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| Evangelical Theological Society “God and God Incarnate” Study Group Weds. Nov. 19, 2003 3:15pm | Dr. Fred Sanders Assistant Professor of Theology Torrey Honors Institute, Biola University |
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Karl Barth on Rahner’s Rule: God’s Freedom For the World and From the World

An important trend in trinitarian theology in the late 20th century was to bring the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity as close together as possible, even to the point of identifying them completely. Karl Rahner’s (1904-1984) famous dictum, “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa,”¹ was the watchword of the movement, and helped revitalize trinitarian theology by re-centering it on the history of salvation. Much of the impetus behind this revitalization came from the work of Karl Barth (1886-1968), who labored in the early decades of the century to eliminate from Christian discourse any hint of a God who is not revealed in Jesus Christ. Did Karl Barth, then, identify the economic Trinity with the immanent? Did Barth affirm Rahner’s Rule?

The question is enticingly anachronistic, and is worth posing because it provides a valuable angle on some of the central issues in Christian theology. God in Christ has given himself to the sinful world in unfathomable love and commitment, and yet he is free, unconstrained, and sovereign over creation. Has God bound himself to his sinful covenant partners in such a way as to forswear his own freedom? Or does God maintain some distance and reserve, holding humanity at arm’s length? Barth’s theology manages to grasp the two poles of God’s committed love and sovereign freedom, describing them in a way that does not pit them against each other in mutual contradiction. He provides resources for an account of divine freedom which is enacted and expressed in God’s faithfulness to humanity rather than in his hypothetical ability to remove his faithfulness. As he remarks somewhere in the fine print of the *Church Dogmatics*: “Yahweh does not stand above the covenant, but in it, yet He is also not under it.”²

¹ This name was coined by either Ted Peters [according to Roger Olson, “Wolfgang Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990), 178], or by Roger Olson [according to Ted Peters, *GOD as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 213].

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-69), volume IV, part 1, 25. Hereafter cited as *CD* followed by volume, part-volume, and page number (*CD* IV/1, 25).

When we state it in this more expansive way, our question is obviously an inquiry about the identity of the God who loves in freedom, and that is the deeper reason why it must take the form of an exploration of the regulatory function of the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology. Because Barth recognized the question at issue here as “the question who God is,” a question “which it is the business of the doctrine of the Trinity to answer” (CD I/1, 301), it is particularly in the context of trinitarian theology that he developed his ideas, exploring the dialectical connection between God’s freedom and love by weaving together the immanent and economic Trinity. This paper focuses on Barth’s trinitarianism as expressed throughout the *Church Dogmatics*, not only in his epochal opening treatise on the triune God (I/1), but also in his discussion of revelation (I/2), the knowledge and reality of God (II/1), election (II/2), and reconciliation (especially IV/1).

Perhaps it is worth saying up front that the short answer to our question is no: Karl Barth did not affirm the content of Rahner’s Rule, and would not have assented to it nor recognized his own interests in it had he met with it in its classical form. However, the full answer is more complex and more illuminating than the simple no. Because the bulk of Barth’s work predated Rahner’s Rule and the particular discussion its appearance provoked,³ we must begin at a safe distance in order to approach his thought on its own terms. Once we have established some of the relevant leading ideas from his theology, we can attempt to draw out his implicit views on whether the economic and immanent Trinity should be said to be related in the way Rahner proposed. To this end, we will investigate a handful of related doctrines (especially the preexistence of Christ, the status of the *logos asarkos*, and a technical question about the agent of the incarnation) to see if Barth is consistent with his trinitarian commitments in other areas. We will locate Barth’s position along the spectrum of positions taken by theological interpreters of Rahner’s Rule, giving special attention to a recent dispute between Bruce McCormack, who argues that Barth’s deepest insights should make economic and immanent Trinity identical in form and content, and Paul Molnar, who maintains that Barth separates the two quite decisively. Having thus climbed out among the branches and twigs of Barth interpretation, we will return to the trunk of the tree and develop a constructive statement on the relationship between the economic and immanent Trinity, in dialogue with Barth. What we can learn from Karl Barth for

³ For a survey of some of the most important works published in this ongoing discussion, see my forthcoming study *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner’s Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (NY: Peter Lang, 2004).

the ongoing task of Christian dogmatics is that theology is obliged to recognize the priority of the immanent Trinity in order to account for God's freedom, while remaining as close as possible to the economic Trinity at all times in order to avoid unwarranted abstraction which would lead Christian theologians to speak of a God who is not –or at least is not necessarily-- the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

I. Rahner's Rule and Its Interpreters

First, a brief explanation of the terminology which has become standard in this discussion: economic and immanent. The distinction itself has its roots in Greek patristic theology, where *oikonomia*, following New Testament usage, signified the administration of God's plan of salvation in a sequence of appointed moments. *Oikonomia* is, etymologically, "household law," and in classical usage it refers primarily to the financial management of a household. In an expanded sense, it was used to describe any setting in order, as for instance the ordering of a subject for clear treatment by rhetoricians. In the New Testament *oikonomia* retains this original sense in the family of words translated as "steward," "stewardship," and "dispensation." From this sense it expanded to denote God's unfolding purpose in the world, and already by the time of Ignatius of Antioch a christological focus of this sense is evident. In Irenaeus' theology, God's *oikonomia* has clearly come to be primarily concerned with Jesus Christ's fulfillment of God's purposes via the incarnation. The economic Trinity, therefore, is the presence of God in this economy of salvation.

As soon as the category of *oikonomia* was clearly delimited, patristic thinkers found it necessary to play it off against *theologia*, or the doctrine of the triune God *in se*, considered as theology proper apart from the incarnation of the Son for our sakes. Athanasius' usage of the two terms is typical: he described what would later be known as Christ's two natures as "that which is *kata oikonomia*, and that which is *kata theologia*." *Theologia* has in recent centuries been given the label "the immanent Trinity," where "immanent" has the sense of "actions remaining within an agent." The immanent Trinity, then, is God *in se*, God's life and action *ad intra* from all eternity, without reference to creation or incarnation.

