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Editorial Note: This concludes a series of three articles begun in the February issue of the current volume of this journal. They originated as lectures to an interested group of student pastors.

The doctrine of reconciliation is among the last subjects Barth has spoken on. This doctrine is presented in Vol. IV of his *Church Dogmatics* and embraces three parts. In Barth's dogmatics reconciliation includes not only the doctrine of the atonement and justification but also the work and person of Christ and the application of salvation (conversion and sanctification). This, I believe, is by far the best of Barth's volumes, especially Part I, which deals with the work of Christ and the justification of a sinner before God. Here Barth is simpler reading than usual, and he offers some important insights into the doctrine of the atonement. Here, too, his dogmatic conclusions seem to be much more in harmony with exegesis than elsewhere. In this present article I shall not outline his entire treatment of the subject, but merely point out five sensitive areas that are connected with the doctrine of reconciliation and in which, I believe, Barth's position is significant.

The Centrality of Justification

In our circles we might take for granted that justification is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae.* If so, we might do well to read Hamann's little book on *Justification by Faith in Modern Theology,*[1] where it is abundantly made clear that this article is not fundamental for many theologians today. Barth, however, wishes to restore justification to its central place in Christian dogmatics. He insists, "There never was and there never can be any true Christian Church without the doctrine of justification." There is no church without the truth of what God has done and does for man (*Church Dogmatics,* IV, 1, 523). The view of Schweitzer, Wrede, and others that justification by faith is only a subsidiary doctrine for Christianity, only something that Paul worked out in a polemical situation, must be rejected. The whole Christology of Paul is an argument for the doctrine of justification. Justification has a special function, Barth believes, a sort of unifying function, a function of keeping us from error.

> There can be no question of disputing the particular function of the doctrine of justification. And it is also in order that at certain periods and in certain situations, in face of definite oppositions and obscuration, this particular function has been brought out in a particular way, that it has been asserted as *the* Word of the Gospel, that both offensively and defensively it has been adopted as *the* theological truth. There have been times when

[1] Henry P. Hamann, *Justification by Faith in Modern Theology* (St. Louis: School for Graduate Studies, Concordia Seminary, 1957).

this has been not merely legitimate but necessary, when attention has had to be focused on the theology of Galatians and Romans. (IV, 1, 522)

Here he sounds like Luther, who used to warn that to keep clear the doctrine of justification was the only way to preserve ourselves from the errors of fanatics and sects.[2] Barth remarks that the times of Luther and Augustine were times when the understanding of the doctrine of justification saved the church from disaster. He points out that the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* is not the doctrine of justification as such but its basis and culmination (IV, 1, 527). This is correct; it includes the work of Christ. Thus we find Barth incorporating his discussion on the work and person of Christ in his section on reconciliation. He is not the first to do this; John Gerhard has done the same thing. And Luther would agree here. For he often spoke of the fundamental article as the article of Christ, or the article of faith in Christ.[3]

Sin and Grace as Presuppositions of Reconciliation

In orthodox theology we have always spoken of the Fall, sin, God's wrath and judgment, and grace as presuppositions of the doctrine of reconciliation; that is to say, we cannot understand reconciliation without a thought toward these other things. This is not the position of Barth, and here he deviates radically from all traditional theology. Grace is a presupposition, he maintains, and he offers a very fine discussion of the Biblical doctrine of grace coupled with a most sarcastic polemic against the Roman doctrine. Reconciliation can only be understood in the light of the Biblical doctrine of grace.

But sin is not a presupposition of justification. Rather the very opposite is the case: justification is the absolutely necessary presupposition of sin. In other words, you cannot know sin unless you first know Christ; sin can be known only in the light of the Gospel. Actually we know our own true nature only when we know the one true man, Jesus Christ, who is our Lord and Head and Representative and has brought "normalization to our human nature" (IV, 2, 453; cf. 280). Hence there can be no autonomous section *de peccato* in any dogmatics, but a discussion of sin must be subsumed under the section on reconciliation (as in Barth's dogmatics). Hamartology must be discussed under Christology (IV, 2, 403 ff.). Barth belabors this point throughout his dogmatics: "The truth is that Anselm's question, *Quanti ponderis sit peccatum?* is given an answer either from the cross of Christ or not at all" (IV, 1, 412; IV, 2, 380—385). This is surely strong language in the face of the great mass of N. T. evidence and the examples of so many in the N. T. who surely knew their sin but knew little or nothing of the Gospel. Barth finds fault with Schleiermacher for constructing an idea of sin with no reference to God, and of course Barth is correct. Sin is against God. We must think of God to think of sin, but we do not need to think of the Gospel to think of sin. Barth reminds us that we cannot make "a division of God into a god in Christ and a god outside Christ" (IV, 1, 376). But no responsible Christian theologian has ever done this.

