finally held to persona and the East to ὑπόστασις, neither party could be perfectly content with the other nor either, finally, with itself.⁸

Here we note that he also abhors Sabellianism on the grounds that it supports a hidden fourth diety which expresses itself in three modes or "masks" of appearance. We shall return to his understanding of Modalism later and use it as an aid to understanding his position. Nevertheless, the reasons why he objects to the terms is that they were tinged with abuse by the heretics in ringing a tritheistic note.

On the same issue, he brings in Augustine when he says,

It is somewhat of a relief to find that a man of Augustine's standing declared openly (De trin. V 9, VII 4) that to call the thing "Person" was a matter of a necessitas or consuetudo loquendi. A really suitable concept for it simply does not exist. Certainly, by the three divine Persons something quite other was intended than a juxtaposition [Nebeneinander] like that of three human persons [drei menschlichen personen], and for this reason, that a juxtaposition of human persons denotes a separation of being [Getrenntheit des Seins] (diversitas essentiae), which in God is completely excluded--thereby the possibility of the Greek objection to πρόσωπον was formally acknowledged!⁹

Thus far Barth has said really nothing which could be considered radically outside the traditional line of Trinitarian thought in the Church. To an extent we see that he has been free in his use of the term "modes of being." In the light of what has been found in the Fathers we can

⁸ CD, op. cit., p. 408; KD, op. cit., p. 375.

⁹ CD, op. cit., p. 408; KD, op. cit., p. 375.

consider this expression in all charity. But he causes the eyebrows of the orthodox Trinitarian to raise when he says,

By Father, Son, and Spirit we do not mean what is commonly suggested to us by the word "persons." This designation was accepted--not without opposition--on linguistic presuppositions which no longer obtain today. It was never intended to imply--at any rate in the main stream of theological tradition--that there are in God three different personalities [Persönlichkeiten], three self-existent individuals [je für sich seiende Individuen] with their own special self-consciousness [je eigenen Selbstbewusstsein], cognition [Erkennen], volition [Wollen], activity [Wirken], effects [Wirkungen], revelation [Offenbarungen], and name [Namen]. The one name of the one God is the threefold name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The one "personality" of God, the one active and speaking divine Ego, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Otherwise we should obviously have to speak of three gods [drei Göttern]. And this is what the Early Church not only would not do, but in the conception of the doctrine of the Trinity which ultimately prevailed tried expressly to exclude, just as it did any idea of a division or inequality between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christian faith and the Christian confession has one Subject, not three. But He is the one God in self-repetition [Wiederholung seiner selbst], in the repetition of His own and equal divine being, and therefore in three different modes of being [Seinsweisen]¹⁰ which the term "person" was always explained to mean.

It is obvious here and even expressly declared that he does not heed the orthodox concept of the members of the Trinity as distinct, cognitive, individual beings because his reason would demand of him to think consequently "of three gods." But this is precisely what the Church Fathers had declared impossible to explain, namely, that in spite of the distinction of the persons as individuals (not mere human individuals) yet their unity is expressed in the ousia.

¹⁰CD, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, IV, 1, pp. 204f; KD, IV, 1, p. 224.

Again, struggling against the use of the term "person," he declares,

What in the conceptual language of the 19th century is called "personality" is distinguished from the ancient and mediaeval persona by the addition of the attribute of self-consciousness [Selbstbewusstseins]. In that way the whole question comes to be thoroughly complicated. One obviously had and has the choice, either of attempting to complete the doctrine of the Trinity by assuming the concept of Person with this new accentuation, or of holding to the old concept of Person which, since this accentuation of linguistic usage, has become completely obsolete and incomprehensible outside monastic and a few other studies. . . . But even the attribute of individuality [Individualität], connected with Father, Son, and Spirit as such instead of with the essence of God, and so the idea of a threefold individuality, is scarcely possible without tritheism.¹¹

There are other passages in evidence throughout his treatment of the Trinity which say essentially the same thing.

For instance he maintains that the Holy Spirit is

not a third spiritual subject [geistiges Subjekt], a third I [drittes Ich], a third Lord [dritter Herr] alongside of two others, but a third mode of existence [Seinsweise] of the one divine Subject or Lord.¹²

We note here a tendency to caricature the traditional position, and we find that Paul Gerhardt becomes guilty of putting mythology in poetry describing a dialogue between the Father and the Son in the hymn, "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth,"¹³ when Barth says,

¹¹ CD, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, 1, pp. 410f; KD, I, 1, p. 377.