In the history of theology, the doctrine of the immanent Trinity has at times drifted away from its moorings in the economy of salvation, and as a result theological statements about God's eternal immanent triunity have often seemed very remote and speculative. The three

persons of God have sometimes been understood more by way of various analogies to the human person's three highest faculties (memory, knowledge, and love), or as three indistinguishable persons joined together. Trinitarianism's history has been a long sad story of the widening gap between this speculatively-derived, abstractly described version of the immanent Trinity and the concrete history of salvation in which the Son is sent by the Father and later sends the Spirit. Deploring this divorce between the two, Karl Rahner set forth an argument in a little book called *The Trinity*,⁴ which has been immensely influential. What has come to be known as Rahner's Rule is this simple axiom: *The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity*. The first half of the axiom has an uncontroversial aspect: that our experience of Father, Son, and Spirit in the history of salvation is truly an experience of God as he is in his eternal life, rather than of something less than God. God reveals himself as he truly is, and since he truly is these three persons in one being, he appears in salvation history in that way. The second half of the axiom, which reverses the first half, has proven more difficult to come to terms with: it implies that God in himself is identical with his manifestation to and participation in the economy of salvation. This "vice versa" has been the most controversial part of Rahner's Rule. Some conservative interpreters truncate the axiom, affirming only the first half because they view the second half as collapsing God's eternal being into the events of world history, a move that seems to imply ontological views consonant with either Hegel or Whitehead. Other conservative interpreters affirm the entire axiom but specify ways in which they think it should be qualified or restricted in its implications. One way or the other, these theologians give qualified assent to the axiom, appreciating its value for healing the rift between the immanent and economic Trinity. Another school of interpreters, however, affirm Rahner's Rule as it stands, but wish that it went further or was more radical. Some of these thinkers argue that an unreserved application of Rahner's Rule would rightly entail the complete denial of the very existence of the immanent Trinity. These more radical interpreters (some are Hegelian or

⁴ "Der Dreifaltige Gott als Transzenderer Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte," in *Mysterium Salutis*, edited by Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer, volume 2 (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1967); ET by Joseph Donceel, *The Trinity* (NY: Herder and Herder, 1970). Crossroad Herder reprinted this volume, with a new introduction, brief index, and glossary by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, in 1997. The first sub-section of Rahner's *Mysterium Salutis* chapter was itself an expansion and revision of his essay "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise De Trinitate," originally published in 1960 and in English translation in *Theological Investigations* vol. 4 (1966). Thus Rahner's most distinctive remarks about the Trinity, including his famous lament and his Grundaxiom, were in print by 1960. Some of the argument (including the Grundaxiom itself) had already appeared in 1959 in "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," (ET in *Theological Investigations* vol. 4).

Whiteheadian, though most are more eclectic in their ontological commitments) do not merely turn their attention to the economy because it is the place where the immanent Trinity is revealed; they turn to the economy because it is all there is. God must then be understood as somehow constituting his being in the course of world history. In Karl Rahner's own thought, both conservative and radical tendencies can be discerned, and the rule itself is somewhat unstable as it is formulated, positing a distinction which it simultaneously overcomes (as if it said, "there are dogs and there are cats, and all dogs are cats and vice versa). It seems to require stabilization toward one side or the other: either restrict it so that the distinction between immanent and economic is preserved, or extend it so that the economic and immanent are resolved into each other and no longer require distinguishing. To ask about Karl Barth's position regarding Rahner's Rule, then, is to ask how he would negotiate this set of issues, and to ask which school of interpreters he would belong to if faced with the task of evaluating Rahner's Rule.

II. "Antecedently In Himself:"

The Economic-Immanent Axis of Barth's *Dogmatics*

Midway through the first volume of what was destined to become the 14 volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth has just sounded his favorite theme, the glad news of God for us, when he immediately poses the rhetorical question: "What would 'God for us' mean if it were not said against the background of 'God in Himself?'"⁵ Here in epigrammatic form is the dynamic between God's inner being and his outward actions which characterizes all of Barth's work. In tract after tract of the sprawling argument that is the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth expounds every major doctrine in terms of this movement between God's own life in himself and God's gracious work in redeeming us. If the assertion has two poles, it is difficult to judge which pole Barth is most concerned to bring to our attention: that God has in fact passed over from the region of his utter self-sufficiency and inner blessedness into our world of need, or that he has done so without abandoning or jeopardizing his inner blessedness. Barth always manages to state his claims dialectically, so that both the yes and the no are heard simultaneously. The best way to see this is to examine how both poles function across a range of doctrinal areas.

⁵ *CD* I/1, 171.

To begin with foundational matters, Barth's crucial doctrine of divine revelation is notoriously closely connected with the doctrine of the Trinity, and thus exhibits this dual movement between God's mysterious depths and his turning toward us. As early as 1924 Barth had written to his friend Eduard Thurneysen that in his dogmatics lectures at Göttingen he was breaking through to a doctrine of "A Trinity of being, not just an economic Trinity! At all costs, the doctrine of the Trinity! If I could just get the right key in my hand there, then everything would come out right..."⁶ The lavishly trinitarian first part-volume of the Church Dogmatics, I/1, was only his opening round, and as he fired off successive volumes of the Dogmatics over the years he grew more resolutely and insistently trinitarian in his approach to theology.

Barth begins with the fundamental assertion that taking Christian faith seriously demands that we base our understanding of God on the revelation in Jesus Christ; in other words, that God must be as we see him revealed in Jesus. Revelation is self-revelation, and in revealing himself to us God is not playing a game or putting on one of many possible faces. "God is precisely the One He is in showing and giving Himself." (CD I/1, 382) There can be no revelation gap inserted between God and Jesus, such that somewhere in the darkness behind the God of Jesus Christ lurks the real, absolute God: "No, revelation has eternal content and eternal validity. Down to the very depths of deity, not as something penultimate but as the ultimate thing that is to be said about God, God is God the Son as He is God the Father." (CD I/1, 414) He then unfolds his doctrine of the Trinity from the fact and content of the revelation in Jesus Christ: God is himself in se, and no less himself in his revelation, and then once again equally himself in the effect of his revelation. To put it in the densest form: "God reveals himself as Lord." (CD I/1, 295ff) God himself, through himself, reveals himself, as Lord. Nor is the triunity in which God reveals himself to us merely a phenomenon of the revelation itself, as if God has shown us a threefoldness which has no foundation in his inmost being: "God's triunity is to be found not merely in His revelation but, because in His revelation, in God Himself and in Himself too, so that the Trinity is to be understood as 'immanent' and not just 'economic'" (CD I/1, 333).

