BARTH AND SCHLEIERMACHER ON THE
DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
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Finally, I should point out that all translations throughout the book are my own. I have also listed the English translations that are available, with the exception of Barth’s Commentary on Romans and Schleiermacher’s The Christian Faith. Both translations seem to me outdated and the first one is also occasionally misleading. For the quotes from The Christian Faith, I have indicated the corresponding paragraphs of the book, which will make it easy to locate quotes and references.

M.G.
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Introduction: ‘Quite close—excuse me—to Schleiermacher’

1. BARTH ON ELECTION

Throughout the centuries, the doctrine of election has been widely attacked by Christian theologians as well as agnostics or atheists, with Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin receiving the lion’s share of the blame. The principal point of contention was the claim that certain human beings are forever lost because God ordered it to be so by means of a double predestination to salvation and damnation. Critics of the doctrine were quick to point out that such a claim is incompatible with the affirmation of God’s saving will and of human freedom. Does the fact that God’s free gift of grace is not accepted universally mean that God wanted it to be that way? If this is the case, could such an idea be reconciled with God’s universal love for His creatures and with the victory over sin and death in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

In response to the dilemma, theologians who wanted to preserve the doctrine as a means to emphasize the freedom of God’s grace

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1 Current interpreters of Augustine and Calvin often agree: ‘most contemporary standard monographs regard Augustine’s solution of the question of predestination with a critical attitude that ranges from sober distance to forceful rejection’. Georg Kraus, Vorherbestimmung. Traditionelle Prädestinationslehre im Licht gegenwärtiger Theologie (Freiburg, Basle, Vienna: Herder, 1977), 45. Calvin’s teaching on predestination ‘is hardly accepted without criticism by contemporary Calvin scholars’. Ibid. 187.

tried to avoid the charge of fatalism or determinism and often ended up with a ‘more noble Pelagianism’, which became the mainstream view. In this way, the unconditional nature of divine grace could be affirmed, while human beings were granted at least a partial share in the generation of faith; only a minority would maintain that God must be held solely responsible for the unbelief of human beings and its dire consequences. On the whole, however, the doctrine of election seemed to obscure rather than to clarify things.

It is therefore not surprising that Karl Barth’s departure from the traditional handling of the issue in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 was greeted with much acclaim, even by those who disagreed with him on some details. In the middle of the tome, discussing the election of the individual, Barth sets forth an explanation why he could not continue on the old paths:

The traditional doctrine of predestination…has begun with [the relation between divine election and individual human beings] and has not made substantial progress beyond it. It has dealt with everything that so far has occupied us here under the heading of the election of Jesus Christ and the election of the congregation of God…only as marginal or additional questions in relation to the question that presented the issue of God’s gracious election: the question of the eternal (positively or negatively determined) order of the *private relationship* that exists between God and every individual human being. The haste with which this problem was tackled and also the self-evident certainty that this was ultimately the exclusive issue regarding predestination are astonishing. But these are the facts, and indeed facts of such a general and ancient kind that they have almost gained the weight and value of inner necessities.

For Barth, ‘the problem of the divine election is not exhausted by the problem of the election of individual human beings. Instead, the

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4 Barth himself remarked right at the beginning of his discussion in the *Church Dogmatics* that the doctrine of election appeared in a more and more ambiguous light. ‘In fact, a lot has been said here in such a way that it could cause confusion, fierce rejection and well-meant but fatal misrepresentations’ of the subject. Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. II/2 (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 3rd edn 1959), 12. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957), 13.
former comprehends the latter. In the historical overview that illustrates the errors of the traditional doctrine the name of Friedrich Schleiermacher appears, for the first and only time in the chapter on election. Barth correlates the bias of the traditional doctrine with the increasingly high esteem of the human individual in the history of Western thought, and he describes ‘the younger Schleiermacher’ as a representative of the enlightened secular individualism since the late eighteenth century. The main document he has in mind here are the *Speeches on Religion, in Response to its Cultured Despisers*, while Schleiermacher’s later theological writings, first and foremost *The Christian Faith*, are not mentioned. Although Barth regarded the latter as Schleiermacher’s ‘masterpiece’, on which ‘his fame and his decisive influence on the theology and the church of the nineteenth century deservedly have been established’, he evidently thought that its doctrine of election was not important enough to warrant any discussion.

In contrast to Barth’s own assessment, the following study demonstrates that there exist many similarities between Barth’s and Schleiermacher’s position on the doctrine of election. I am not proposing a theory of historical dependence. While nothing indicates that Barth’s view on the matter was at any stage directly influenced by Schleiermacher, there exist striking parallels between their criticism of traditional views as well as between fundamental dogmatic motifs in their reconstruction of the doctrine. They become particularly visible in the second edition of *Romans* and in Barth’s first set of lectures on Systematic Theology, the so-called *Göttingen Dogmatics*. The reconstruction in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 thus not only presents a revision of traditional views but also overcomes certain limitations

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6 Ibid. 339. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 308.
7 Ibid. 338. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 308.
that were inherent in his own earlier position. Seen in this light, Barth’s revision of the doctrine has a predecessor in Schleiermacher.

Despite the lack of detailed investigations, the importance of the doctrine even for Barth’s earlier theology can hardly be doubted. Aldo Mora suggests that ‘the doctrine of election always stood at the center of Barth’s concerns’. While this might be an exaggeration, he accurately observes that ‘it is already present in the second edition of the Römerbrief, in passages that are undoubtedly fundamental and of high density, as a comparison with the first edition makes clear [and] it grows stronger and is founded christologically in an important essay from 1936’.10 Some commentators have pointed out continuities in Barth’s view on election between Romans and Church Dogmatics II/2,11 but the only extensive study on the issue is a Yale dissertation from 1952.12 Naturally, the author does not mention the elaboration on the topic in the Göttingen Dogmatics, which by then was virtually unknown. He correctly notes that Barth follows Schleiermacher in his criticism of ‘the individualistic approach of the traditional doctrine’,13 but his description of Schleiermacher himself comes close to being a caricature. For Schleiermacher, ‘God is immanent in history’, and he ‘tends to speculate about the divine on the basis of a study of the religious experience of man

10 Aldo Moda, ‘La dottrina barthiana dell’elezione: verso una soluzione delle aporie?’ in Sergio Rostagno (ed.), Barth Contemporaneo (Turin: Claudiana Editrice, 1990), 79. The ‘important essay’ from 1936 is called Gottes Gnadenwahl, a small pamphlet that revolutionizes the traditional doctrine of predestination, according to George Casalis, Portrait de Karl Barth (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1960), 91. We will see, however, that the ‘revolution’ of the traditional doctrine is not complete until its full-scale revision in Church Dogmatics II/2.


12 Frank H. Woyke, ‘The Doctrine of Predestination in the Theology of Karl Barth’ (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1952). The revision of the idea of double predestination in Romans II is briefly mentioned by William John Hausmann, Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Election (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), 39–41. Hausmann alleges an imminent universalism in Barth’s early exposition of the doctrine, but he fails to mention that it is a universalism of grace and judgement, as we will see.

generally.’

All these claims represent serious distortions of Schleiermacher’s thinking, as we shall see. In fairness to Woyke, it must be said that he wrote half a century ago, and it would not have been surprising if he simply carried on the neo-orthodox prejudices, which were common among Protestant theologians at the time. Since they had their roots in Barth’s own strategy of positioning himself in opposition to Schleiermacher, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, it will be useful to provide a glimpse of the main issues at stake for Barth in a brief overview.

2. BARTH ON SCHLEIERMACHER

In his early years, when he was still an ardent defender of modern liberal theology, Barth praised Schleiermacher as a theological teacher who had combined the best insights of the Reformation with the contemporary demands of the modern world, a man ‘who has taught us, or should teach us, on the soil of modern thought to acquire the genuine heritage of the Reformation, in order to possess it.’ In front of his congregation in the small Swiss village of Safenwil he once called Schleiermacher ‘one of the deepest Christian thinkers of all times, full of devotion to and understanding of Jesus’.

Only two years later, in the summer and autumn of 1915, such sentiments

14 Ibid. 328.
15 Ibid. 329.
16 I make no attempt to offer a detailed investigation here. A comprehensive study of Barth’s life-long quarrel with Schleiermacher can be found in Dietmar Lütz, Homo viator: Karl Barths Ringen mit Schleiermacher (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1988). Alas, it is a study with severe limitations, because it focuses almost exclusively on Barth’s own interpretation of the issue. Nevertheless, it succeeds in laying out the evidence that Barth should be taken seriously as an original interpreter of Schleiermacher, despite the fact that his judgment is at times overly harsh or biased.
gave way to growing doubts and, finally, to the insistence on a fundamental and irreconcilable contrast between Schleiermacher and himself. The unease began when Barth agreed with his close friend and fellow pastor Eduard Thurneysen that they ‘could not quite trust Schleiermacher any longer’. The synthesis between Schleiermacher and the Reformers was put into question. The scepticism grew during his work on the first edition of *Romans* between 1916 and 1918, and in May 1921, while he was writing the second edition of the book, he declared himself ready for an ‘attack’ on Schleiermacher, as soon as he would have assumed his honorary post for Reformed Theology at the University of Göttingen. For the next decade, Barth would respond to Schleiermacher with great excitement, regarding every reading of ‘this church-father and religious virtuoso’ as a virtual battle.