¹² CD, op. cit., p. 537; KD, I, 1, p. 493.

¹³ The Lutheran Hymnal. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1941), Hymn 142.

The conception of this inter-trinitarian pact [in Federal theology] as a contract between the persons of the Father and the Son is also open to criticism. Can we really think of the first and second persons of the triune Godhead as two divine subjects and therefore as two legal subjects who can have dealings and enter into obligations with one another [als zwei miteinander verhandelnde und sich gegenseitig verpflichtende Rechtssubjekte vorzustellen!]? This is mythology, for which there is no place in a right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity as the doctrine of the three modes of being of the one God which is how it was understood and presented in Reformed orthodoxy itself. God is one God. If He is thought of as the supreme and finally the only subject, He is the one subject. And if, in relation to that which He obviously does amongst us, we speak of His eternal resolves or decrees, even if we describe them as a contract, then we do not regard the divine persons of the Father and the Son as partners in this contract, but the one God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit--as the one partner, and the reality of man as distinct from God as the other.¹⁴

Not that we or Paul Gerhardt would sanction Federal Theology in its entirety, but it is obvious here that Barth carries to its fuller implications the idea that there is no self-consciousness in each of the persons of the Trinity. God therefore, has only one self-consciousness in Barth's theology when he further contends,

In our proof that the doctrine of the Trinity is rooted in Biblical revelation, we started from and always returned again to the revealed name Yahweh-Kyrios, which binds together OT and NT. The doctrine of the Trinity itself neither is nor claims to be anything else than an explanatory confirmation of this name. This name is the name of an unique entity, of a single, unique Willer [einzigem Wollenden] and Doer, whom Scripture designates as God.¹⁵

¹⁴CD, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, IV, 1, p. 65; KD, IV, 1, p. 69.

¹⁵CD, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, 1, p. 400; KD, I, 1, p. 368.

For this reason he is forced to take the term "modes of being" in place of "person" when he says,

Manifestly, in the first place, the ancient concept of Person [Personbegriff], which is the only one in question here, has today become obsolete; in the second, the only possible definition of the entity in question is not for one moment a definition of this ancient concept of Person. Therefore, wherever ancient dogmatics, or Catholic dogmatics even today, speaks of "Persons," we prefer to call Father, Son, and Spirit in God the three individual modes of existence [Seinsweisen] of the one God, consisting in their mutual relationships. ¹⁶

But yet these "modes of being" are to be distinguished sharply, not in the sense of "self-consciousness" as we found even Basil to admit as well as the other Fathers, but in the following sense:

It is a question of special, distinct, absolutely individual modes of God's existence. In other words these modes of God's existence are not to be confused or mixed up with each other. Of course, in all three modes of existence God is, in Himself and compared with the world and man, the one God. But this one God is God three times in another way [dreimal anders Gott], so other that it is precisely only in this three-times-otherness that He is God, so other that this otherness, His existence in these three modes of existence, is absolutely essential to Him, therefore, so other that this otherness is irremovable. Neither can we contemplate the possibility of one of the divine modes of existence just as well being the other, say, the Father the Son, or the Son the Spirit, nor of two of them or of all three coalescing and dissolving into one. Were that so they would cease to be modes of existence essential to the divine existence. Just because the threeness is grounded in the one essence of the revealed God, because in denying the threeness in the oneness of God we at once mean another God than the one revealed in Scripture--for that very reason this threeness must be regarded as an irremovable one, the individuality [Eigentümlichkeit] of the three modes of existence as

¹⁶ CD, op. cit., p. 420; KD, op. cit., p. 386.

an ineffaceable one.¹⁷ by examining passages where he

and again in a later work where he states,

He does not exist as such [as modes of being] outside or behind or above these modes of being. He does not exist otherwise than as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He exists in their mutual interconnexion and relationship. [in ihrem Zusammenhang, in ihren Beziehungen zueinander]. He exists in their difference, not in their identity: the Father in His mode as the Father of the Son; the Son in His as the Son of the Father; the Spirit in His as the Spirit of the Father and the Son. He is not threefold, but trine, triune, i.e., in three different modes the one personal God, the one Lord, the one Creator, the one Reconciler, the one Perfecter and Redeemer. He is all this as He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is it in the relationships to Himself thereby posited. His being as God is His being in His own history.¹⁸