What is remarkable is that by moving the Trinity to the front of his system and engaging it with his central ideas, Barth has restored the doctrine to its original place in the structure of Christian faith. Instead of being a problem that needs to be solved, the doctrine of the Trinity

⁶Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914 1925, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), 176.

functions as the solution to problems in other tracts of Christian doctrine. It has explanatory value rather than standing in need of explanation. In Barth's theology, trinitarianism stops being a rarefied riddle and becomes instead the hermeneutical key for opening up questions in all theological loci.

Of Barth's three major contributions (closing the revelation gap, unfolding the doctrine of the Trinity from the concept of revelation, and using the Trinity as explanatory key), the first and last have been widely influential and have set the tone of the ensuing conversation, while the second is more idiosyncratically Barthian, bound up as it is with a strict insistence on revelation as exclusively self-revelation, and an equally strict rejection of natural theology in any guise. But the basic import of Barth's trinitarianism is that he has reversed a long history of subordinating the doctrine of the Trinity to a general doctrine of God. To begin with "God in general" and then move to "God as revealed as Trinity" would be to insert a dangerous gap, and to open the door for some other God to intrude into Christian theology. Instead, Barth led the way in using the doctrine of the Trinity to secure the identity of God, to answer the question "which God?" by referring to the biblical story of the history of salvation. All of Barth's theological maneuvers discussed above can be seen as a concerted effort to mobilize trinitarian resources in answering "the question who God is, which it is the business of the doctrine of the Trinity to answer." "The doctrine of the Trinity," he says, "is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation."⁷

In *Church Dogmatics* II/1, Barth takes up the challenge of moving from his doctrine of revelation to the actual doctrine of God. Here he faces the question of how God can be revealed without becoming a controllable factor within human experience. The double bind Barth describes is as follows: On the one hand, if God is to be truly revealed, then God must become no longer merely the subject of divine actions, but an actual object of our cognition. Yet if God becomes an object within our experience, then this object which he becomes, being amenable to our manipulation, is no longer Lord. God therefore, not being revealed as Lord, is not truly revealed. The problem itself is of course already distinctively Barthian, and not one that would emerge in just any theological system. Barth's solution, however, is what is particularly relevant to the discussion of Rahner's Rule. God is indeed truly revealed to us, and therefore has become

⁷ CD I/1, 301.

an object of our knowledge. This is made possible by the fact that the possibility of God's being rendered an object is already actualized within the divine life itself, within the immanent Trinity.

In His triune life as such, objectivity, and with it knowledge, is divine reality before creaturely objectivity and knowledge exist. We call this the primary objectivity of God, and distinguish from it the secondary, i.e., the objectivity which He has for us too in His revelation, in which He gives Himself to be known by us as He knows Himself. It is distinguished from the primary objectivity, not by a lesser degree of truth, but by its particular form suitable for us, the creature. God is objectively immediate to Himself, but to us He is objectively mediate (CD II/1, 16).

Barth thus begins from the actuality of revelation and reasons back to the conditions which must obtain to have made it possible: "Where the actuality exists there is also the corresponding possibility" (CD II/1, 5). This is the procedure which grounds all of Barth's "transcendental deductions" of doctrine. God has given himself over to us in the economy, to stand before us as object under the sign of created realities, because already within the immanent Trinity God has given himself over directly to himself. The primary objectivity grounds the secondary: "His secondary objectivity is fully true, for it has its correspondence and basis in His primary objectivity. God does not have to be untrue to Himself and deceive us about His real nature in order to become objective to us. For first to Himself, and then in His revelation to us, He is nothing but what He is in Himself" (CD II/1, 16).

This distinction between God's primary and secondary objectivity allows Barth to simultaneously guarantee the validity of revelation and to affirm the graciousness of God in opening this revelation to us. Barth alternately emphasizes the one and then the other, making the most of this flexible conceptual tool: "First of all and in the heart of the truth in which we know God, God knows Himself; the Father knows the Son and the Son the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. This occurrence in God Himself is the essence and strength of our knowledge of God" (CD II/1, 48-49). Thus far the doctrine of God's objectivity as the guarantee of revelation, of the direct connection between economic and immanent Trinity. But then the other side:

It is not an occurrence unknown to us; rather it is made known to us through His Word; but it is certainly a hidden occurrence. That is to say, it is an occurrence in which man as such is not a participant, but in which he becomes a participant through God's revelation and thus in a way inconceivable to himself. It is not self evident that we become participants in it, that our knowledge of God acquires truth as the external expression of that inner truth (CD II/1, 49).

In this inconceivability and lack of self-evidence Barth tries to do justice to the distinction between economic and immanent Trinity. With this distinction between the primary and secondary objectivity of God in place, Barth goes on to make a number of pronouncements which are as close as he ever gets to explicitly stating Rahner's Rule, such as "He acts towards us as the same triune God that He is in Himself" (CD II/1, 51). To paraphrase at least this tract of Barth's theology, we could translate Rahner's Rule into Barthian categories by saying that the economic Trinity is the secondary objectivity which corresponds to the primary objectivity of God in the immanent Trinity. The resulting formula's similarity to Rahner's Rule is obvious, but its dissimilarity is equally instructive.