The opposition was openly expressed with a grudging acknowledgment of the man’s genius and achievement during lectures on Schleiermacher in the winter semester of 1923–4, when Barth called him ‘intelligent, instructive and generous’, where the ‘useless crowd’ of more recent theologians are ‘stupid, clumsy, inconsistent and timorous. If one really wants a modern Christianity, it might well be the best to stay with Schl. all along, where the matter is at least new and powerful; for we really cannot deny that about him; he is in

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19 Eduard Thurneysen to Karl Barth, 6 October 1921, in *Karl Barth—Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel*, vol. 1, 1913–1921, ed. Eduard Thurneysen (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), 525. According to Thurneysen, this sentiment was expressed for the first time during a nightly walk by the two men in Leutwil, where Thurneysen was pastor at the time. It is possible that the walk took place in June 1916, shortly before Barth began with his studies on Romans.

20 Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen, 13 May 1921, in *Barth-Thurneysen: Briefwechsel* 1: 486. A. Heron thinks that ‘Barth himself was well aware of sharing common concerns with Schleiermacher—an awareness in no way weakened by his intensive criticism through more than forty years, for he sensed that Schleiermacher was the figure whom he had to counter, but whom at the same time he must not only criticise but also appreciate.’ Alasdair I. C. Heron, ‘Barth and Schleiermacher on the Task of Dogmatics’, in John Thompson (ed.), *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth May 10, 1986* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 268. During the time of *Romans*, however, Barth showed little or no appreciation, and a first awareness of ‘common concerns’ did not emerge until the time of his lectures on Schleiermacher in 1923/4.

21 Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen, 18 May 1921, in *Barth-Thurneysen: Briefwechsel* 1: 489.
almost everything he undertakes a master to whom one has to take off one’s little hat, even though one would like it best to go for his throat! The way in which he approaches and expounds particularly the ethical problems is simply brilliant.\textsuperscript{22} In lectures from 1926 Barth described their opposition as a ‘mobile war’ and cautioned against an overly triumphant attitude.\textsuperscript{23} At the same time, his Swiss colleague and combatant in the ‘mobile war’ Emil Brunner, had the impression that Barth’s view on the relation between creation and redemption came close to Schleiermacher. He said it was ‘even to the left of the Covenant-Theologians who never use the term redemption for Adam before the Fall and quite close—excuse me—to Schleiermacher, for whom redemption also is not a re-[storation] but an ultimate revelation of the divine life-reality, which surpasses all previous ones’.\textsuperscript{24}

In a course on nineteenth-century theology he taught twice, in 1929–30 and 1933, Barth retracted his martial attitude and replaced it with a dialectic of love and hate: ‘Anyone who has never loved here and is unable to love here again and again may not hate here either.’\textsuperscript{25} He acknowledged that the focus on the Christian pious

\textsuperscript{22} Karl Barth, Circular Letter 20 December 1923, in \textit{Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel}, vol. 2, 1921–30, ed. Eduard Thurneysen (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), 207. At the same time, Barth’s early mentor from Marburg, Martin Rade, cautioned that the mere condemnation of Schleiermacher had ‘little value’, while a critical discussion would be helpful and even necessary. See Martin Rade an Karl Barth, 31 December 1923, in \textit{Karl Barth-Martin Rade: Ein Briefwechsel}, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1981), 195.

\textsuperscript{23} Karl Barth, ‘Schleiermacher’, in \textit{Die Theologie und die Kirche} (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1928), 189. In his university courses Barth carefully avoided condemning Schleiermacher. ‘For myself…I still think Schleiermacher is just terrible, but I will try to tell the students about it as little as possible and make visible…the most positive interpretation.’ Karl Barth to Wolfgang Trillhaas, 10 May 1926, in Wolfgang Trillhaas, ‘Karl Barth in Göttingen’, in Dietrich Rössler, Gottfried Voigt and Friedrich Wintzer (eds.), \textit{Fides et communicatio. Festschrift Martin Doerne} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1970), 374.


\textsuperscript{25} Karl Barth, \textit{Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte} (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 3rd edn 1960), 380–1. ET \textit{Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History}, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 413. In 1924, Barth ‘unfortunately’ had not been able to express such love, although he already had recognized that love is, ‘if one \textit{can} love’, more helpful for the sake of gaining knowledge than mere aversion. Barth, \textit{Die Theologie Schleiermachers}, 9. ET \textit{The Theology of Schleiermacher}, xvii.
self-consciousness did not necessarily lead to a relegation of the question of God’s acting to a lower rank, although he still charged that Schleiermacher’s conception of the relation between God and humankind conflicted with the affirmation of Christ’s divinity and the Reformers’ emphasis on the self-sufficiency of God’s Word; in short, Christ is merely the predicate of the pious human being as the subject.\textsuperscript{26} Still, he hesitated to judge whether his own attempt to go beyond Schleiermacher had been successful: no one ‘can say today whether we really have overcome him, or whether we are still at heart children of his age, despite all… loud and fundamental protest against him’.\textsuperscript{27} While he was always aware of the manifold difficulties inherent in the attempt to ‘overcome’ Schleiermacher, he now relativized his earlier polemical stance and put it into historical perspective. This position he would hold until the end of his life.

Throughout the \textit{Church Dogmatics} (1932–67), Barth kept Schleiermacher’s theology at a distance. After a series of harsh reproaches, especially in connection with the attacks on Natural Theology in \textit{Church Dogmatics} I and II/1, his remarks became more conciliatory.\textsuperscript{28} Shortly before his death in 1968 Barth reconsidered their relation in a well-known ‘Epilogue’ to a publication of excerpts from Schleiermacher’s writings. Despite the praise he lavishes on his opponent, he is convinced that his original intuition of the necessity to overcome Schleiermacher’s theology remains correct, while he also admits that a central systematic–theological question probably remains unresolved: could his thorough and persistent criticism have been more successful if it had focused on pneumatology, since this topic had been of central importance in Schleiermacher’s theology?\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{26} Barth, \textit{Die protestantische Theologie}, 411 and 418–24. ET Protestant \textit{Theology in the Nineteenth Century}, 445–6 and 452–9.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. 380. ET Protestant \textit{Theology in the Nineteenth Century}, 412. Barth’s students at the time were rather dismayed by their teacher’s approach. They favoured a clear-cut dismissal of Schleiermacher’s theology as heretical. Instead, Barth called him a ‘giant among the theologians’ and stated that it is wiser to acknowledge his place within the church. See ‘Seminar Protocol from April 20, 1930’, in \textit{Karl Barth—Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel}, vol. 3, 1930–1935, ed. Caren Algner (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2000), 143 n. 9.
Most probably the answer will not be a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ but require some careful qualification. Above all, the conclusion that Barth fundamentally broke with Schleiermacher is simplistic and ‘too pervasive’, even though many of his students thought so and contributed to the perception that the two men belong to opposite theological camps, a perception that is also common among those who favour Schleiermacher. On the whole, Barth’s theological evaluation of Schleiermacher ‘is sometimes negative, sometimes positive, and often ambiguous’.30

3. BARTH AND SCHLEIERMACHER

Despite the fact that Barth and Schleiermacher were seen as belonging to two opposing theological camps, similarities between them have been noticed by a number of scholars. Eberhard Jüngel was one of the first who pointed out that Barth ‘tried to overcome’ Schleiermacher yet ‘remained related [to him] in many ways’.31 On the occasion of Barth’s one hundredth birthday in 1986, Colin Gunton noted that ‘Barth’s relation with Schleiermacher is increasingly being recognized as one of serious dialogue rather than total rejection.’32 During the last two decades several attempts were made to scrutinize the relation,33 but Barth’s theological views prior to the Church Dogmatics have been mostly exempt from

them. This is also true for the one study that focuses on the doctrine of election.\textsuperscript{34} Its author concludes sympathetically that for Schleiermacher and Barth the divine decree is ‘single’ and ‘directed to humanity in Christ’,\textsuperscript{35} but he finds their achievement is limited, because it ‘presupposes the radical transcendence of God’\textsuperscript{36} and thus an indifference towards history.\textsuperscript{37} Unfortunately, he pays hardly any attention to the crucial paragraph 33 of \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, where Barth lays the foundation of his revision. He also does not adequately take into account Schleiermacher’s discussion of the work of Christ in \textit{The Christian Faith}. His focus on the opposition between ‘transcendence’ and ‘history’ prevents him from recognizing important differences in their reconstruction. As we will see in the following chapters, the analysis of Barth’s christological revision against the background of his earlier view on election sheds not only a new light on the development of Barth’s own doctrine of election, but it also leads to a more nuanced description of his relation to Schleiermacher.

It hardly needs to be said that Schleiermacher should no longer be read through Barth’s eyes. While such an approach might have been helpful to understand the motivation behind Barth’s dissent from liberal theology, it obscures the continuity of shared theological concerns between the two men. It is curious but perhaps not surprising that the same problem emerges when one looks at the history of recent Schleiermacher research. Many theologians in the second

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} J. Daryll Ward, \textit{The Doctrine of Election in the Theologies of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth} (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1989).
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid. 1 and 340.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 340. Woyke claimed exactly the opposite. For Schleiermacher, he says, God is ‘immanent in history’ (see above, n. 14).
\item \textsuperscript{37} Barth’s view of ‘radical transcendence’ entails that it is ‘not clear what [his] theology has to tell us about history’ (Ward, \textit{The Doctrine of Election}, 3 n. 3). Schleiermacher’s position is not without problems either, but on the question of history Ward finds him somewhat better than Barth. Moreover, the dialectic of election and reprobation in the \textit{Church Dogmatics} leads to an ambiguity that is only partially resolved: ‘If the elect are rejected and the rejected elected, does that mean the dead are alive and the alive are dead? Is it not possible to see in this doctrine a single decree that is as universally negative as it is universally positive? The answer to this last question must be no because of Barth’s fundamental claim that, in Christ, God took the reprobation of humanity on himself. But what that implies for historical existence is unclear’ (ibid. 181–2).
\end{itemize}
half of the nineteenth century were still aware of his interest in and ties to the Reformed tradition, but most interpreters in the wake of the so-called ‘Schleiermacher-Renaissance’ since the 1960s regard him primarily as a philosophical theologian, for whom German Idealism was the main conversation partner.38