But Barth even declares that the terminology, "modes of being," is even inadequate and only relative when he admits,

We prefer . . . to say not "Person [Person]" but "mode of being [Seinsweise]," with the intention of expressing by this concept the same thing as should be expressed by "Person," not absolutely but relatively better, more simply and more clearly.¹⁹

But we still have not clarified precisely the meaning of "modes of being," in Barth. It is true that he considers this term somewhat akin to what Basil of Caesarea did, but altogether different in that the modes have no individuality or self-consciousness. The question arises whether his concept of the Trinity is a refined type of Modalism. The only

¹⁷CD, op. cit., p. 414; KD, op. cit., p. 380.

¹⁸CD, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, IV, 1, p. 205; KD, IV, 1, p. 225.

¹⁹CD, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, 1, p. 412; KD, I, 1, p. 379.

way we can determine this is by examining passages where he speaks of Modalism.

Modalism

There is a cryptic use of the term "repetition" in Barth's Trinity when he sometimes speaks of the three members.

The name of Father, Son, and Spirit means that God is the one God in a threefold repetition [dreimaliger Wiederholung]; and that in such a way, that this repetition itself is grounded in His Godhead; hence in such a way that it signifies no alteration in His Godhead; but also in such a way that only in this repetition He is God; but also precisely for the reason that in each repetition He is the one God.²⁰

In connection with the word "repetition" there are other passages which seem to clarify what he means by "repetition." He introduces the subject of the economy of the Trinity in the following manner:

Herewith, like all who before us have busied themselves with this matter, we enter upon the most difficult section of our investigation. What is meant here by "Person," as commonly used? Or to put the question generally what is meant in God by what is distinguished or arranged as Father, Son, and Spirit? What is the common concept under which these three are to be interpreted? What are these three--apart from the fact that, as well together as each separately, they are the one true God? What is the common principle of their being, now as Father [je als des Vaters], now as Son, now as Spirit? [our emphasis]²¹

We can observe that the phrase, ". . . now as Father, now

²⁰CD, op. cit., p. 402; KD, op. cit., p. 369.

²¹CD, op. cit., pp. 407f; KD, op. cit., p. 374.

as Son, now as Spirit" is the exact replica of the phrase used by Sabellius when describing the appearance of the modes of being of God.²²

Added to all this, Barth definitely favors the economy of Modalism when he makes the assertion that

it is of decisive importance to recognise the three modes of being, not only economically as Modalism does [nicht nur im Sinn des Modalismus ökonomisch] [our emphasis], but, according to the seriousness of the divine presence and power in the economy of His works. . . .²³

The only element in Modalism which he seems to oppose is the idea of a hidden fourth entity which manifests itself in modes of appearance when he declares,

By that (the doctrine of the Trinity is the proper interpretation of this very revelation as such) we do not assert that the doctrine of the Trinity is merely the interpretation of revelation and not also an interpretation of the God who reveals Himself in revelation. That would be meaningless, because after all revelation is the self-interpretation of this God. If we have to do with His revelation we have to do with Himself and not, as modalists of all periods have thought, with an entity distinct from Himself [einer von ihm selbst unterschiedenen Entität].²⁴

In support of this we recall a passage cited previously,

But did not persona, πρόσωπον, also mean "mask"? Did not the concept give fresh support to the Sabellian idea of three mere phenomenal forms, behind which stood a hidden fourth [verborgenes Viertes]?²⁵

²² Supra, p. 27.

²³ CD, The Doctrine of God, II, 1, p. 326; KD, II, 1, p. 367.

²⁴ CD, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, 1, p. 358; KD, I, 1, pp. 328f.

²⁵ CD, op. cit., p. 408; KD, op. cit., p. 375.

He is very definitive in his position, again, when he excludes the undifferentiated fourth entity and wishes to maintain the modalistic economy when he asserts,

This unity cannot therefore be understood, as though the truth regarding God's operation outward were just a vanish of the independence of the three modes of existence in a neutral, undifferentiated fourth [neutralen ununterschiedenen Vierten], so that with modalism no statement relating to this opus ad extra could be made seriously about a definite mode of existence, while all statements relating to this opus ad extra, might be made indifferently about each separate mode of existence.²⁶

Again, when he warns against the pitfalls of the doctrine of perichoresis, we find the identical objection.