The distinction between two kinds of objectivity becomes one of the most important structural elements of Barth's theology from this point on, and receives an almost baroque elaboration in the doctrine of God's perfections in the second half of *Church Dogmatics II/1*. With each of God's perfections, Barth treats it first as revealed in the economy of salvation, and then reflects on what that attribute must be like in God himself, without reference to us. This dynamic interplay of economic and immanent is sometimes straightforward, as when God's righteousness is said to characterize his own inner life before being opened up to us for our justification. But it is most instructive to see Barth pushing hard to delineate the economic-immanent dialectic in a few cases where it requires more work, for instance with the grace of God. Grace is the concrete form taken by God's love when, seeking to establish fellowship with another, it is met by unworthiness and opposition (II/1, 353). In this form we meet God's grace, as "He condescends, He, the only One who is really in a position to condescend" (II/1, 354). If we encounter God's love with this form and content (that of grace), then God's love must already have such a character immanently, within the divine life, or else we are meeting with God's love in an altered form which does not really deliver self-revelation. True to his principles, Barth argues accordingly: "Grace is an inner mode of being in God Himself... He is gracious in Himself and therefore gives Himself to be known as gracious and acts graciously" (II/1, 353). But how can this be, since in the inner life of God no love is ever met with unworthiness or opposition, but only with perfectly answering love? Barth replies: "The form in which grace exists in God Himself and is actual as God is in point of fact hidden from us and incomprehensible to us" (II/1, 357). In a kind of transcendental deduction, Barth follows the principle of "antecedently in himself" and asserts that even though it is inconceivable to us, "He

who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is from eternity to eternity the center and source of all unity and all peace, therefore He must be the origin and essence of that which we know as grace in such a very different form,” for indeed “how can it have divine reality in the form known to us if it does not have reality in the unfathomable life of God Himself?” (CD II/1, 358) So although we cannot know what grace is when it is immanent to God, we must posit its existence there as the transcendent ground and possibility of the exercise of grace under the conditions of our experience (to speak for once like a doctrinal version of Kant, as Barth occasionally did in this period).

One of the most surprising doctrinal loci in which this economic-immanent axis is described is in the massive christological paragraphs of volume IV, the doctrine of reconciliation. Rather than treating the three offices of Christ as mere exercises of Christ’s duties as mediator, Barth takes the offices of Christ as prophet, priest, and king up into the immanent Trinity, tracing them within the very being of God’s eternal triune life. The priesthood of Christ, for example, reveals “The Lord as Servant,” and is expounded under the heading of “The Obedience of the Son of God,” an obedience and submission judged to be revelatory of the eternal person of the Son. In other words, the fact that Christ the Lord becomes servant in order to be our priest shows that “it belongs to the inner life of God that there should take place within it obedience.” (CD IV/1, 201). The eternal relationship of personal subordination of the Son to the Father finds its “strangely logical final continuation” in the history of salvation, in the infinite condescension and painful obedience of the cross, because “He is in and for the world what He is in and for Himself” (CD IV/1, 203-4). Barth’s discussion in IV/3 of Christ as prophet is equally illuminating. [note to self: decide whether to develop this argument for another page of description; cite tracts from IV/2 – IV/3, footnote Webster]

We have sketched the most prominent appearances of the economic-immanent axis in Barth’s theology, from revelation and the knowledge of God to the divine attributes and Christology. It is an axis that runs between God in himself and God for us, around which turns the whole structure of Barth’s thought.⁸ The journey from the immanent Trinity to the economic Trinity is, to borrow Barth’s own language from another context, “the way of the knowledge of

⁸ Many thinkers correctly identify this axis, but misinterpret its significance. So for example, Dietrich Ritschl describes “the abolition of the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity” as “THE basic theological epistemological thesis in Karl Barth’s dogmatics.” Dietrich Ritschl, “Historical Development and Implications of the Filioque Controversy,” in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy* [Faith and Order Paper Number 103], ed. Lukas Vischer (London: SPCK, 1981), 46- 65.

God” (II/1, 179). Theology must walk in this way, tracing the path from God’s aseity to his promeity, arcing back and forth along the axis in tireless obedience to the God whose covenant faithfulness is encountered along this way. Rahner’s Rule, that “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity,” is a description which collapses the axis, strictly identifying the two poles with each other and eliminating the need for intellectual movement from one to the other. The line becomes a point. In Barth’s Dogmatics, the economic-immanent axis is a way from there to here; in Rahner’s Rule it is an x that marks a single spot. Thus Barth’s “no” to Rahner’s Rule, a protest that keeps us from reducing God’s free, personal action to a state of affairs or a view of things.

In the thinking necessary in correlating God and man we must not think away the free basis that this correlation has in God... If we are not to do this, then it is not just good sense but absolutely essential that along with all older theology we make a deliberate and sharp distinction between the Trinity of God as we may know it in the Word of God revealed, written and proclaimed, and God's immanent Trinity, i.e., between 'God in Himself' and 'God for us,' between the 'eternal history of God' and his temporal acts. In so doing we must always bear in mind that the 'God for us' does not arise as a matter of course out of the 'God in Himself,' that it is not true as a state of God which we can fix and assert on the basis of the concept of man participating in his revelation, but that it is true as an act of God, as a step which God takes towards man and by which man becomes the man that participates in His revelation. (CD I/1, 172)

Equating economic and immanent Trinity is to witness “the synthetic ‘God into the world’ becoming an analytic ‘God in the world’” (CD I/1, 341).

III. Confessing God’s Freedom Dogmatically

It is not always sufficient to reach the right conclusions about the relation of the economic and immanent Trinity just when considering the theme explicitly. Especially because Barth’s treatment of the economic-immanent axis is dynamic and dialectical, and because the topic itself is so expansive and so intimately connected with other doctrines, it is entirely possible that a theologian could affirm the immanent Trinity in one place and go on to speak inconsistently in another context, reducing God’s being to his being for us in the economic Trinity. Indeed, this tendency toward inconsistency is one of the factors which made trinitarian theology in the latter half of the twentieth century so difficult to grasp. Theologians would deny the immanent Trinity in their doctrine of God, but then find the need to affirm it in their doctrine

of creation, or vice versa.⁹ For this reason it is salutary to examine a number of doctrines which are so closely related to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity that they can be inspected to determine the soundness of the latter doctrine. These related doctrines have diagnostic value as “detectors of an economic reductionism”¹⁰ in particular, and as indicators of how a thinker negotiates the economic-immanent distinction in general.

Creatio ex nihilo is one such doctrine, because any theology that fails to recognize God’s transcendent freedom from the world and its processes will only with great difficulty be able to describe God’s creation of the world as a gratuitous act of bringing something into existence from nothing. Barth is quite strong on this front, affirming *creatio ex nihilo* robustly and even from time to time indicating just how independent God is from reliance on the world process: “in His Word becoming flesh, God acts with inward freedom and not in fulfillment of a law to which He is supposedly subject. His Word will still be His Word apart from this becoming, just as Father, Son, and Holy spirit would be none the less eternal God, if no world had been created” (CD I/2, 135).