The following study presents the first monograph on the doctrine of election in Schleiermacher and Barth. It offers a new evaluation of their relation, concentrating on the systematic exposition of central texts by both theologians and the way in which each of them handles the subject matter at hand. This shall enable us to provide a rich comparison of their thinking on election and its systematic–theological context, in order to understand better their respective contributions to our understanding of the doctrine. While many interpreters have recognized the importance of an approach that sets Barth’s theology in the context of the debates of the Reformed tradition, they often remain content with Barth’s own assessment of his relation to Schleiermacher and adhere to the conventional view ‘that although Barth recognized Schleiermacher’s theological merits in several areas, he was deeply critical of his anthropological

38 To be sure, Schleiermacher took great interest in philosophical issues and often lectured on them. This might explain that since the publication of the first edition of The Christian Faith interpreters have focused on philosophical questions in the introduction and neglected the main parts of the book, despite Schleiermacher’s insistence that the book as a whole is an exercise in dogmatics. Nevertheless, it is puzzling how little scholarly work on The Christian Faith, especially in Germany, has been devoted to Schleiermacher’s relation to the Reformed tradition. Some studies have examined Schleiermacher’s relation to the confessional writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, especially Martin Ohst, Schleiermacher und die Bekennnisschriften: Eine Untersuchung zu seiner Reformations- und Protestantismusdeutung (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989). The volumes of a major symposium in 1984 contain two articles on Luther and Schleiermacher but none on Schleiermacher and the Reformed tradition. See Kurt Victor Selge (ed.), Internationaler Schleiermacher Kongreß Berlin 1984, vols. 1 and 2 (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter 1985). The same is true for the Festschrift Günter Meckenstock and Joachim Ringleben (eds.), Schleiermacher und die wissenschaftliche Kultur des Christentums (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1991). The situation in the English-speaking world is somewhat different. In particular, the work of Brian Gerrish has helped to rediscover Schleiermacher as the main Reformed theologian of the modern era. See the essays in A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). For his interpretation of Calvin see his monograph Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
presuppositions’. Our study will show that on crucial points Barth agrees with Schleiermacher regarding a doctrine of critical importance for the Reformed tradition and that precisely the anthropocentric outlook of traditional views motivated not only Barth but also Schleiermacher to search for a new approach.

My overall task will be a twofold one. On the one hand, I compare Barth’s earlier view on election, as laid out in his second commentary on Romans and his initial series of lectures on systematic theology, the so-called Göttingen Dogmatics, with Schleiermacher’s view in his essay ‘On the Doctrine of Election’ and in The Christian Faith. On the other hand, I will discuss in detail the subsequent changes in Barth’s view, culminating in Church Dogmatics II/2. We will see that the resemblances between the two theologians become most clearly visible in Barth’s early formulation of the doctrine. Therefore, such a resemblance and convergence of interest behind their respective reconstructions is true not first of Barth’s later theology in Church Dogmatics III and IV, as is sometimes suggested, but already and even more impressively of his earlier theology, at a time when he was writing his most virulent criticisms of Schleiermacher. In regard to the second aspect, I will not dwell on the surprising coincidence of material resemblance and hefty rejection, since the focus of my analysis of Barth’s theological development is on the fortunes of a single doctrine through the various phases of his thinking. It should be noticed, however, that a more detailed consideration of the issue would have to take into account the influence of liberal theologians, particularly Barth’s teachers, on his early assessment of Schleiermacher. Leading theologians at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century like Albrecht Ritschl and Wilhelm Herrmann, whom Barth continued to admire even after his own dissent from liberal theology, held Schleiermacher in high esteem, and Barth initially followed their appraisal. The general interest in the topic of election, however, was scarce. Schleiermacher’s new approach did not influence subsequent dogmatic reflection.

One of the few theologians who ventured a fresh elaboration of the doctrine was the Swiss pastor and professor Alexander Schweizer (1808–88), a student of Schleiermacher’s, in his dogmatic work *Der christliche Glaube nach protestantischen Grundsätzen dargestellt* (2nd edn 1877). During Barth’s student years, a major contribution to the discussion about election came from the field of sociology rather than theology, through Max Weber’s seminal study on the effects of central Protestant ideas in a specific social-historical context.

The picture that emerges from the following pages reveals that Barth’s theology is not just a repudiation of Schleiermacher but an expansion of his predecessor’s work in a new framework. We will see where his doctrine of election shares in ideas and suggestions first brought into play by his predecessor and where he breaks new ground. A new assessment of his relationship to Schleiermacher comes into view. For both theologians, the doctrine of election stresses the indispensability of God’s grace. Far from renouncing the doctrine of election, as other liberal theologians did, Schleiermacher advocated its strict version, as exemplified by Augustine and Calvin, while criticizing two central aspects of the traditional view: the focus on the election or reprobation of individuals and the assumption of a twofold divine will for two predetermined groups of persons. Instead, he argues for a single divine decree and one predestination to salvation, in order to arrive at a more satisfactory explanation for the relation between God’s universal grace and the

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41 See Bruce McCormack, ‘The Sum of the Gospel: The Doctrine of Election in the Theologies of Alexander Schweizer and Karl Barth’, in David Willis and Michael Welker (eds.), *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 470–93. McCormack argues that there is a ‘tremendous convergence of interest which lies back of their respective formulations of the doctrine’. Both wanted to stress ‘that what God does in time is grounded in God’s eternal being’ (ibid. 471, 485).

42 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1930). The first German edition of Weber’s essay appeared in 1904. Weber’s thesis has been widely discussed but also misunderstood. He did not argue that Calvinism was the main force behind the development of modern capitalism. For a critical evaluation, see Herbert Lüthy, ‘Variations on a Theme by Max Weber’, in Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism, 1541–1715* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 369–90. In contrast to Weber, who assumed that the formative power of religion in modern societies was declining, Ernst Troeltsch envisioned a process of transformation that could release anew the cultural potential of Protestantism.
possibility of unbelief. The dialectic of election and reprobation is part of the historical realization of God’s kingdom, which entails that not everyone responds to the proclamation of the gospel in the same way.

If Barth had paid closer attention to Schleiermacher’s reconstruction of the doctrine, when he reflected upon the topic in the 1920s, he would have noticed how close it came to his own theocentric revision, which stresses that the divine decision is not predetermined by an eternal decree for individual persons but occurs time and again in history, when God’s address leads to faith or to unbelief. Reprobation is not an end in itself but always remains open and oriented toward the election for salvation, which is the steadfast goal of God’s acting. In both reconstructions, however, the relation between election and christology remains vague. Despite an emphasis on the historical appearance of Christ (Schleiermacher) or the teleology of God’s salvific will (Barth), it is not clear to what extent, if any, the divine will itself is determined by the history of Jesus Christ.

While Barth’s earlier treatment of the doctrine of election shows a striking resemblance to Schleiermacher’s reconstruction, his later christological revision modifies not only the traditional idea of an absolute decree but also Schleiermacher’s idea of a single divine decree. Barth now states that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus Christ, who is the elected human being and the electing God (the object and subject of election). The combination of election and redemption is no longer controlled by the concept of divine preservation (Schleiermacher) or the divine decision in every moment of time (Barth) but by the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Only here, it becomes clear that predestination is defined by grace, or more precisely that the determination of God’s will and thus the content of predestination is grace. At this point, Schleiermacher’s and Barth’s earlier views of the doctrine were marked by a fundamental ambiguity. Contemporary attempts to appropriate Barth’s christological revision of the doctrine will be most fruitful when they pay careful attention to its central features.

43 See Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. II/2, 129–36. ET *Church Dogmatics II/2*, 120–7. In particular, a clarification of the relation between the active and passive election of Jesus Christ is necessary.
and straighten out the occasional terminological inconsistency. If they accept the revision, it will be hardly possible to fall back upon a position that resembles Barth’s earlier position.

The comparison between Schleiermacher and Barth offered here is an exercise in historical theology with a focus on systematic–theological issues. It could stimulate further attempts to identify Schleiermacher’s and Barth’s common interests and to seek doctrinal formulations that correspond to these interests, perhaps even more so than the ones from the two men themselves. A better understanding of the development of the doctrine of election in the modern era can also sharpen our perception of the similarities as well as the differences between Schleiermacher’s and Barth’s appropriation of the Reformed tradition. Finally, the realization of shared interests and concerns between those who follow Barth and those who follow Schleiermacher may have the effect of ‘teaching both of their need for one another in a vital Reformed theology of the future’, which can only profit if old prejudices are overcome. One does not need to deny that there were (and still are) differences between the two traditions that we are accustomed to call ‘liberal theology’ and ‘dialectical theology’. At the same time, none other than Rudolf Bultmann remarked already in 1924 that the ‘most recent theological movement’ does not represent a negation but a ‘deliberation about the consequences’ of liberal theology. Karl Barth’s theology is one of the most important examples of such a deliberation.

Probing the Tradition: Schleiermacher’s Revision of the Doctrine in his Essay on Election

The essay ‘On the Doctrine of Election, especially in regard to the Aphorisms of Herr Dr. Bretschneider’¹ offers a sympathetic reconsideration of the strict Augustinian–Calvinist view on election. According to Schleiermacher, this view offers a cogent explanation of the indispensability of divine grace for human salvation, although he criticizes its focus on the salvation of individual human beings. The essay was his first publication in the field of dogmatic theology. He called it ‘a kind of precursor to my Dogmatics’,² since it offers an early and more detailed version of the doctrine of election developed a few years later in The Christian Faith. The motivation to write the essay stemmed from various sources.³ In the spring of 1818, Schleiermacher was asked to contribute an article to the first issue of a new theological journal. Initially, he had planned to submit a substantial discussion of the strife between the two theological


² In a letter to his friend Ludwig Gottfried Blanc from April 28, 1819, see Schleiermacher, Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, xlviii.