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[2] WA 40 I, 296.

[3] WA 46, 19—21; 33, 213—214; 31, 254 to 256.

It is just that the stubborn fact remains that Lutherans and all theologians must speak of one thing at a time; we must and should speak of sin at one time and grace at another. And sin can at least be spoken of without a knowledge of grace, but grace cannot be spoken of without a knowledge of sin. Barth graciously concedes that orthodox theology has discussed sin in the light of everything that follows, viz., atonement, justification, faith, and salvation. Here is a grand confusion of Law and Gospel as we see it in Barth, precisely what Walther was speaking against when he wrote his seventh thesis, "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Gospel is preached first and then the Law."[4] Barth's entire position tumbles in the face of Rom. 3:20: "By the Law is the knowledge of sin."[5] (Cf. Rom. 5:20; 7:7)

It is true of course — and here Barth quotes Luther with telling effect — that the cross points up sin to us. Here we may recall a statement from the Formula of Concord, "Yea, what more forcible, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than just the suffering and death of Christ, His Son?"[6] But then carefully the words are added: "But as long as all this preaches God's wrath and terrifies men, it is not yet the preaching of the Gospel, nor Christ's own preaching, but that of Moses and the Law against the impenitent. For the Gospel and Christ were never ordained and given for the purpose of terrifying and condemning, but of comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid." Throughout Barth is quite consistent in his Gospel-Law emphasis.

We should want to go along with Barth only so far as to say that no man knows himself as he should know himself, as a redeemed sinner with an eschatological hope, unless he knows Christ. We would agree perfectly with Barth's statement, "The greater the concentration with which we look at Him [Christ], the better will be the knowledge we have of ourselves" (IV, 2, 269). It is just that we decline to follow his theory, built on his denial of any natural knowledge of God, that we cannot know sin at all apart from Christ and the Gospel. And we must reject his Gospel-Law emphasis.[7]

While we are on the matter of sin we might mention some other significant points. To Barth sin is primarily negation, nothingness, a lack. He calls sin "nonbeing" (IV, 1, 46); it is a reality, but not an "autonomous reality" (IV, 1, 144); it has the character of "nothingness." "Its character is purely negative" (IV, 2, 411).

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[4] *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 89.

[5] Concerning Rom. 3:20 Barth says (IV, 1, 395): "We wrest this statement from its context and misunderstand it if we take it to mean, as some did, that there is a Law which is different from the Gospel, a Law by which we are confronted and have to be confronted if we are to come to a knowledge of sin and to be led to repentance and to become receptive and ready for the Gospel."

[6] FC SD V 12. In a similar vein Luther says: "But the fact and the knowledge that all men are born in sin and are damned and that no one can come to grace except through Christ, the Son of God, and that one is saved only through Christ, who is Grace and Truth — all this is not known by Moses and the Law but by the Lord Christ and the Gospel." WA 46, 669; SL VII, 1707.

[7] Cf. Thomas Coates, "The Barthian Inversion: Gospel and Law," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXVI (July 1955), 481 to 491.

Wingren has been most critical of Barth on this point, maintaining that to Barth man's sin consists merely in this that he does not know God.[8] It is true that Barth tones down the positive aspect of sin as willful rebellion against God. Barth also denies original sin. He rejects the term *Erbsünde* and substitutes the term *Ursünde*. "The idea of a hereditary sin which has come to man by propagation is an unfortunate and mistaken one" (IV, 1, 500). It seems too illogical and arbitrary to him that sin could be propagated. "Hereditary sin has a hopelessly naturalistic, deterministic and fatalistic ring to it." So there is no state of integrity. Man is immediately a sinner. To Barth original sin is this, that each man is responsible.

In the light of the above excursus it is no wonder that Barth says sin is known only from the light of the cross. If Wingren is right and sin to Barth is basically lack of knowledge of God, then obviously one can only know sin if he knows Christ.

The Work of Christ

Barth insists that Christology and soteriology belong together. We would agree in this, and the fact that John Gerhard, as I have mentioned, includes the work of Christ in his locus on justification shows that there is good precedent for this approach.