An absolutely unambiguous boundary between bidden and forbidden cannot, of course, be drawn. We can only say that the doctrine of perichoresis, which admits of misuse in a one-sided emphasis on the involution or interpenetration (Ineinander) of the three modes of existence, also includes the other element, by which we should be warned against misuse, namely, regarding the involution as a convolution (Miteinander), presupposing the eternal independence of the three modes of existence in their eternal community. And in any case it may be stated quite definitely, that to systematise the one-sidedness, as we partly find it in the ancient modalism (e.g. in the form of "Patripassianism"), is absolutely forbidden, because it would mean the dissolution of the three-in-oneness into the neutral fourth [neutrale Vierte].²⁷

There is, of course, a crass element of Modalism which we would naturally assume him to oppose and that is that there is no identity of the persons with one another.²⁸

²⁶ CD, op. cit., p. 455; KD, op. cit., p. 417.

²⁷ CD, op. cit., p. 456; KD, op. cit., p. 418.

²⁸ CD, op. cit., p. 534; KD, op. cit., p. 491.

Understanding the heretical features of Modalism in the light of the above exceptions, Barth maintains that the doctrine of the Trinity is in reality a denial of Modalism.

But on the other hand the doctrine of the Trinity means, as the denial of modalism, the expressed declaration that those three elements are not foreign to the Godness of God. The relationship is not that we should have to seek the proper God beyond these three elements, in a higher being in which He was not the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The revelation of God, and therefore His being as Father, Son, and Spirit, is not an economy foreign to His essence, limited as it were from above or from within, so that we should have to inquire about the hidden Fourth [verborgenen Vierten], in order really to inquire about God. But if we inquire about God, we can only inquire about Him who reveals Himself. It is He who according to the witness of Scripture exists, speaks, and acts as Father, Son, and Spirit, in self-veiling and self-unveiling and self-impartation, in holiness, mercy, and love, it is this and no other, who is God. . . . Modalism in the last resort means the denial of God. Our God and only our God, the God, that is, who makes Himself ours in His revelation, is God. To relativise this God, as is done in the doctrine of the real God beyond this manifest God, is to relativise, i.e. to deny, the one real God. Here also the Thou, the Lord, drops out. Here also man obviously wants to get behind God, behind God as He really shows and gives Himself, and therefore behind what He is; for the two things are the same. Here also, therefore, it is a matter of making God an object. Here also the divine subjectivity is absorbed by the human, inquiring after a God who does not exist. Here also man finds himself, this time via mysticism, alone with himself in the end, in his own world. This possibility, coinciding with the first one at its root and at its top, the Church wished to guard against, when she rejected Sabellius and all forms of modalism. And again we ask: are we to think that she did not do well in this?²⁹

We suspect that perhaps he realizes that he is treading very close on Modalistic soil when he says,

²⁹CD, op. cit., pp. 438f; KD, op. cit., pp. 402f.

We, too, cannot avoid every step of ours being exposed to danger in this very region, whether the menace comes from the tritheistic or the modalistic error, from at least the suspicion felt on either side that there is a danger of the opposite error. We, too, cannot so take a middle course, that every misunderstanding is excluded, and our "orthodoxy" is clearly assured.³⁰

Thus far, on the surface we seem to get a picture of Barth's Trinity depicted rather vividly by the Trinitarian description furnished by C. S. Lewis.

A world of one dimension would be a world of straight lines. In a two-dimensional world, you still get straight lines, but many lines make one figure. In a three-dimensional world, you still get figures [six squares making a cube] but many figures make one solid body. In other words, as you advance to more real and more complicated levels, you don't leave behind you the things you found on simpler levels; you still have them, but combined in new ways--in ways you couldn't imagine if you knew only the simpler levels.

Now the Christian account of God involves just the same principle. The human level is a simple and rather empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings--just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure, and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who don't live on that level, can't imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course we can't fully conceive a Being like that: just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it.³¹

But in reading Lewis' graphic description, we can not assume that he is in any way trying to get across a conception of

³⁰CD, op. cit., p. 422; KD, op. cit., p. 388.

³¹C. S. Lewis, Beyond Personality: The Christian Idea of God (New York: The Macmillan Co., c.1945), pp. 9f.

the Trinity in the full sense, as he maintains, but only a faint notion, or the simple idea that the Trinity is beyond our world and therefore incomprehensible. He seems simply to argue here that it is conceivable that the Trinity is incomprehensible, and no more. His presentation would naturally convey the idea of modalistic appearances of the one God in a super space of more than three dimensions by the analogy of the six squares on the one cube. No doubt Lewis would admit and seems to admit the inadequacy of the description, as all other descriptions have proven inadequate.