³ Schleiermacher, Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, xlv–xlvi (editorial foreword).
factions of the day, supernaturalism and rationalism. During the following winter months, however, he delayed this project and instead worked on the topic of election, while he began to write out his academic lectures on dogmatics with the goal of future publication. For this major project, he deemed a fresh systematic—theological treatment of a significant doctrine to be a more appropriate accompaniment.

Moreover, the topic had gained renewed attention in the wake of the ecclesiastical union formed by the Lutheran and the Reformed churches in Prussia in 1817, which was supported by Schleiermacher. Historically, the two topics that had caused the most conflict and division between the two main Protestant confessions in Germany were the Lord’s Supper and the doctrine of election. Both issues were also highlighted in a new publication by the leader of a Lutheran synod, Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (1776–1848), the Aphorismen über die Union der two Protestant churches in Germany, their communal celebration of the Lord’s Supper and the differences in their teachings.4 Although Bretschneider supported the union of Lutherans and Calvinists, he disagreed with Schleiermacher’s claim that doctrinal differences between the two churches do not have to be straightened out for the sake of full communion. In his Aphorismen, he tried to show the errors of Calvin’s doctrine of election and advised the Reformed churches to relinquish it in favour of the belief that God wants all human beings to be saved.5

Schleiermacher composed the essay with Bretschneider’s publication in mind. In order to tackle the various unresolved issues and break new ground after centuries of debate with little or no progress, he opted for a principal reconsideration of the issue.6 He seized the opportunity to set forth his own view that neither dismisses nor simply repeats Calvin’s arguments but instead seeks to offer a new

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4 Aphorismen über die Union der beiden evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland, ihre gemeinschaftliche Abendmahlsfeier, und den Unterschied ihrer Lehre (Gotha: 1819). The relevant passages are included in Schleiermacher, Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, 444–68.

5 Bretschneider, Aphorismen über die Union, in Schleiermacher, Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, 449–64.

basis for Lutherans and Calvinists to settle their long-standing controversy. Throughout the essay, he tries to appeal to voices from the Lutheran tradition in support of his argument and refrains from confessional polemic. Notwithstanding the ecumenical stance, the main goal of the essay is to explain the advantages of the Augustinian–Calvinist position and call attention to those aspects that were often neglected in the previous debates. Schleiermacher is convinced that the ‘strict’ understanding of election, which stresses the unconditional divine decree, is solidly grounded in the formulations of Scripture and the Christian doctrine of God, even if many people have claimed the opposite. Besides its originality, the essay also demonstrates the author’s remarkable breadth of vision and addresses a variety of other theological topics that are relevant for a fuller understanding of the doctrine.

1. UNCONDITIONAL GRACE AND PREDESTINATION

According to both Schleiermacher and Bretschneider, the crucial point in all controversies over the doctrine of election has been the indispensability of divine grace for the act of conversion and the question whether human beings can accept or resist God’s grace by their own free choice. The starting-point for their discussion is the question ‘what must divine election be like if certain Reformation assertions are true about the incapacity of the self for salvation and the total confidence the Christian may place in God’. Both

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7 Ibid. 150.16–32.
8 Ibid. 147.6–22. It should be mentioned that the essay consciously ignores voices from the tradition of Reformed Orthodoxy. Schleiermacher finds that, in contrast to Calvin’s original and productive insights, later Reformed theologians used ‘harsh expressions that…obscure the subject matter, which could only arise because one got involved in shallow rhetoric about questions that did not follow from a clear intuition of the subject matter’ (ibid. 220.12–16). The rebuke is aimed particularly at the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619).
9 Ibid. 151.10–15 and 162.13–21.
theologians agree on the decisive significance of the question, yet their answers differ sharply.

Bretschneider admits that the premise of the natural human incapability of the good is consistent with Calvin’s view of predestination, but he argues that according to certain biblical passages human beings are inherently capable of willing the good. He calls the claim of a human inability towards salvation a ‘wrong’ proposition of the Lutheran ‘system’ and requests that the idea of an eternal and immutable divine decree of election and reprobation should be rejected. It not only lacks warrant from Scripture, he thinks, but it also contradicts the fatherly love and providence of God as well as the belief in the moral constitution of human beings as God’s children.

Schleiermacher agrees that the assumption of a natural opposition to God’s grace correlates with the idea of an unconditional decree. Unlike his opponent, however, he has no qualms about the two poles of the correlation. He argues that the willing of the good is completely powerless without the gift of grace; in itself, it is no more than ‘a mere wanting’ or ‘an unfulfilled desire’. Bretschneider’s position is motivated by a desire to avoid any determinism and to emphasize the responsibility of the individual believer in the process of salvation, even if it means abandoning the traditional Lutheran idea of the bondage of the will. For Schleiermacher, on the contrary, the assumption of a free human will in matters of faith is problematic. While it seeks to emphasize the generality of redemption, it seems to render the work of Christ superfluous, since it assumes that human beings are by themselves capable of the good. In any case, such an assumption should not be acceptable for theologians in the Lutheran tradition: ‘One can hardly quote here, if one does not want to repeat everything Luther has written.’

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12 See Bretschneider, Aphorismen über die Union, in Schleiermacher, Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, 456.10–457.27.
14 Ibid. 153.22–3. Schleiermacher also mentions Johann Gerhard, Franz Volkmar Reinhard and Philipp Marheineke. Bretschneider’s rejection of a key tenet of Lutheranism seems odd, but the ‘Pelagian tendencies of the times’ were strong, as August Twesten noted in a letter to Schleiermacher on November 1, 1819. See Schleiermacher, Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, xlix–l.
confession as core Lutheran teaching and simultaneously call Calvin’s views about election an unacceptable or even dangerous doctrine.\textsuperscript{15}

As proof of his point, he cites Johann Gerhard’s definition of election: God foreordains those persons to salvation of whom God foresees that they will believe, and combines it with the fifth article of the Augsburg confession, which claims that ‘God bestows the Holy Spirit who effects faith, where and when God wants it.’ The combination leads to the view that God has foreordained salvation for those in whom God has foreseen Himself as effecting faith by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Schleiermacher contends that this thesis does not differ from Calvin’s understanding of the origin of faith; the corresponding view of election is the same on the Lutheran side as on the Calvinist side. One might want to dispute this outcome with the claim that faith originates through the influence of the Holy Spirit but that a person is able to resist the influence. Yet, for Schleiermacher, this thesis implies that if a conversion occurs, God alone is the origin of faith, whereas in the case of a negative outcome, the human person is held responsible. He is not satisfied with such a distinction, since the question remains why some resist, or neglect, the pious feelings aroused through God’s Word. He argues that, if divine aid fosters a person’s openness for the effects of grace, as the Lutherans hold, the lack of such aid leads to resistance or negligence. He concludes that the absence or presence of divine aid is identical with predestination.\textsuperscript{16}

According to Schleiermacher, the Lutheran position on election implies the untenable claim that human beings are able to love and trust God even before they receive the gift of faith.\textsuperscript{17} He suggests that everyone who seeks to uphold the primacy of divine grace for human faith and conversion should come to the conclusion that God’s original creating will orders everything, including that which is

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 154.12–157.30.
\textsuperscript{17} Schleiermacher is convinced that the ‘natural moral feeling’, which is sometimes invoked as an aid to foster a person’s spiritual impulses is itself ‘entangled in the bourgeois society to which we belong and the age in which we live’. Therefore, it is not a perennial habit of humankind but always dependent on a socially determined ‘feeling of honor and common sense’. Therefore, human desire ‘can also trifle with it’ (ibid. 158.11–15).
foreseen by God. Any doctrine of grace which assumes the possibility of an independent human opposition to divine grace would be inconsistent: on the one hand, it claims that salvation is God’s work alone, whereas on the other hand, it assumes a human co-operation in the process of salvation. Hence, Schleiermacher agrees with the claim of Augustine and Calvin (among others) that God’s predestination determines salvation as well as damnation. He concludes that the debate over election always reaches a point where one has to choose between an Augustinian view of grace, including a strict doctrine of election, and a Pelagian view of grace. He chooses the former, while Bretschneider opts for the latter.\textsuperscript{18}

Schleiermacher is aware that the preference for a Pelagian position is often rooted in the assumption that the doctrine of election is not compatible with human responsibility and ‘very detrimental’ to morality.\textsuperscript{19} He insists, however, that the doctrine does not have such adverse effects. Calvin’s emphasis on the coincidence of the gift of grace and the new life in Christ without consent to sin shows that it does not lead to frivolous pride (in those who think of themselves as the elect), timidity (in those in whom the conflict of virtue and vice is unresolved), or despair (in those who seem to have resigned to the power of sin).\textsuperscript{20}

Bretschneider’s concerns about the moral effects of the doctrine are related to the assumption that the desire for a new life in Christ is only a means to the end of salvation and that one can resume one’s former way of life once this end is achieved. Schleiermacher rejects any separation between salvation and sanctification and points out that both include the knowledge of God and God’s laws, as Paul says that the inner person is awakened through God’s Spirit and finds more and more delight in God’s law.\textsuperscript{21} He also remarks that the doctrine of election is no more speculative than the widely accepted teachings about God’s righteousness and omnipotence. He agrees with Calvin’s admonition to look at one’s election in Jesus Christ and emphasizes that the believers’ consciousness of their vocation

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 158.19–162.10.