Obedience is the word which describes Christ's life, according to Barth (IV, 1, 195). Here the temptation of Christ and the agony in Gethsemane bring out the full extent of Christ's obedience to the Father. The life of Christ was a *vicarious* life. Barth does not flinch from this word in the slightest, nor does he share Aulén's concern about it.[9] Jesus Christ "took our place," "allowed Himself to be judged for us" (IV, 1, 228). "In His omnipotence and mercy the Son of God has made Himself the Brother of this man [all men], and as his Brother his Representative, taking his place, accepting his guilt, perishing and passing and dying and being lost in his stead" (IV, 2, 293). This is orthodox language. Listen to him again.

> The decisive thing is not that He has suffered what we ought to have suffered so that we do not have to suffer it, the destruction to which we have fallen victim by our guilt, and therefore the punishment which we deserve. This is true, of course. But it is true only as it derives from the decisive thing that in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ it has come to pass that in His own person He has made an end of us sinners and therefore of sin itself by going to death as the One who took our place as sinners. (IV, 1, 253)

> He suffers this rejection not merely as a rejection by men but, fulfilled by men, as a rejection by God — the rejection which all others deserved and ought to have suffered, but which He bore in order that it should no more fall on them. Their cross does not mean that they have still to suffer God's rejection. This has been suffered already by Him (as their rejection). (IV, 2, 600)

There is more than one point of reference from which the doctrine of the atonement can be approached. The older Reformed and Lutheran theology considered the Atonement under the high priestly office of Christ. Aulén makes his basic emphasis or motif the victory theme. We

[8] *Theology in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 23—44.

[9] *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 236.

sometimes make the idea of redemption the main theme. The figure under which Barth feels the Atonement may be best discussed is the forensic picture. His approach to the doctrine of atonement (or reconciliation) is in terms of God's righteousness, and is thus forensic. I do not believe we should find fault with him for this, although it is novel. Next to the priest-sacrifice theme the forensic is the most common in the Bible, also in the O. T., where the righteousness of God both in judgment and in redemption is dealt with most emphatically. It is only when one takes a certain motif and limits the doctrine of the atonement to this, to the exclusion of other clear Scriptural evidence, that one gives a distorted presentation of the Atonement. It is perhaps well that Barth has chosen this new tack in presenting the doctrine of the atonement, for the justice of God has not been given its due by many theologians of late, and the idea of forensic justification has been toned down by many. All this means that Barth does not shrink from calling the Atonement a *satisfaction,* an offering *quid pro quo.* He even defends Hollaz who said, "In a certain respect Christ made satisfaction to Himself." (IV, 1, 281)

One flaw must be mentioned in his doctrine of atonement. Although he is insistent against Ritschl and his followers that God is angry with sin and that this is something in God which is real — constantly working itself out in history — and must be reckoned with, he denies that this wrath of God is turned away by the reconciliation of Christ. We must never say that God is reconciled, according to Barth. God is unchangeable and does not need to be reconciled (IV, 1, 253 and 186). This is in direct conflict with Art. III of the Augsburg Confession and with Scripture (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19 and especially Rom. 5:10, where the ἐχθροί in the context must be taken passively). Christ's struggle in Gethsemane and on the cross was not primarily a struggle to subdue man's enmity but a struggle with God.[10] (Cf. Luke 18:13)

The Results of Christ's Work

We have already been talking of the results of Christ's work in Barth's theology, although only by implication. According to Barth, universal justification is the result of Christ's work. The atoning work of Christ does not present a mere possibility but an actuality (IV, 1, 285). The Atonement through the death of Christ means that all died, all people of all time, even though they may not believe this or even hear it (IV, 1, 295). The resurrection of Christ is the great verdict of God (IV, 1, 309). "He Himself, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made man, was justified by God in His resurrection from the dead. He was justified as man, and in Him as the Representative of all men all were justified" (IV, 1, 306). Faith does not effect or in any way complete justification. God's verdict has long since taken place (IV, 1, 317). Here in Barth's doctrine of uni-

[10] G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 236, sums up Barth's doctrine of God's wrath admirably with one pithy statement: "Wrath is real, but only as the 'modus' of the divine love. As such it really exists *within the area of grace.*" Again he says significantly on p. 253: "Barth does indeed acknowledge the 'reaction' of God against sin, but his emphasis on the a priori power of God's 'initiative' threatens to swallow up this acknowledgment."

versal justification we find a constantly recurring emphasis, a motif.

If we were to assume that Barth here is presenting a position very like our Lutheran doctrine of objective, or universal, justification, we should be premature in our judgment. For to Barth not merely redemption and justification are universal and pertain to all. He speaks also of a universal conversion and sanctification.