But there is one more element in Barth's doctrine which further complicates matters, and that is a dynamic conception of the Trinity.

A Dynamic Modalistic Economy

If we could possibly be charitable enough to assume that Barth goes no further than Basil (which we have found is not the case), we nevertheless find that he apparently overthrows all the traditional background of the doctrine of the Trinity when he asserts (with reference to the homousia),

Of this most famous and, technically considered, most central concept of the dogma we must also say what we have said of all formulations of the preceding stipulations, that we are very far from conceiving the object, with regard to which we are trying to justify ourselves by means of this concept. Precisely when we take the concept of homousia non-polytheistically as well as non-modalistically, precisely when we regard it on the one hand, with Athanasius and Augustine, as

identity of essence, and also, adopting the attitude of the Neo-Nicenes, let it speak of two distinct equal modes of existence of the one essence, it is then that it is obviously speaking of an essence of which we have no sort of an idea [keinerlei Anschauung], it is then that it becomes a concept of the kind described in philosophy as "empty concepts." We have often enough asserted distinction in unity and unity in distinction as the meaning of the whole theology of the Trinity. It is precisely in view of the concept of homousia which claims to assert both, that it is in place for us to admit to ourselves, that ultimately we are only acquainted with unities without distinction, distinctions without unity. Upon these limits of our thinking and speaking, all figures of speech go to pieces: the figure of Father and Son, the figure of Speaker and Word, the figure of light and light, the figure--even that is a mere figure--of original and copy. There we never have the one essence in really two modes of existence, nor are there two modes of existence of really one essence, but we always have either one essence in what are only apparently, only in passing, two modes of existence. Or we have two modes of existence, to which two essences correspond--according to our interpretation of the figures, and all these figures can be interpreted in two ways. The really one essence in really two modes of existence is God Himself and God alone. He Himself, He alone is also Father and Son, Speaker and Word, light and light, original and copy.³²

Up to this point Barth has been relatively clear enough to analyse, but at this bend in the road we can understand this statement only in the light of what he has to say with reference to his emphasis on the dynamic relation between the members of the Trinity.

In speaking of the traditional orthodox theology on the Trinity Barth contends that there was an abstraction from the Trinity when the theologians defined the essence of God.

It was certainly right to define the essence of God:

³²CD, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, 1, pp. 503f; KD, I, 1, pp. 422f.

. . . . But even in the definition of this a se et per se there ought never to have been an abstraction from the Trinity [keinen Umständen abstrahieren dürfen], and that means from the act of divine revelation.³³

He further criticizes this theology on the following account;

They spoke of three persons, of their inter-relationship, of their common work ad extra, without ever realizing the implications of the fact that this triune being does not exist and cannot be known as a being which rests or moves purely within itself. God is not in abstracto Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the triune God. He is so with a definite purpose and reference; in virtue of the love and freedom in which in the bosom of His triune being He has foreordained Himself from and to all eternity.³⁴

He seems to be of the opinion that these theologians never thought dynamically of the persons of the Trinity, but only in abstraction. That they actually did is debatable, but the point is that when traditional orthodoxy describes the essence of God apart from what He does in actions does not imply the consideration of God in abstracto. To make such an implication is a non sequitur. At any rate, Barth goes to the opposite extreme when he asserts,

The first [arbitrary way of thinking from which we have to free ourselves] consists quite naturally in the idea that unity is necessarily equivalent with being in and for oneself, with being enclosed and imprisoned in one's own being [Gefangensein in einer einzigen Seinsweise], with singleness and solitariness. But the unity of God is not like this. It is, of course, exclusively His unity. No other being, no created being is one with itself as God is. But what distinguishes His peculiar unity with Himself from all other unities or from what we think we know of such unities is the fact that--in

³³CD, The Doctrine of God, II, 1, p. 261; KD, II, 1, pp. 292f.