\textsuperscript{20} Schleiermacher, ‘Üeber die Lehre von der Erwählung’, 165.3–169.9.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. 169.10–35.
and justification is a firm testimony to their election. If doubt persists, the progressive work of the Holy Spirit will provide a clearer assurance of election than any degree of moral perfection or a set of ethical rules; the latter two standards rather lead to more doubt. In general, the free reign of God’s Spirit should be the ultimate standard to deal with issues that arise as part of the Christian life. According to Schleiermacher, the doctrine of election is the most cogent explanation of the indispensability of divine grace for salvation through Jesus Christ, and when understood correctly it does not have the detrimental consequences attributed to it by Bretschneider. Therefore, it is also not necessary to abandon the ‘fundamental evangelical doctrine’ of the bondage of the will.

2. ELECTION AND GENERAL REDEMPTION THROUGH CHRIST

After the discussion of the crucial point in the debate over election and its relation to the believer’s new life in Christ, Schleiermacher turns to the difficult question whether the doctrine of election contradicts the idea of general redemption through Christ. Bretschneider’s Aphorisms had addressed the issue by means of three objections to the position of Augustine and Calvin, which allegedly demonstrate that their views on election stand in direct contrast to widely accepted teachings.

First, he says that Calvin’s view implies that God intends the ‘restoration of moral freedom’ and the liberation from sin through Christ’s redemptive work only for some, not for all

\[22\] Ibid. 171.20–173.17. Schleiermacher does not delve further into the issue but refers to Calvin’s view as the model of his own response, if he were to explain his position in more detail.

\[23\] Schleiermacher, ‘Ueber die Lehre von der Erwäbung’, 219.19–23. ‘Hence those Lutherans who decline to abandon God’s grace do not need to be shy of the unconditioned decree which, as Bretschneider correctly perceived, must accompany it: Schleiermacher has made it easier for them to go over to the Calvinist side’ (Gerrish, Tradition and the Modern World, 114). For Bretschneider, however, the question was not whether one should ‘abandon God’s grace’ but whether one should ‘abandon’ human freedom in relation to God.
persons. Schleiermacher responds that in principle one can speak of God’s intention in the singular but not in the plural. He rejects the ‘always confusing conception’ of a particular divine decree in regard to the individual person and claims that ‘the church knows only one divine arrangement of God for the restoration of humankind, namely through Christ’. In doing so, he does not deny that God’s decree affects individual persons. The point is that one should not assume particular relations between God and every human being.

Moreover, Schleiermacher points out that Lutheran and Calvinist theologians agree that some persons will not be saved. Therefore, the Lutheran side could admit that God accounts for redemption in such a way that everyone could be saved and that some persons are not saved. It is insufficient to say God accounts for the redemption of all persons but some are lost due to their resistance to God’s grace, since in this case God would account wrongly. The resistance was not merely allowed for but ordered by God. At the same time, it was not determined by some pre-temporal decree for every person. Rather, the proclamation of the gospel occurs through human speech and action and stands under the historical rule that a great potential can be realized partially but not at once. The living whole of the community of believers grows through the repetition of expansion and contraction, or success and failure. Schleiermacher employs this central rule, in order to show the advantages of the Calvinist


\[26\] Schleiermacher does not mention that this ‘particularism’ also characterizes the writings of Augustine and Calvin, who still clung to an individual view of predestination to salvation or damnation. For Augustine, God’s mercy extends only to the elect and sets them apart from the mass of sinners who still remain under God’s judgment, see Henri Rondet, ‘La prédestination augustiniennne: Genèse d’une doctrine’, Sciences Ecclésiastiques 18 (1966), 241–2. Similarly, Calvin explains that ‘by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment [God] has barred the door to life to those whom he has given over to damnation. . . . God’s mercy succors some’. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, eds. Ford L. Battles, John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 931 and 959. Calvin quotes Augustine’s allusion to the potter-image from Rom. 9:21–4 to support his position: a potter can make two kinds of vessels out of the same lump of clay.

\[27\] Schleiermacher, ‘Ueber die Lehre von der Erwählung’, 177.12–40. W. Pannenberg notes that Schleiermacher rediscovered the universal historical context of the idea of election and overcame the abstract, unmediated relation
claim that God’s predestination applies to the saved and the lost over the Lutheran view that divine predestination applies only to the elect. The proclamation of the gospel occurs under the conditions of history, which means that anything gradually spreading over the whole cannot be conceptualized as occurring in one instant and without resistance. Therefore, it is consistent that an accounting for the salvation of some always implies an accounting for the loss of others, although it does not have to be an eternal loss.  

Bretschneider’s second objection suggests that a number of New Testament passages, most prominently among them Rom. 5:12–19, affirm the general nature not only of sin but also of redemption. Schleiermacher replies that these passages do not refer to the result but only to the event of the proclamation of the gospel. He says that the gospel has to be proclaimed, so that it can be heard and accepted, but proclamation and acceptance are not the same. In the texts of the New Testament salvation always depends on faith in Christ and only those who believe in Christ will be saved. In order to clarify his point, he introduces the distinction between a preparatory and an effective grace, related to Jesus’ saying in Matt. 22:14 that ‘many are called but few are elected’. Moreover, in Rom. 5:12–19 Paul does not claim that all human beings in fact will be redeemed but that the ‘inner power’ of redemption is inexhaustible, while it is effectively real only for those who come to faith through the proclamation of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact that not everyone is actually saved through Christ, even if everyone dies through Adam, does not limit the general power of redemption itself.

between God’s eternal election and particular human beings. The observation matches Schleiermacher’s emphasis on a single decree. Yet, another crucial aspect of his revision remains unnoticed: the gradual progress and development of God’s kingdom through human speech and action. Schleiermacher attributes the historical manifestation of divine election not only to the justification of individuals in accordance with divine providence, as Pannenberg explains, but more specifically to the realization of the effects of the proclamation of the gospel under the conditions of time. In addition, Pannenberg briefly mentions similarities between Schleiermacher and Barth regarding the idea of Christ as Second Adam. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematische Theologie, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993), 488–9.

Third, Bretschneider says that the debate over election culminates in the question whether God wants or does not want the whole of sinful humankind to be saved through Christ. Schleiermacher does not agree with this alternative. He points out that the Lutheran churches explicitly acknowledge that not everyone accepts the proclamation of the gospel or that some accept it and still fall away at a later stage. They also hold that God owes humankind nothing and that it is God’s will if someone never hears the proclamation of the gospel. The Lutheran tradition itself suggests that, contrary to Bretschneider’s position, God does not will the salvation of some persons.

Schleiermacher goes on to explain that the objection implies two possible ways of thinking about the relation between God’s will and redemption, which both remain unsatisfactory. In the first view, the omnipotent will of God does not want the salvation of those who reject or fall away from the gospel, although there exists another divine will in favour of their salvation. This view leads to a contradiction in God. In the second view, God’s will is limited over against the realm of human freedom and the latter the ultimate reason for salvation. This option goes against key Protestant insights and cannot be a common ground for the debate. Schleiermacher puts forth a third view of general redemption, which, in his opinion, is consistent not only with Augustine’s and Calvin’s concept of predestination but also with fundamental Lutheran assumptions. He says that the power of Christ’s redemptive work does not hinder anyone from being saved and that both sides agree on this point, while they also agree that not everyone is actually saved, which they explain differently. The Lutherans say that God foresees the unbelief of some, while the Calvinists say that God does not want to grant faith to everyone. The difference in emphasis does not imply a different concept of general redemption. In regard to those persons who are never reached by the proclamation of the gospel, the two sides also agree that God owes nothing to humankind and that it is God’s will if someone is not addressed by God’s Word.

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32 Schleiermacher, ‘Über die Lehre von der Erwählung’, 183.5–187.10. He cites several passages from Lutheran and Reformed confessions as evidence of their fundamental agreement on central points.
3. ONE DIVINE DECREE

Schleiermacher offers his most original contribution to the discussion about election by developing the idea of a single divine will and decree which effects faith and unbelief, in order to overcome the problems inherent in the Lutheran concept of a twofold will for the elect and for the reprobate. The Lutheran tradition abandoned the Augustinian doctrine of election because of the alleged implication that God does not want the salvation of all persons. Instead, it promoted the ideas of a twofold will that intends the salvation of all but effects only the salvation of some persons and, ‘so to say’, of a half will that assumes the predestination of the elect but not of the reprobate.\(^{33}\)

The idea of a twofold divine will is related to the assumption of an antecedent and a consequential divine will, which is sometimes combined with the distinction between a general and a particular will. Schleiermacher comments that the distinction between an antecedent and a consequential will implies a temporal dimension in God and contradicts the common belief that God is not a finite being. Some Lutherans, like Johann Gerhard, grounded it in the difference between divine mercy, which wants everyone to be saved as God’s antecedent will, and divine righteousness, which effects the salvation of believers and the condemnation of unbelievers as God’s consequential will. Yet, in this model God’s antecedent will would remain ‘entirely ineffective and empty’,\(^{34}\) unless it also included the predestination of unbelievers, but this idea is rejected by the proponents of the model. Furthermore, the hypothesis that God’s antecedent mercy rather than God’s righteousness effects salvation relies on a problematic distinction between the general and the particular will of God. Whereas the object of the general and ineffective will is humankind as a whole, the particular and effective will implies a partition between the saved and the damned. Thus, we are left with an ineffective and an effective will about the same purpose (salvation), which contradicts the unity of God’s will and omnipotence.\(^{35}\)

\(^{33}\) Ibid. 187.32–188.2.  \(^{34}\) Ibid. 189.16–17.  \(^{35}\) Ibid. 188.5–190.9.
In order to explain the diverse responses to the historical proclamation of the gospel, Schleiermacher prefers to stay away altogether from the idea of a divine will regarding the election or reprobation of human beings as human beings. He argues that the general divine will is always a particularly determined will. The general and the particular are identical in God’s will, because ‘in God one must think only of a most determined—and not an indeterminate—knowledge of the objects of His will’. The believers are given God’s grace as believers for Christ’s sake, while the unbelievers are reprobate as unbelievers and remain outside of Christ. While the two parts of the claim are not new in themselves, their combination includes a stronger emphasis on the work of Christ than in traditional accounts of election, including those of Augustine and Calvin.