The preexistence of Christ is another and even more obvious indicator, because just as a merely economic Logos betokens a merely economic Trinity, the incarnation of a Word which was always personally with God indicates a God who always existed in personal fellowship within his own being. Again, Barth defends Christ’s preexistence explicitly and draws the implications for trinitarian theology: God the Son “reveals Himself as the One He is. He does not first become God’s Son or Word in the event of revelation. On the contrary, the event of revelation has divine truth and reality because that which is proper to God is revealed in it, because Jesus Christ reveals Himself as the One He already was before, apart from this event, in Himself too” (CD I/1, 414). Or more briefly, “He is the Son or Word of God for us because He is so antecedently in Himself” (CD I/1, 416).

However, when we ask about the nature of this preexistent Christ, we come to a different doctrine, another possible indicator of economic reductionism. That doctrine is the *logos asarkos*, the eternal Word before he took on flesh. Classically, Christian theology has found it necessary to have a technical term such as this to indicate the pre-existent person, the second

⁹ Pannenberg, gap btwn volume I and II of the *Systematic Theology*.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Thompson, “Imitatio Trinitatis: The Trinity as Social Model in the Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff,” PhD Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996, 270.

person of the Trinity, who was always with the Father and then “in the fullness of time” took flesh us and for our salvation. Among other things, recognizing the *logos asarkos* is a way of recognizing the aseity of God and the fact that the incarnation is a free divine act rather than a statement about God’s necessary constitution. It is a way of affirming that the word, who was not flesh, truly did something new when he became flesh.

For theologians who follow Barth’s lead in using the doctrine of the Trinity to specify which God is the object of Christian discourse, the concept of the *logos asarkos* poses a problem, however: who is this eternal person who is not (or at least not yet, or perhaps not necessarily) identified with Jesus Christ? In a much-discussed section of his doctrine of reconciliation, Barth makes the point that “the first and eternal Word of God ... means in fact Jesus Christ.” He goes on to say that

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 *logos asarkos*. 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 or epistemologically (CD IV/1, 52).

Barth believes that it is sometimes (“in this context”) dangerous to divert our attention from Jesus Christ and turn it instead to an unincarnate word. As he points out, we could not know anything about that unincarnate word unless we learned it from the incarnate word. Thus our statements about the *logos asarkos* would be endangered on all sides: on the one hand we might infer from Christ’s status as Emmanuel that the eternal second person of the Trinity has it as his very nature to be God with us. On the other hand we might pretend to know a great many things about the eternal second person of the Trinity, things which we have not learned from him in his incarnation. If we take recourse to some other fund of knowledge besides Jesus Christ, we will fill out the concept of the *logos* with any number of attributes derived from any number of sources, speculative or practical depending on our personal taste. For this reason, Barth warns against changing the subject from Jesus Christ to the *logos asarkos* when discussing redemption, asking “what is the point of a regress to him?” In the context of understanding the form and content of redemption, there is no point in taking this dangerous step of abstraction.

In other contexts, however, Barth apparently believes that there is a definite point in talking about the *logos asarkos*. In the next sentence after the one quoted above, Barth says of the *logos asarkos* that “He¹¹ is the content of a necessary and important concept in 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” (CD IV/1, 52). In other words, we can and should refer to the *logos asarkos* when we are specifically indicating the gratuity of the gospel and the freedom with which God acts on our behalf. Whenever theology confesses God’s freedom, it should fill out its assertion of the preexistence of Christ by affirming the preincarnate word. Perhaps a bare admission of the fact of the preincarnate word is as much as can be hazarded, however, because as soon as we attempt to say anything determinate about it, or to assign it some distinctive content or form, we must admit that the only word we have to hear or obey is the incarnate one. It is of course this incarnate word that Barth wants to focus all theological attention on, in every context except where affirming God’s freedom.¹² Thus he goes on to argue that “since we are now concerned with the revelation and dealings of God, and particularly with the atonement, with the person and work of the Mediator, it is pointless, as it is impermissible, to return to the inner being and essence of God and especially to the second person of the Trinity as such, in such a way that we ascribe to this person another form than that which God Himself has given in willing to reveal Himself and to act outwards” (CD IV/1, 52).

In light of our analysis of the role played by the economic-immanent axis in the dogmatics, it is possible to view Barth’s account of the *logos asarkos* as yet another trip back and forth along that axis. Bruce McCormack is an interpreter of Barth who has puzzled over the apparent conflict between Barth’s continued affirmation of the *logos asarkos* and his complete focus on the actually incarnate Christ. He argues that in Barth’s thought, “the second ‘person’ of the Trinity has a name and His name is Jesus Christ,” and that because of this “the immanent Trinity is made to be wholly identical in content with the economic Trinity.”¹³ For McCormack,

¹¹ The German text at this point says not *er* but *sie*. I have not yet checked the rest of the context to see if perhaps the original language consistently uses more impersonal language, making a better translation “It is the content of a necessary and important concept,” rather than “He is the content,” etc.

¹² It would be valuable to compare these deliberations in IV/1 with Barth’s full-length treatment of divine freedom in the second half of II/1, where he is jealous to affirm God’s freedom concretely rather than abstractly: “We have to be taught first, by the decision made in His actual existence, that God is free in Himself.” CD II/1, 308.

¹³ Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100.