³⁴CD, The Doctrine of God, II, 2, p. 79; KD, II, 2, p. 85.

a particularity which is exemplary and instructive for an understanding of these others--it is a unity which is open and free and active in itself--a unity in more than one mode of being, a unity of the One with Another, of a first with a second, an above with a below, an origin and its consequences. It is a dynamic [dynamische] and living [lebendige] unity, not a dead [tote] and static [statische]. Once we have seen this, we will be careful not to regard that mean and unprofitable concept of unity as the last word of wisdom and the measure of all things. And its application to God will be ruled out once and for all.³⁵

It is more than likely that in effect Barth is saying that there is no such thing as an ontological God, but only a dynamic God as opposed to an ontological one, whose being consists only in what He does. This point is brought out very forcibly in the passage where he states that it is pointless and even in a sense idolatrous to think of a *λόγος ἄραρκος*, i.e. Christ, the Son of God before he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

In this context we must not 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 ἄραρκος*. What is the point of a regress to Him as the supposed basis of the being and knowledge of all things? In any case, how can we make such a regress? The second "person" of the Godhead in Himself and as such is not God the Reconciler. In Himself and as such He is not revealed to us. In Himself and as such He is not Deus pro nobis, either ontologically [ontologisch][our emphasis] or epistemologically. He is the content of a necessary and important concept in the trinitarian doctrine when we have to understand the revelation and dealings of God in the light of their free basis in the inner being and essence of God.³⁶

³⁵CD, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, IV, 1, p. 202; KD, IV, 1, pp. 220f.

³⁶CD, op. cit., p. 52; KD, op. cit., p. 54.

Actually Barth is maintaining that it is idolatrous to think of God or the members of the Trinity apart from their actions. In connection with this it is interesting to observe that Sabellius considered the distinction of the persons as lying in their actions (*ἐνεργεῖα*) or names.³⁷ Now because Barth in this sense adheres to a dynamic modalistic economy, he maintains that God must be the Subject, but never the object of our thoughts. It is He Who must act as a subject always does, but an object never does. An object is acted upon either by thought, word, or deed. He brings this out clearly.

Also and precisely as Son and as Spirit, He who reveals Himself according to the witness of Scripture is not an It nor a He; He remains Thou. And by remaining Thou He remains the Lord. The Subject [Subjekt] of revelation is the Subject that remains indissolubly Subject. We cannot get behind this Subject. It cannot become an object.³⁸

Van Til seems to have observed the same stress with reference to Barth by saying, ". . . in the doctrine of the Trinity, God stands before us as the one great Subject. Because he is the great Subject, he can never become the object of our thought."³⁹ Considering God as an object would be to place God into an ontological existence, but on the contrary,

³⁷ Supra, p. 27.

³⁸ CD, The Doctrine of the Word of God, I, 1, p. 438; KD, I, 1, p. 402.

³⁹ C. Van Til, The New Modernism (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., c.1947), p. 148.

according to Barth, He remains the Subject, the indissoluble I, the Being who can only be thought of as the One who acts as Subject by virtue of the fact that He is Subject. Van Til, on this very subject, apparently observes the same thing when he says,

Barth's whole argument, like the argument of the Existenz philosophers, is anti-metaphysical in character. It is the very purpose of the whole analysis of the trinity idea, according to the logic of the revelation concept as Barth conceives it, to be rid, once for all, of the ontological trinity, since it stands as it does for all that is evil in his eyes.⁴⁰

From this we can understand why Barth abhors the idea of self-consciousness in the persons of the Trinity after the analogy of a human personality. This cannot be done since it would be again turning God into the object of our thought instead of leaving Him as the Subject and the persons of the Trinity as actions of that Subject. So far does Barth go in his argument that he discards the use of number with reference to God in a quote gleaned by Van Til,

Applying the existential method, or the logic of the revelation concept, to the question of the trinity, we learn that when numerical distinctions are applied to the trinity they are to be taken negatively. "The application of numerical distinctions to God--can, in the nature of the case, have only negative significance. We are to attach no importance to either the number three or one." (Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes, Vol. 1 of Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf, Munchen, 1927, p. 158) Numerical distinctions are distinctions made by man and applicable directly to the surface-phenomenal; as such they hide even as they reveal when applied to God. With Aristotle, Barth says in effect that a numerically

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 153.

identifiable God is wholly meaningless to man.⁴¹

Thus ends our comparison and analysis. That additional material could be brought in to clarify in a more philosophical manner Barth's system is no doubt true, but at this point unnecessary. That actually lies outside the scope of this paper.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 147.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We have noted that Barth in a consistent manner applies the principle that God is alone the Subject, not the object of our thoughts. It is impossible, or rather degrading, verging on the point of idolatry, thus to think of God ontologically as the object, materially or otherwise. But rather, as Subject, God is one who acts, never and absolutely never one who is acted upon, not even to be considered in our thinking, but only as the One who acts on us.