The idea of a ‘half will’ does not fare better. Schleiermacher rejects the view that predestination relates only to the elect and that God merely foreknows the reprobation of the others, since it implies that God’s knowledge has a wider range than God’s acting, which is an untenable anthropomorphistic view, as Calvin already recognized. Similarly, he criticizes the distinction between predestination and permission, which was often used to soften the perceived harshness of the doctrine of election. He praises Calvin once more, for pointing out that it is not successful, because in this context the term ‘permission’ either denies the divine omnipotence by assuming a determining ground for reprobation outside of God’s will or simply leads back to the concept of predestination. Hence, he deems it necessary to give up the distinction between predestination and permission altogether.

In order to buttress the argument, Schleiermacher refers to two ‘equally basic elements of Christian piety’, which, in his view, leave no room for the idea of a twofold or half will of God; first, the anti-Pelagian conviction that the believer can develop a pure consciousness of grace only if the latter is perceived as God’s gift for Christ’s sake and not for one’s own sake; second, the anti-Manichaean conviction that the believer develops ‘a pure and joyous

36 Ibid. 191.22–4.
37 Ibid. 191.24–33.
38 Ibid. 191.34–193.2.
39 Ibid. 194.10.
feeling of divine omnipotence [only if] everything is based in the same way on the One and indivisible, eternal and faultless will and decree of God'.\footnote{Ibid. 194.18–21.} In contrast to these fundamental convictions, the aforementioned concept of divine permission applies to the realm of reciprocal effects, and Schleiermacher warns that ‘it necessarily leads to Manichaeism if one makes God a part of this realm, since God can be in reciprocal interaction only with something originally independent and opposed [to God]' \footnote{Schleiermacher, ‘Letter to Karl Heinrich Sack (April 15, 1820)’, \textit{Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen}, I.} In order to avoid the Pelagian and Manichaean errors, it is therefore necessary to understand the concept of predestination in a strict sense as an affirmation of the ‘omnipotent and thus irresistible will of God’.\footnote{Schleiermacher, ‘Über die Lehre von der Erwahlung’, 195.7.}

Schleiermacher acknowledges two objections against his position. First, the question whether the idea of predestination to reprobation implies the predestination of the Fall, second, the question whether the idea of a single divine will as the basis for both faith and unbelief assumes an arbitrary decision on God’s part. In regard to the first question, he points out that it is inconsistent to affirm God’s providence in history but to deny it for the first pair of human beings. His anti-Pelagian and anti-Manichaean stance leads him to reject the view that Adam’s sin was the result of his free will or of the devil’s meddling. This does not mean that God predestined Adam individually to sin, as Calvin thought, or that God created human nature good but then intended it to become worse, as the classical idea of original perfection suggests. Instead, Adam sinned because humankind as a whole was destined to both sinfulness and redemption. The perfection of human nature was not initially lost and later restored, but it was truly realized for the first time through the appearance of Christ.\footnote{Ibid. 195.7–196.23.}

As far as the second objection is concerned, Schleiermacher argues that the idea of a single will and decree does not assume a groundless arbitrariness in God, since the divine foreordination is not rooted in an arbitrary will but in the ‘good discretion’ of God. He finds himself in agreement with Calvin and points out that the famous idea of an
indeterminate *decretum absolutum* was a later development and not accepted by all Reformed churches. The idea of one undivided divine will should be used against the background of the all-encompassing divine act of creation. The human species, he explains, is necessary for the completion of the world, and it would be absurd to argue that the creation of human beings was an arbitrary act. Everyone is what he or she is according to God’s act, and if one person would be another person, or vice versa, the question about the reason for this would remain. Schleiermacher then applies the same line of reasoning to the issue of election and says that the question why God elected some and rejected others is as meaningless as the question why God made human beings in the way they were made. Moreover, he finds it reasonable that some people are more receptive for the good than others, since the simultaneous existence of higher and lesser abilities and of different levels of development is an integral element of the completion of the human species.44

Schleiermacher admits that a strong objection can be made against this construction, since it explains certain differences among human beings but does not specify why God grants faith only to some and not to all persons. He points out that the objection equally affects the Lutheran position and that it presents a test case for the validity of the strict Augustinian view of election.

His response consists in a brief phenomenology of faith, which, in his view, corresponds to the Lutheran claim that a person possesses no freedom in spiritual matters without the Holy Spirit (Augsburg Confession, Thesis 18). He appropriates ‘the old expression that the sinful human being is spiritually dead’,45 as long as he or she does not develop a conscious relation to God. They may participate in the overall spiritual life, in which one receives various impressions about God through the effects of regeneration in other persons, but they have not yet become active religious persons. The latter occurs only when the Holy Spirit grants them faith, by which they are incorporated into Christ. This is called regeneration, because it is the beginning of an individual ‘free life’. Those who are regenerated

44 Ibid. 197.10–199.15. In *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher will speak of God’s ‘good-pleasure’ (Wohlgfalten) instead of ‘good discretion’ (Gutdunken).
and begin their religious self-development are the elect. The other persons belong to the mass of persons who are spiritually dead, although they never lose the ability to be revived. The event of regeneration, however, is as incomprehensible as every beginning of a new life is incomprehensible. If one wants to ask for its ultimate reason, one might as well ask why God chooses to let some people become alive and let others die shortly after they are born.46

Schleiermacher concludes that the decree of election and reprobation is no more arbitrary than the decree of creation. At the same time, he rejects the idea of a particular decree of reprobation, which was the main stumbling-block for the Lutheran side, since it is as implausible as a positive decree not to create something. While the limitation of the decree’s range to the elect only is equally implausible, the alternative does not consist in the traditional assumption of particular decrees for individual persons. Instead, a consistent doctrine of election must be based on the idea of a single, unconditional divine decree that comprehends and conditions the entire order of the development of the spiritual world. The constitution of particular events or persons can be deduced only from the general act of creation based on divine omnipotence.47

4. GOD, SIN, AND ETERNAL DAMNATION

The idea of the single decree helps to explain why the idea of unconditional grace does not lead to the denial of general redemption, as some critics of the doctrine had thought. It also makes clear that the distinction between predestination and permission is not useful to solve the problems of the traditional doctrine but rather reinforces them. In the last section of the essay, Schleiermacher replies to two further objections against the doctrine of election and refutes the idea of an eternal damnation.

The first objection is the claim that the predestination of Adam’s sin implies that God is the author of sin. Schleiermacher says

46 Ibid. 199.31–200.9 and 201.5–203.24.
the alternative claim that evil is caused by the free yet finite human will (a claim accepted by some Lutherans) does not fare better, because God foreknew, at least, that such a will would lead to sin. Once more, the distinction between predestination and permission does not apply to the divine will. The well-known response that a freedom which can be misused is better than no freedom and possibility of misuse at all, does not suffice here, since it implies a limitation of divine omnipotence, in that it is then necessary for God to choose between two evils.48

For Schleiermacher, there is only one satisfactory way to resolve the tension between the proposition that everything which exists is constituted by God’s creative will and the proposition that God is not the author of sin and evil. The solution is that sin and evil itself do not exist in relation to God. He explains that the reality of evil always includes the actualization of a freely effective sensible power. God is the origin of this power, but those parts of an action that contradict the good are ‘not real’. At the same time, the need for redemption presupposes the reality of sin and evil, but it always dissolves evil into the good that has its origin in God alone. Schleiermacher thinks that his explanation why God is not the author of sin and evil needs further sustained argument. Still, he is convinced that eventually it can be shown to be correct; it corresponds to Paul’s thesis that there is no sin without the law (Rom. 7:14–15) and also to the assertion that the distinction between predestination and permission does not help to resolve the problems in the debate over election and other issues related to it.49

The second objection suggests that the idea of God’s good discretion as the ultimate basis of election keeps human reason from understanding the mystery of the divine decree. Even if one admits that election is not rooted in a groundless arbitrariness, it is still rooted in a groundless discretion. In response, Schleiermacher says that attempts to understand the divine will for historical or

48 Ibid. 207.17–208.24.
49 Ibid. 208.32–209.19. Schleiermacher’s formula does not explain how God can be at once responsible for the human power that originates sin and not responsible for the effects of this power. The idea that evil does not exist for God, that is, evil as nothingness, will become less important in The Christian Faith, where sin is discussed in the context of the opposition between sin and grace.
natural constellations have not succeeded either. He advises theologians not to ask for final causes but to look at efficient causes, in which one certainly finds ‘the glorification of divine wisdom’. As an example, he mentions the manifold ways in which God’s Spirit transforms the most hardened persons, and the undoubted fact that even experienced Christians are troubled if they lack an address by the divine Word. The question for the determining reasons of the development of God’s kingdom is an ‘empty’ one. Instead, one will have to look at the way it is actually determined and how everything is ordered within the whole. The question should be about the how and not about the why of God’s will.