Barth's argument that we must not turn our attention from Jesus Christ to that "second person" who is not yet Jesus Christ entails an outright denial of "the propriety of the distinction between the *Logos asarkos* and the *Logos ensarkos* altogether."¹⁴ If Barth first denies the existence of the *logos asarkos* except as the *logos incarnandus* (the word whose nature is that he is the one who is going to become incarnate), secondly affirms that Jesus Christ is the person who is the second person of the Trinity, and third rejects free-floating talk about "the son of God" as a mythological abstraction, then he should be consistent with these premises and draw the conclusion that God's triunity is "logically as a function of divine election." In other words, drawing on Barth's doctrine of election (II/2), McCormack believes that Barth should have recognized that there is no eternal son who is not already determined by his eternal decision and will to become incarnate, therefore "if election is an eternal decision, then it has never not taken place."¹⁵ McCormack's proposal is a high Reformed road along the doctrine of predestination, a road that circumvents the economic-immanent distinction in some ways by using the category of eternal election to render the immanent Trinity identical with the economic. We can certainly admit that it is a path consistent with some of Barth's major commitments, and that McCormack is a powerful interpreter of Barth's crucial doctrine of election. However, it is manifestly not Barth's own road, as McCormack freely admits when he expresses consternation over why Barth did not draw these conclusions himself: "Either Barth did not fully realize the profound implications of his doctrine of election for the doctrine of the Trinity, or he shied away from drawing them for reasons known only to himself."¹⁶

Another interpreter of Barth, Paul Molnar, argues that Barth is the great champion of the immanent Trinity and the clearest advocate of making a strong distinction between economic and immanent. He has carefully scrutinized Barth's writings for their affirmation of the ontological priority of the immanent Trinity, of the "antedecedently in Himself" which for Barth grounds all of God's actions in the economy. He takes exception to McCormack's argument, pointing out that

the order between election and triunity cannot be logically reversed without in fact making creation, reconciliation and redemption necessary to God. It is

¹⁴ McCormack, "Grace and Being," 96.

¹⁵ McCormack, "Grace and Being," 101.

¹⁶ McCormack, "Grace and Being," 102. It would be odd to charge McCormack with thinking too undialectically about Barth's argument, because he has been the most resolute advocate of a "permanent dialectic of veiling and unveiling" in Barth's thought. See his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Nevertheless, what we are describing as a movement along the economic-immanent axis is a kind of dialectic, and McCormack's argument seems to flatten it out.

precisely this critical error that is embodied in McCormack's proposal. Barth insisted that the Trinity exists eternally in its own right and thus even the electing God is not subject to any necessities, especially a necessity that would suggest that the ground of his triunity is the covenant of grace. It is exactly the other way around. The covenant of grace is a covenant of grace because it expresses the free overflow of God's eternal love that takes place in pre-temporal eternity as the Father begets the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

Molnar has undoubtedly identified a very important theme in Barth's trinitarianism, and documents it very well. However, he sometimes neglects to explicate its significance in dialogue with Barth's equally massive emphasis on God's irrevocable and supremely "actual" turn toward humanity, a turn which according to Barth's doctrine of election is God's essential self-determination.¹⁸ Barth seems to have allowed relatively more distance between the economic and immanent Trinity prior to his doctrine of election than after it, thus giving his interpreters the task of dealing with "the later Barth" in at least this context. The possibility of development in Barth's thought is what gives McCormack's argument its plausibility: he wants to correct the Barth of *Church Dogmatics* I/1 – II/1 in light of the major development in the doctrine of election, II/2. McCormack also wants to bring the Barth of volume IV into line with the doctrine of election, which is where McCormack's case becomes hardest to establish. At any rate this theme of God's eternal self-determination for humanity must be reckoned with when arguing about being true to Barth's insights in dialogue with Rahner's Rule.

Molnar's neglect of this theme leads him to make a dubious correlation in which the immanent Trinity is "God's sovereign freedom from us" and the economic Trinity is God's "freedom for us."¹⁹ Obviously Barth would only have made a distinction of that sort, separating "God's freedom from us" from "God's freedom for us" in order to reconcile the two immediately, for instance by stating that God's freedom from us is God's freedom for us, and vice versa. Perhaps this statement is a workable translation of Rahner's Rule into Barthian categories, and as such, an indicator that Barth's theology may well harmonize with the axiom. To divide the two kinds of divine freedom from each other and leave them internally unrelated,

¹⁷ Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 63.

¹⁸ Thus Molnar's presentation jars up against interpreters of Barth who prefer to emphasize this equally Barthian theme, as for instance Ted Peters. To see the clash at its most direct, see Molnar's "Experience and Knowledge of the Trinity in the Theology of Ted Peters: Occasion for Clarity or Confusion?," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999), 219-243.

¹⁹ Molnar, "Function of the Immanent Trinity," 398.

as Molnar seems to do, raises the very un-Barthian specter of an almighty counterfactual hypothetical as the only guarantee of God's freedom. Barth's genius, on the other hand, was to establish the freedom of God without taking recourse to abstractions or hypotheticals, but to limn that freedom in the very contours of the economy, in its enacted form. Molnar is certainly right that the freedom of God demands systematic recognition in theology, and likely also right to argue that the doctrine of the immanent Trinity is necessarily involved in that recognition.

One final doctrinal question can be treated by way of testing Barth's commitment to the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. In the annals of the history of doctrine there has occurred a strange, admittedly speculative disputed question: Could any person of the Trinity have become incarnate, or did it have to be the Son who undertook this mission? Rahner identified this question as having diagnostic value regarding his axiom, because if a theologian can answer that any person of the Trinity could have become incarnate, that theologian must not believe that the economic Trinity is a reliable revelation of the personal distinctions in the immanent Trinity. It is obvious that if Rahner's Rule holds at all, the answer must be no; and this is the answer Rahner presses. In doing so, however, he concedes that he is taking a stand against such notables of the Christian tradition as Augustine, Lombard, and Aquinas, all of whom answer the question in the affirmative. Peter Lombard, writing in the twelfth century, does in fact say the fateful words: "Just as the Son was made man, so the Father and the Holy Spirit could have been and can be now."²⁰ In the subsequent proof, Lombard is primarily concerned to offer reasons why it was in fact the Son who found the mission of incarnation "most suitable" to his nature. It is more suitable for the Son to become incarnate for at least three reasons: 1. Since the Word is Wisdom, it is proper that he should be the one to enlighten us; 2. Since the Word is already "from" the Father, it is proper for him to come from the Father into the world; and 3. Since the Word is also the Son, he enables us to become children of God. Thomas Aquinas mines this vein of scholastic reflection even more thoroughly, devoting an article in the *Summa Theologiae* to the query "whether it was more fitting that the Person of the Son rather than any

²⁰ Lombard, *Sentences* 3:1,3; cited in Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, Vol. 1 (NY: E. J. Brill, 1994), 419. Lombard was the most influential but not the first to say it. Colish cites as his predecessor the anonymous author of the *Summa Sententiarum*. LaCugna claims that Anselm is the first to put forth this view, but she offers no documentation (*God For Us*, 99), and Anselm seems to argue the opposite position in *Cur Deus Homo* II:9. In the modern literature, Lombard has become the standard source to cite for this thesis (see Barth, Congar, Jenson, etc.).

other Divine Person should assume human nature?”²¹ Karl Rahner is not only willing to take a stand against this tradition, but he considers it a sign of the weakness and inadequacy of traditional trinitarianism that it could have posed such a question, let alone answered it with a yes.