> The reconciliation of the world with God takes place in the person of a man in whom, because He is also true God, the conversion of all men to God is an actual event *{die Umkehrung aller Menschen zu Gott hin Ereignis wird}*. (IV, 1, 130)
>
> It was His concern to create order, to convert the world to Himself, and therefore genuinely to reconcile it *{Es ging ihn wirklich darum, Ordnung zu schaffen, die Welt zu sich hin umzukehren und so echt und recht mit sich zu versöhnen}*. (IV, 1, 237)

From the foregoing we might conclude that Barth is employing the term "conversion" in an unusual sense to denote merely "reconciliation." But again such a conclusion would be premature. For Barth's universal conversion has vast implications. It means that we (even before faith) belong to this man, He is our Head (IV, 2, 266). It means that we are now with Him (IV, 2, 272), that everyone is already "in Christ" (IV, 2, 273; 283). There is even now an ontological connection between Christ and all men which is the basis of the Christian kerygma (IV, 2, 270). That "God's verdict and direction and promise have been pronounced over all" means that "objectively, all are justified, sanctified and called" (IV, 1, 148). Perhaps the clearest statement of Barth's position on the implications of this universal conversion is to be found in his discussion of the meaning of the Christmas message. He says:

> And what is this message? It is not just the supernatural indicative that there was then born an exceptional man who was God Himself, a creature who was also the Creator who rules over all things, and that this remote fact is our salvation if we today accept it. Nor is it the supernatural imperative that what took place then can and should be repeated today, God Himself being born in us, or in our soul. What it does tell us is that in the union of God with our human existence which then took place uniquely in the existence of this man, prior to our attitude to it, before we are in any position to accept or reject it, with no need for repetition either in our soul or elsewhere, we today, bearing the same human essence and living at a particular point in time and space, *were taken up* (quite irrespective and even in defiance of our own action and merits) *into the fellowship with God* [my emphasis] for which we were ordained but which we ourselves had broken; and that we are therefore taken up into this fellowship in Him, this One. (IV, 2, 270)[11]

[11] The above agrees quite generally with Barth's doctrine of election in Christ (Barth calls it supralapsarianism, but in an un-Calvinistic sense): viz., that Christ is reprobate and rejected for all men and that all men are elect in Him (II, 2, 166). This view stands against the Formula of Concord (SD XI 5), which says that election does not extend over both godly and wicked. Barth's doctrine of election is almost identical with the first of the eight points in the Formula of Concord, which says: "1. That the human race is truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who, by His faultless obedience, suffering, and death, has merited for us the righteousness which avails before God, and eternal life" (XI 5). Barth's position (cf. II, 2, 167) approximates what Samuel Huber taught in the late 16th century, viz., universal election, not, however, universal salvation.

May we say on the basis of this statement that we are faced merely with a terminological shift, and therefore confusion, which is typical of Barth, who often gives new content to established ecclesiastical and Biblical terms? No, the problem goes deeper than that. I pass over the charge of universalism, which has so often been made against Barth, for he denies that this is the conclusion to be drawn from his position. Rather to understand the full implication of Barth's position outlined above I would dwell momentarily on his idea regarding the impossibility of unbelief. It is a profound and difficult question to Barth how man who is lost and spiritually dead and impotent can believe. "How can sinful man — there is an obvious *contradictio in adiecto* here — believe?" (IV, 1, 746). The obvious answer is that it is impossible. Barth proceeds to assert that we must never make or speak of faith as a "possibility." "In a rivalry between a possible faith and actual sin, faith will always come off second best. The rivalry will have ended in favor of our sin even before it has begun." No, there is no possibility for faith, for every man chooses to disbelieve. And yet faith is necessary. The point here is that faith is never for man a chance or proposition which he can accept now or at any time. "It is not for man to choose first whether he himself will decide (what an illusion!) for faith or for unbelief." Where there is faith unbelief is an impossibility; it is swept away. But this necessity of faith does not lie in man. Fallen man cannot believe. It lies in Christ, the Object of faith. Listen to Barth's rather enigmatic statement on the entire matter [italics are mine].

> In this destroying and renewing of man as it took place in Jesus Christ there consists the necessity of faith, because beyond this destroying and renewing there remains for sinful man only faith in the One in whom it *has* taken place. In the death of Jesus Christ both the destroying and renewing *have* taken place for *all* men, and the fact that this has happened has been revealed as valid for all men in His resurrection from the dead. Therefore objectively, really, ontologically, there is a necessity of faith for them all. This object of faith is, in fact, the circle which encloses them *all,* and which *has to be closed* by every man in the act of his faith. Jesus Christ is not simply one alternative or chance which is offered to men, one proposition which is made to him. He is not put there for man's choice, *à prendre ou à laisser.* The other alternative is, in fact, swept away in Him.
>
> For this reason unbelief has become an objective, real and ontological impossibility and faith an objective, *real and ontological* necessity for *all men* and for *every man.* In the justification of the sinner which has taken place in Jesus Christ these have both become an event which comprehends all men. (IV, 1, 747. Cf. II, 2, 167)