In conformity with the above principle, Barth will not consider the persons of the Trinity as self-conscious individuals, since he would thus be objectifying the Trinity, tending to strike a comparison between the persons of the Trinity and human beings. The ontological Trinity must be discarded. Instead of regarding the members of the Trinity as persons he prefers the term "modes of being," signifying in a dynamic manner a modalistic economy of the members of the Trinity. He is not a Modalist in that he objects to the idea of regarding the "modes of being" as masks behind which is a hidden fourth entity. His Modalism is a refined type, unlike any of the modalistic teachings of the fourth century. It is not an ontological Modalism, but a Modalism existing in actions only. He even sees in his own "modalism" a danger in using the term, "modes of being." It is a relative

term because there is the ever present possibility of regarding the "modes" as objects, and not leaving them as the actions of the One divine Subject. For this reason he would also take issue with Basil the Great in that Basil's Trinity is an ontological one. The same holds true with all the other Fathers. Whether he himself would say outright that he denies an ontological Trinity is subject to debate, but as we see it, it is a conclusive result of an examination of his writings.

In the light of the above analysis it would not be considered rash to say that Barth is anti-Trinitarian, Trinitarian in his own eyes, yes, but not Trinitarian in the eyes of traditional orthodox theology. In fact we may go so far as to say that he is Unitarian in the sense that the only distinction he sets up in the one God is that of His various actions or "modes of being." There is no distinction set up with individual persons as all the Fathers contended.

In criticism we may say that Barth is trying to do the impossible, that of placing God in an unapproachable plane, approachable in that He approaches man, but unapproachable in that if Barth were consistent to the very end he would not even mention God. In the light of Scripture, his philosophical approach breaks down. He is actually limiting God as the one Subject instead of giving Him the credit of being able to be the object of our thoughts as Scripture throughout most certainly does. The very fact that God has created

man in His own image, that like God, man is also a subject, a subject of God, most certainly means that an ontological consideration of God as Object is necessary. This certainly would not exclude a dynamic consideration of God, as was seen from Basil when he also used the term "modes of being" in a dynamic as well as ontological sense, yet still held to the idea of self-conscious individual beings in an ontological sense. Neither would this exclude the consideration of God as Subject (not exclusively in the Barthian sense), which He most certainly is when He sends Christ, the Son, an individual being, a self-consciousness, as our Savior, as Scripture clearly indicates. But Barth's downfall occurs when he superimposes a philosophy on Scripture which regards God only as a Subject that acts, and His being only in that He acts as Subject. In short he is undoing what Scripture asserts.

Since Barth is considered the Father of modern Neo-Orthodox theology, it may be of considerable interest to explore the other theologians of the same class who have followed Barth more or less on similar philosophical presuppositions. That such an exploration would prove of great value is an understatement indeed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Aristotle. Topica. Edited by Maximilianus Wallies. Leipsig, Germany: B. G. Teubner, 1923.
- Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics. Vols. I-IV. Translated from the German by G. T. Thomson, et al. Edinburgh, England: T. & T. Clark, c.1936-.
- . Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. Vols. I-IV. Zurich, Switzerland: Evangelischer Verlag A. G. Zollikon, 1944-.
- Hippolytus, St. Refutationis Omnium Haeresium. Goettingen: Sumptibus Dieterichianis, 1859.
- Ireneaus, St. Contra Haereses, Part I of Opera. Edited by Domni Renati Massuet. Venetiis: Franciscum Petterium, 1734.
- Lewis, C. S. Beyond Personality: The Christian Idea of God. New York: The Macmillan Company, c.1945.
- Lutheran Hymnal, The. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941.
- Migne, J. P., editor. Patrologiae: Patrum Graecorum et Latinorum. Paris: n.p., 1844-1888.
- Page, T. E., editor. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929-.

Secondary Sources

- Prestige, G. L. God In Patristic Thought. London: Billing and Sons Ltd., c.1952.
- Van Til, Cornelius. The New Modernism. Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, c.1947.
- Wolfson, Harry Austryn. Faith, Trinity, Incarnation. Vol. I of The Philosophy of the Church Fathers. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, c.1956.