It is somewhat surprising to find that Barth takes a position of agreement with Lombard and Aquinas, and answers this question in the affirmative, or at least with a double negative: We cannot say that another person of the Trinity could not have undertaken the incarnation. After running through a series of arguments showing the fittingness of the Son’s incarnation, Barth summarizes by saying that only in the Word’s mode of being could God show himself to us; that “in that way He had to become manifest to us.” Just as he seems to be making the jump from fittingness to necessity he draws back: “We shall do well, however, to put in brackets all our talk about ‘needing’ and ‘being able’ and ‘must’... The trinitarian theology in which we have been engaging does not allow us to assert that God absolutely could not become manifest to us except in this way.” In a fine-print excursus, he commends Aquinas (and behind him Lombard) for sagaciously calling the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity not *Necessarium*... but *Convenientissimum* (CD I/2, 34).

To justify his endorsement of this *Convenientissimum* over the stronger *Necessarium*, Barth appeals to the gap between the revealed truth and our doctrinal interpretations of it. What is given in revelation is that it is in fact the Son who became incarnate. Developed trinitarian theology, on the other hand, is not given in revelation as such, but is a conceptual construct which helps us come to an understanding of that event. The theologian, warns Barth, cannot absolutize the doctrine and judge the revelation itself by it, especially in the face of the utter freedom of God and the Word. “The doctrine of the Trinity is not itself a text of revelation but only a commentary upon it... We take our stand not above but beneath the reality of revelation, and assign necessity to it and not to our grounds, not even to our grounds in trinitarian theology” (I/2, 35). It is characteristic of Barth’s agenda throughout *Church Dogmatics I/2* that he takes great pains to acknowledge the freedom of God over against certain venerable doctrines which run the risk of promising human control over God and his revelation. This is the part-volume in

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q3, article 8. He has already treated the question “whether each of the Divine Persons could have assumed human nature” in article 5. His answer is yes: “Whatever the Son can do, so can the Father and the Holy Ghost, otherwise the power of the three Persons would not be one.” With characteristic thoroughness, Aquinas (in the reply to objection 2) explains how adoptive sonship could be bestowed on humans via the hypothetical incarnate Father or incarnate Spirit!

which, for example, he makes the crucial distinction between the Word of God and the Bible, develops his sustained critique of religion, and argues for the freedom and authority of the Word in the church. In this context, Barth refuses to allow even the doctrine of the Trinity to assert itself as a way of putting theologians into a position of cognitive control over revelation, dictating on its basis what God can and cannot do. To do so would be to allow tradition to overmaster scripture. On this question, at least, Barth seems to have desired a very strong restriction and qualification of Rahner's Rule, and provided for a great deal of possible (though not actual) difference between the economic and immanent Trinity.

IV. "A Deliberate and Sharp Distinction"

In summary, we can say that the economic-immanent axis is indeed a central element of all Barth's theology, and that he insists equally on both poles as well as their connection to each other. In his treatise on the Trinity in CD I, Barth describes his method in language very similar to Rahner's axiom:

we have consistently followed the rule which we regard as basic, that statements about the divine modes of being antecedently in themselves cannot be different in content from those that are to be made about their reality in revelation. All our statements concerning what is called the immanent Trinity have been reached simply as confirmations or underlinings or, materially, as the indispensable premises of the economic Trinity. They neither could nor would say anything other than that we must abide by the distinction and unity of the modes of being in God as they encounter us according to the witness of Scripture in the reality of God in His revelation. The reality of God in His revelation cannot be bracketed by an 'only,' as though somewhere behind His revelation there stood another reality of God; the reality of God which encounters us in His revelation is His reality in all the depths of eternity. (CD I/1, 479)

For Barth, the close connection between economic and immanent is only another way of affirming that God has effectively and truly revealed himself. He is not merely musing on an abstract theory of revelation, but specifically interpreting the presence of the eternal persons of the Trinity in the economy of salvation when he reaches these conclusions: "To the involution and convolution of the three modes of being in the essence of God there corresponds exactly their involution and convolution in his work" (CD I/1, 374).

However, for all his passion for the actual history of God with us, and for all his refusal to speak abstractly or theoretically about divine possibilities, Barth is also insistent on theology's

need to confess God's freedom in terms of his immanent objective otherness from us. For Barth, it is illegitimate to speak of human nature in itself, in isolation from God, since that is an abstraction from the actual state of affairs in which man is never without God. He refuses, however, to make a simply parallel move in terms of discourse about God: "in the strict doctrine of the Trinity as the presupposition of Christology, it must speak of God in Himself, in isolation from man." Barth calls this demand a "recollection of the immanent objective Godness of God in Himself in distinction from His Godness for us" (CD I/1, 172). The "Godness of God in Himself" as Father, Son, and Spirit should be recognized as a systematic and trinitarian restatement of Barth's early emphasis on God's utter transcendence. He affirmed the immanent Trinity resolutely, treating it as the indispensable presupposition of the economic Trinity and repeatedly pointing his readers back to that presupposition as the deep truth behind our experience of God in the history of salvation. Even after he elaborated his doctrine of God as a doctrine of God's primal self-determination in favor of salvation, a turn which he would later describe as a turn toward "the humanity of God," Barth's theology continued to rotate on the axis that runs from the immanent Trinity to the economic. Well into volume IV of the *Dogmatics*, Barth continued to cultivate forms of speech that drew attention to the freedom of God and grounded it in his asiety, his perfection of being and fellowship in the rich immanent life of triunity: "God loves, and to do so He does not need any being distinct from His own as the object of His love. If He loves the world and us, this is a free overflowing of the love in which He is and is God and with which He is not content, although He might be, since neither the world nor ourselves are indispensable to His love and therefore to His being. Thus the love of God is free, majestic, eternal love" (CD IV/2, 755). If, in spite of these repeated insistences on God's freedom and self-sufficiency, Barth can still be read (or mis-read, as I assert) as arguing that God is so involved in the project of human redemption that his eternal being seems to be colored by that commitment, then perhaps that is an index of how successfully Barth has normed his theology by the word made flesh. For just as Yahweh does not stand below the covenant, he also does not stand above it: He takes his stand in it, for us and our salvation.