Furthermore, Schleiermacher argues that the relation between election and reprobation is a part of the ‘general coherence’, in which everything is ordered by God, according to its significance for the whole. Particular features are not arbitrary but established through the ordering power of God’s creating will that also determines the order by which God’s Spirit quickens the dead mass of sinners. ‘[We are convinced] that one cannot speak of a divine decree for every singular human being in particular but that there is only One decree by which God determines what becomes of all and every human being.’ At the same time, the process of regeneration is also determined by the specific condition of the receiver. In the Gospels, Christ’s calling is most efficient among those who have developed a clear awareness of their sinful condition. God’s Spirit has been poured out over the disciples and, in combination with the Word, has become a ‘spiritual power of nature’. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the different levels of need and receptivity among human beings, whereby eventually final causes and efficient

Schleiermacher, ‘Ueber die Lehre von der Erwählung’, 212.5.
Ibid. 209.19–211.22. Some early interpreters of the essay had the impression that the reference to God’s good discretion still left room for a groundless arbitrariness. See Schleiermacher, Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, li–l.ii. Schleiermacher’s admonition to ask how God’s will is determined rather than why it is determined in this or that way confirms rather than dispels the criticism. In The Christian Faith, he will show more openness for the consideration of the determining reasons of the divine decree (see below, Ch. 2, 3.iii.a).
causes coincide.\textsuperscript{54} Hence, a person’s desire for redemption and his or her opening up for the influence of the Spirit is neither a predetermined outcome nor the result of an arbitrary historical process. It belongs to the new creation that continually spreads and develops ‘the richest variety of the spiritual life out of the mass of nothingness and corruption’,\textsuperscript{55} representing the kingdom of God.

Schleiermacher concludes that election and reprobation are the contrasting yet united aspects of the single divine decree, based on the divine will that creates and orders everything, by which human-kind shall be regenerated and transformed into the spiritual body of Christ. In the actual course of the proclamation of the gospel, not all human beings respond to it in the same way. Those who are captured by the power of God’s Word and become regenerated are the elect; those who are not captured by it, either because they were not receptive to it or they died before it reached them, are the overlooked or the reprobate. Their rejection belongs to the historical development of God’s kingdom and is not rooted in a second decree or second part of the divine decree. The latter assumption rather leads to a problematic distinction between final causes and efficient causes. Instead, the relation of individual persons to the single divine decree must be considered in the larger context, in which God’s good discretion always intended to create a world where God’s Spirit works as a power that is the origin not merely of particular spiritual individuals but of an entire spiritual world.\textsuperscript{56}

The final issue considered in the essay is the question whether eternal damnation awaits those who were not receptive to God’s Word or who died before it reached them. Schleiermacher finds this idea difficult to combine with human nature, the general

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. 211.22–213.12. Although Martensen is correct to observe that for Schleiermacher human beings outside of Christ have not reached their ‘true personality’, he is wrong to claim that for Schleiermacher salvation occurs ‘exclusively as a type of natural development’. Martensen, \textit{Die christliche Dogmatik}, 295. Schleiermacher thinks that the different degrees of human receptivity for the effects of God’s Spirit are historically determined, even if the desire for redemption is something intrinsic to human nature. Clearly, Martensen neglects the central aspect of Schleiermacher’s revision of the doctrine. Not surprisingly, he also puts forth (erroneously) the charge of universal salvation against the revision. Ibid. 296.


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. 215.12–216.22.
power of redemption and the eternal love of God. He points out that the Lutheran position on the issue is no more convincing than the Calvinist affirmation of double predestination, since it has to assume, if not a divine predestination, at least a divine permission of eternal damnation. Eventually, the justification of God does not depend on the distinction between predestination and permission but on the question whether one affirms that the reprobate fulfills a necessary role within the existence of human nature as a whole and its development, or not. Only an affirmation here is compatible with the concept of God’s love, but neither the Lutheran nor the Calvinist side has taken this stance. Schleiermacher’s historical understanding of reprobation makes clear that the reprobate is included in God’s love. Thus, he breaks with the traditional division of divine love and divine righteousness onto the elect and the reprobate. He insists that everything that belongs to the ‘ordered world of life’ must be the object of all divine attributes. The idea of a single decree thus emphasizes the unity of the divine attributes and helps to clarify key issues not only in the debate over election but also in the doctrine of God.

While Schleiermacher finds the idea of an eternal damnation to be lacking in clarity, he does not reject the concept of damnation altogether but reinterprets it as an indication of the historical or temporal difference between earlier and later membership in God’s kingdom. His emphasis on the unconditional character of divine grace does not negate the generality of redemption, even if not every person is always already saved. It will be always the case, Schleiermacher says, that some persons are not yet members of the kingdom of God, but this does not imply a fixed number of individuals who are forever lost. It is simply a historical fact that not every person responds in the same way to the proclamation of the gospel. A person’s exclusion or absence from the community of believers is an expression of the development of God’s kingdom and not the result of special divine foreordination. The finite condition of the world entails that at any given moment only a limited number of human beings believe in Christ and live in the fellowship of the Christian church.

57 Ibid. 216.23–218.9.
Schleiermacher is aware that the rejection of the idea of an eternal punishment as part of the incomprehensibility of God’s order could lead to the affirmation of a final general reconciliation and restoration of ‘everything lost’, beyond any possible conflict between God’s love and righteousness. Indeed, he expresses a preference for this option⁵⁸ and admits that neither the Lutheran nor the Calvinist view has tended to move into this direction. In support of his decision, he points out that the present salvation of the believers would be severely marred by the assumption that some persons who died are forever excluded from God’s kingdom, unless the believers themselves had lost their fellow-feeling for all human beings, but in this case an integral part of their own salvation would be lacking.⁵⁹

To sum up this chapter, Schleiermacher’s essay offers a succinct account of his view on election and various other related topics, notwithstanding some unresolved questions regarding the grounding of the single decree in God’s good discretion. He regards the Augustinian–Calvinist position as a good explanation of the indispensability of divine grace for human salvation through Jesus Christ and as a solid bulwark against Pelagianism and Manichaeism. Furthermore, it is more consistent than the attempts to soften its perceived harshness by defining predestination as foreknowledge or permission, although its focus on the salvation of individual human beings and the assumption of two predetermined groups of persons is problematical. Schleiermacher sets forth a more theocentric position that surpasses the Lutheran idea of a two-fold divine will for the elect and the reprobate as well as the Calvinist idea of a divine predestination to damnation. He argues that election and reprobation are not expressions of individual relations between God and humankind. In doing so, he rejects not merely the idea of a positive decree of reprobation, as Lutheran theologians did by positing a twofold divine will, but the idea of a divine decree in regard to

⁵⁸ ‘Only in [this idea] reason finds rest, if it shall combine coherently the original and developed differences of human beings with everyone’s dependence on divine grace, the divine power of redemption with the products of human resistance and finally the misery of the unbelievers with the word of grace attached to their memories.’ Ibid. 218.41–219.3.
⁵⁹ Ibid. 218.19–41.
individual persons altogether. Election and reprobation are rooted not simply in a divine decree but in a single divine decree.60

Schleiermacher’s revision marks an important advance, since he is now able to explain that the idea of an unconditional divine decree does not necessarily imply a denial of general redemption, as many critics of the doctrine had claimed. The idea of a single decree overcomes the traditional attribution of election and reprobation to divine mercy and divine righteousness respectively and from there to two groups of human beings. Systematically, the argument of the essay proceeds along the lines of the first article of the Christian creeds. The single decree is an expression of the good order of the world rooted in the will of the almighty creator. Its content is the creation of humankind so that they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the regeneration through faith in Christ. The event of regeneration signals a person’s election. Although Schleiermacher occasionally refers to the idea of a new creation through Christ and to the effects of God’s Spirit in the world, neither his christology nor his pneumatology informs the idea of the single divine decree. In the end, his concept of election remains theocentric.

60 Ward calls Schleiermacher’s reference to God’s will as the basis for both election and reprobation a defense of ‘the double decree’. This is not quite right. For Schleiermacher the fact that only a limited number of human beings live in the fellowship of God’s kingdom at any given time is the result of the finite and contingent condition of the world (nature, history and human interaction) and as such is based on the single divine decree. The term ‘double decree’ suggests a duality that stands in clear contrast to Schleiermacher’s basic intuition about the unity of the divine decree and to his emphatic rejection of all particularistic concepts of the relation between God and the world. See Ward, The Doctrine of Election, 30–2.
A Universal Predestination to Salvation in Christ: The Doctrine of Election in The Christian Faith

The doctrine of election in Schleiermacher’s main theological work extends the argument of the essay.¹ He still commends the Augustinian–Calvinist version of the doctrine as being more consistent than the alternative versions, while he revises it more thoroughly along the lines of the concept of a single divine decree, which structures the argument throughout the book. According to R. R. Niebuhr, the idea of the one decree through which human beings are elected ‘is the most encompassing single statement of the principle of the interconnection of the doctrinal contents of The Christian Faith.’² The doctrine of election serves as an explanation of the fact that not all human beings accept the gospel, if the latter is proclaimed to them at all. Its function remains the same as in the essay, but it is now located specifically in the context of ecclesiology and the origin of the

¹ The doctrine of election in the first edition of The Christian Faith (1821/2) is identical in content with the slightly enhanced version in the second edition and does not merit a separate discussion. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, Der christliche Glaube, nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt (1821/22) (Kritische Gesamtausgabe I/7), ed. Hermann Peiter (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 2, 164–89 (§§ 136–9). A general preference for the first edition is clearly not warranted; interpretative choices regarding the two editions should always be made on a case-by-case basis. See Martin Weeber, Schleiermacher’s Eschatology. Eine Untersuchung zum theologischen Spätwerk (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000), 18–19 n. 12.