What can we make of this strange language? Obviously all men do not come to believe. Barth is concerned to nail down two theological truths which should be equally important to us: (1) the factuality of salvation for all in Christ, (2) divine monergism in man's appropriation of God's proffered salvation. This last emphasis is made throughout the section under discussion, which is entitled "Faith [presumably in the N.T. sense of the term] and its Object." If this were all Barth has in mind with his cryptic language, we should hardly wish to disagree. We should only want to insist that man does the "impossible" when he rejects God's promises — and Barth

himself asserts this — and to maintain also that when man says yes to God's promises and thereby does what Barth says is "the only objective, real and ontological thing which he can do," he does so not by coercion, as Barth implies, when he says later that man really "has no other choice."

It may be that precisely here we are putting our finger on the real difficulty of Barth's position. Is it possible that Barth does not take sin, particularly the sin of unbelief, quite seriously enough? Unbelief is rebellion against God, and this rebellion, this no to God, is objective and real and ontological, and (this is the important and terrible thing!) it may and can and does thwart God's purpose for us. The awful truth is that God wills one thing for man, and men will the opposite, and men's will wins out (Matt. 23:37). Man can always reject God. This is a real possibility; grace is resistible. Now if this conclusion of ours does not seem to comport with the view (of Barth's) that God's salvation is a sovereign salvation, we shall simply have to live with this tension — for it is Scriptural. We cannot minimize the importance Scripture lays upon man's response to God, whether it be yes or no. Scripture never implies the "ontological impossibility" of unbelief, but consistently warns against the possibility of this and the dreadful results of it.

As I have intimated, Barth teaches that justification is forensic. In this he is most insistent. But we must not, he says, think of justification as an ineffectual and empty verdict upon man. When man is justified it is not merely as though he were righteous; he is righteous. We do well to listen to Barth again at this point.

> There is no room for any fears that in the justification of man we are dealing only with a verbal action, with a kind of bracketed "as if," as though what is pronounced were not the whole truth about man. Certainly we have to do with a declaring righteous, but it is a declaration about man which is fulfilled and therefore effective in this event, which corresponds to actuality because it creates and therefore reveals the actuality. It is a declaring righteous which without any reserve can be called a making righteous. Christian faith does not believe in a sentence which is ineffective or only partly effective. As faith in Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead, it believes in a sentence which is absolutely effective, so that man is not merely called righteous before God but is righteous before God. (IV, 1, 95. Cf. IV, 1, 283)

This, I believe, is a classic statement.

Faith (the Appropriation)

The foregoing leads us naturally to the question of the place of faith in justification. As has been implied, faith to Barth is not a virtue, for faith merely sees oneself under the judgment of God but for the act of Christ. Faith neither assists or adds to what Christ has done (IV, 1, 317). Justification by faith does not mean that man presents the work of faith to God (IV, 1, 615). Only the arrogance of Modernism would make faith such a thing. "A self-fabricated faith is the climax of unbelief" (IV, 1, 745). But faith embraces the treasure, and faith alone can do this, for faith is the very exclusion of human co-operation in justification (IV, 1, 626). Thus justification is by faith alone. Still it is a "living, active, busy thing," as Luther said (IV, 1, 627). Again Barth is most insistent and lengthy in his emphasis.

On the object of faith Barth appears to be quite sound. Faith is the orientation of

man on Jesus Christ. Faith is in Him. Man who believes looks to Him, holds to Him. "Faith is following, following its object" (IV, 1, 742). Faith owes nothing to the human subject and his activity. It stands or falls with its object.

And here we see the final emphasis in Barth's doctrine of faith, that it is a gift. Monergism marks Barth's theology throughout, and in this he is always consistent, just as he is consistent also in maintaining the sovereignty of God and the utter separation of nature and grace.

We might close this series of articles with this question: What is the reason for Barth's great impact and reputation? Certainly not didactic ability, simplicity, or compelling logic. He has not succeeded in any of these. He is ponderous, to say the least. Nor is his impact due to his popularity, that he tells people what they want to hear. For if his theology is found wanting by our conservative standards, it will be even more opposed by Modernism and Liberalism because of its emphasis on resurrection, atonement, forensic justification, God's wrath, etc. I can offer only one suggestion: he is recognized as a theologian who today wants to remain within the stream of Christian theology and to some extent succeeds.

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