Outline:

Introduction

I. Rahner's Rule and Its Interpreters

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B. Rahner's Rule

C. Radicalizers and Restricters

II. "Antecedently In Himself." The Economic-Immanent Axis in Barth's Dogmatics

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C. Test Doctrine 3: Logos Asarkos (McCormack vs. Molnar)

D. Test Doctrine 4: The Son as necessary agent of the incarnation

IV. "A Deliberate and Sharp Distinction"

APPENDIX: The other paper to be presented in this study group:

Scott R. Swain
Paper Proposal
ETS 2003

In Christian theology, the doctrines of God and Christ are systematically related. The ecumenical creeds constitute, among other things, the church's attempt to articulate (and to leave unarticulated where necessary) the contours of this systematic relation. In light of the perceived bankruptcy of many Enlightenment natural theology projects and due in large measure to the constructive contributions of thinkers like Karl Barth and Karl Rahner in dogmatics as well as of Hans Frei, Paul Ricoeur, and others in hermeneutics, contemporary theology has achieved a near ecumenical, if only methodological, consensus concerning the systematic relation between theology proper and Christology. The consensus stated briefly: distinctly Christian discourse about God's being must be pursued along a pathway of reflection upon God's revelation and action as rendered in the story of Jesus Christ.

While a near consensus exists on this methodological point, contemporary theology remains divided on the dogmatic implications of this methodological rule for the Christian doctrine of God. Does the story of Jesus require radical revision of classical Trinitarian theism? If not, what are the hermeneutical and theological bases for warranting the traditional understanding of God?

Robert W. Jenson, one of today's major ecumenical and systematic theologians, has contributed much to the contemporary discussion on these questions. Jenson's answer to such questions is that the story of Jesus Christ requires that classical Trinitarian theism be revised in the direction of a Trinitarian panentheism.

In the proposed paper, I will: (1) explain both the nature and rationale of Jenson's answer to this contemporary doctrinal question; (2) demonstrate where Jenson's doctrinal proposal falls short (with respect to several significant requirements for distinctly Christian speech about God); and (3) drawing on the work of Karl Barth, Bruce Marshall, Kathryn Tanner, David Burrell, and others, outline a "hermeneutical grammar" for reading the Jesus story in a more classically theistic manner.

Alternative title and essay: "The Humanity of God in Barth and Jenson"

A related discussion from CD I/1 on speculative “pro-nobism” and the Reformers:

It is one of the many optical illusions of Modernist Protestantism to have imagined that it should and could interpret and discredit this "antecedently in himself," i.e., the confession of Christ's true and eternal deity, as the exponent of an untheological metaphysical speculation by claiming that the Reformers adopted a very different position in this matter from that of the ancient and mediaeval Church. CD I:1, 416. There follows in fine print an excursus which includes:

Melanchthon's Loci and the beneficia christi stuff; dissing the trinity. "It reflects a passing mood but not a theological position which became historically significant even for Melanchthon. And even the mood was not directed against the content of the trinitarian dogma but against its importance in relation to // other dogmas which lay nearer to Melanchthon's own heart." 416 7

"Friends of the Melanchthon passage" might appeal to Calvin and the Caroli affair. The first edition of the institutes "does indeed give a very sound and respectful exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, and shows that there is not a vestige of truth in Caroli's charge that Calvin avoided the terms trinitas and persona, but it should still be noted that the author hardly has a burning interest in the matter." 417 calvin took to a bit of "a churlish mood" in the face of Caroli's accusations.

"What is left of the whole appeal to the Reformation..." is just that they were really excited about other concerns, and they "did and perhaps had to permit themselves sometimes to set the problem of the 4th century aside and put it in its proper place in a somewhat impatient gesture." 419

"The Reformers never dreamed of allowing Christology to be resolved or dissolved in a doctrine of the beneficia Christi." 419 (followed by a swat at Ritschl)

"But the objection that we have only an untheological speculation in the dogma of Christ's deity is materially nonsensical and untenable and in the long run it is bound to recoil on its authors." 419

"On the distinction between the "in Himself" and "for me" depends the acknowledgment of the freedom and unindebtedness of God's grace, i.e., of the very thing that really makes it grace. It is this acknowledgment that is made in the Church dogma, whereas Enlightenment theology (in the broadest sense of the term) is obviously at war with it." 420

now the recoil: "It is strange but true that the Church dogma of the true and eternal deity of Christ with its 'antecedently in Himself' is the very thing that denies and prohibits an untheologically speculative understanding of the 'for us.' And the very man who thinks he must reject the Church dogma undoubtedly does this because he is in the grip of an untheologically speculative understanding of the 'for us.' 420

"If we will not listen to the fact that Christ is antecedently God in Himself in order that in this way and on this basis He may be our // God, then we turn the latter, His being God for us, into a necessary attribute of God. God's being is then essentially limited and conditioned as a being revealed, i.e., as a relation of God to man. Man is thus thought of as indispensable to God. But this destroys God's freedom in the act of revelation and reconciliation, i.e., it destroys the gracious character of this act. It is thus God's nature (c'est son metier, Voltaire) to have to forgive us. And it is man's nature to have a God from whom he receives forgiveness. That and not the Church dogma which forbids this thought is untheological speculation." 420 1

"How could a theology which does not know the freedom of God's grace, which does not know the mystery of His way, which does not know the fear of God as the beginning of wisdom, how could such a theology come to call itself a theology of revelation and faith? How could it be knowledge of the beneficia Christi? Is not this defiant arrogance, all the worse because it pretends to be so humble? But there is no sense in scolding here." 422

"Those who are at loggerheads here ... They not only have a different theology; they also have a different faith." 422