Christian church (the people who believe in Christ) in distinction from the world (the people who do not yet believe in Christ). While the introduction to *The Christian Faith* (§§ 1–31) does not itself belong to the discipline of dogmatics, it offers a preliminary discussion of the topic, to which we turn first.³

### 1. THEOLOGY, THE CHURCH, AND CHRISTIANITY

In the first chapter of the introduction, Schleiermacher defines dogmatics as a discipline that belongs to the positive science of theology⁴ and functions exclusively in relation to the Christian church. It deals with ‘the historically individual element in Christianity, which cannot be deduced in a speculative way’.⁵ It is not a discipline for the

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³ The decision to differentiate but not separate the introduction from the dogmatic parts of *The Christian Faith* reflects a growing research consensus. See Albrecht, *Schleiermachers Theorie der Frömmigkeit* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 208. Here, a word on sources is in order. In recent years, it has become clear that Schleiermacher’s claim about the consistency of his dogmatic theology with his philosophy is accurate. A fine proof for this thesis is provided by Christian Albrecht, *Schleiermachers Theorie der Frömmigkeit*. He analyses the *Speeches*, the *Dialektik* and *The Christian Faith* and concludes that piety and reason are *gleichursprünglich* in the human consciousness. Ibid. 306–18. D. Ward has shown that the notion of God’s transcendence in *The Christian Faith* is consistent with the *Dialektik* and the *Speeches*. Ward, *The Doctrine of Election*, 88–156. For our purposes, this is sufficient. As far as the sermons are concerned, Schleiermacher himself insists that only dogmatic theology can define the Christian pious self-consciousness adequately. Preaching belongs to the ‘rhetorical’ kind of descriptions of the Christian pious-self-consciousness, whereas dogmatic theology deals only with descriptions of a ‘representative-didactic’ kind. In any case, his sermons do not address the topic of election directly. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube, nach den Grundsätzen der evang. Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, vol. 1, ed. M. Redeker (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960), 117–18 (§ 18.3), hereafter cited as CG 1.

⁴ According to Schleiermacher, a positive science consists of productive, goal-oriented, multi-disciplinary activities, which thematize complex forms of communication. Martin Rössler, *Schleiermachers Programm der Philosophischen Theologie* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 45–53. In the case of theology, its goal consists in the preservation of the Christian faith by means of fostering a coherent direction of the Christian church. It must be noted that the task of direction pertains not only to the official leaders of the church but to every active member in the congregation (Albrecht, *Schleiermachers Theorie der Frömmigkeit*, 99–103).

establishment of general principles applicable to Christian doctrines but a coherent reflection upon the articulations of the believers’ self-consciousness. Dogmatic propositions belong to the representative and didactic kind, besides the poetical and the rhetorical kind, of Christian propositions of faith and describe a specific class of pious mind-states (Gemütszustände) with the highest possible degree of definition. They are intrinsically related to the self-proclamation of Christ, who is the origin of the Christian church and the source of all Christian doctrines. The explanation of dogmatics includes a closer look at the concepts of piety, religion and Christianity. For our purposes, the concept of the church and the particular characteristics of the Christian church are relevant.

1.1. The Essence of Piety

For Schleiermacher, a church is a community that is constituted by and exists through free human actions. Specifically, it is defined by its relation to piety, which is ‘the basis of all ecclesial communities’. Pious actions are a unique form of human action. The pious character of an action stems from the determination of its motivation, which in turn is an expression of the determination of the agent’s self-consciousness. Piety in itself, however, is not a determination of reason or will but of the immediate self-consciousness or ‘immediate existential relationship’ (feeling), in distinction from the objective or reflective self-consciousness. It belongs to the realm of receptivity, without being separated from the realm of productivity (knowledge and action). The common element in all expressions of piety is the consciousness of oneself as being absolutely dependent, which is equated with the consciousness of being in relation

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6 CG 1, 10–12 (§ 2.1) and 105–12 (§§ 15–16).
7 Ibid. 12 (§ 2.2).
8 Ibid. 14 (§ 3).
10 CG 1, 14–23 (§ 3).
with God. The equation implies that the Whence of human existence is co-posited in the pious self-consciousness and designated by the term God. It does not signify a result of human reflection like ‘an idea or a projection’ but the co-determinant in the self-consciousness, to which human beings can trace the existence of themselves and the totality of their interaction with the world.

On the one hand, the human self-consciousness as consciousness of being in and with the world is determined by the consciousness of partial dependence (receptivity) and partial freedom (productivity), which entails the assumption of a reciprocal effect between self and other. On the other hand, it is determined by the awareness that the totality of human existence is not the result of spontaneous productivity but is absolutely dependent on something not dependent on anything else. The feeling of absolute dependence is not ‘an inference of the existence of something absent, but rather a discovery of a presence’, a pre-reflective awareness, which underlies human reflection and action. When it is actualized, human self-consciousness reaches its climax, and a person can be called pious. Thereby,

11 Ibid. 1, 23 (§ 4). For Albrecht, Schleiermachers Theorie der Frömmigkeit, 245 n. 217, ‘absolute receptivity’ is a better phrase, since it avoids the misunderstanding of a contrast between the consciousness of relative freedom and the consciousness of absolute dependence, when in fact the two coincide (see CG 1, 27–8, § 4.3). The translation ‘sheer receptivity’ is also possible; it points to the other important element in Schleiermacher’s famous phrase, that is, immediacy. ‘Both these elements, receptivity and immediacy, define the all-important term, das schlechthinige Abhängigkeitsgefühl’ Julia A. Lamm, The Living God, Schleiermacher’s Appropriation of Spinoza (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 191. The ambiguities in the concept of a ‘feeling’ of absolute dependence are discussed by Konrad Cramer, ‘Die subjektivitätstheoretischen Prämissen von Schleiermachers Bestimmung des religiösen Bewußtseins’, in Dietz Lange (ed.), Friedrich Schleiermacher 1768–1834. Theologe, Philosoph, Pädagoge (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985), 152–60. He summarizes: ‘The consciousness of the absolute dependence of our existence as a whole thus has no intentional correlate that we would posit within or without ourselves and from which we would be knowingly dependent. This is the reason why it cannot be called “knowledge”’ (156). Although the term ‘consciousness of absolute dependence’ might be more precise than ‘feeling of absolute dependence’, it needs some additional qualification, so as not to suggest a reflective quality that would be foreign to Schleiermacher’s understanding of the concept. For this reason, the common expression is retained here.

12 Lamm, The Living God, 118.

any idea of a givenness of God is excluded. The transference of this feeling to a sensible object is either an act of arbitrary symbolization or signals a ‘corrupt’ idea of God. While the feeling of absolute dependence is a foundational element of human consciousness, which can be apprehended by paying attention to the structure and determination of the immediate self-consciousness, it does not constitute a proof for the reality of God (as the Whence of human existence), even though it implies that all finite beings exist in non-reciprocal dependence upon and relation with something that is not dependent on anything else. Piety is not constituted by a person’s concept of God. A person can be pious, or his or her self-consciousness can be determined by the feeling of absolute dependence, even when a developed conception of God does not exist.

The feeling of absolute dependence is the highest, or as Schleiermacher also says, higher form of the self-consciousness and can be equated with the God-consciousness. It always appears in a temporal moment and becomes manifest only in correlation with the sensible self-consciousness, under the conditions of partial dependence and partial freedom. It therefore participates in the antithesis between the pleasant and the unpleasant, without itself being affected more strongly by the latter. The antithesis does not express a

14 CG 1, 30 (§ 4).
16 CG 1, 30 (§ 4.4) and 40 (§ 5, app.). Schleiermacher says that the expression of the feeling of absolute dependence as God-consciousness requires ‘a certain clarity’ (ibid.). This implies that the feeling can be understood in two ways, as a pre-reflective awareness of absolute dependence and as a reflective awareness of absolute dependence on God. See Ingolf U. Dalférfth, Theology and Philosophy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 104–5. The distinction does not apply to the absolute dependence of the world on God. The world as a whole does not possess a (self-)consciousness of being absolutely dependent, so that God is not its ‘co-determinant’ but the sole determinant. CG 1, 190, § 38.
17 ‘Schleiermacher makes it axiomatic that the “God-consciousness” … can never appear except in conjunction with a moment of time; that is, “with a specific relationship to the world”. Niebuhr, Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion, 186. Hence, “religion is always historically differentiated” (ibid. 196, my emphasis). The point is crucial for an adequate understanding of The Christian Faith. It helps to avoid the error that Schleiermacher’s locates piety only in the immediate self-consciousness, which makes it appear as something ’unreal’. Günter Bader, ‘Sünde und Bewußtsein der Sünde. Zu Schleiermachers Lehre von der Sünde’, Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 79 (1982), 63.
18 CG 1, 316 (§ 59.3).
fundamental contrast between the highest and the sensible self-consciousness but refers to their relation when the God-consciousness is actualized. Pleasure occurs when the highest self-consciousness is actualized easily. Together they constitute a pious moment, and their steady correlation marks the life of a pious person. The goal is the facilitation of pious stirrings, regardless of the question whether the sensible self-consciousness is in a state of pleasure or reluctance, and eventually their permanent facility.\textsuperscript{19} It is important to notice that it is a function not of distinct individual persons but of finite being in general. Absolute dependence is a qualification of finite individuality as such. ‘For if we are automatically conscious of ourselves in our finitude as being absolutely dependent, the same holds true of every finite being, and in this regard we take up the whole world into the unity of our self-consciousness.’\textsuperscript{20}

Schleiermacher believes that piety is an essential element of human nature and the progressive development of humankind.\textsuperscript{21} It brings forth various forms of community, which is due to a general species-consciousness that leads every human being beyond the limits of his or her individual personality to the imitation and assimilation of character traits of other persons. The development of pious communities is fostered by the way in which human beings communicate, since this is a revelation of a person’s inner state of mind, which not only develops into thought and action but also expresses itself to other persons.

The communal aspect of piety has two significant implications for the concept of the church. First, although the feeling of absolute dependence is the common element in every pious expression, its occurrence in time always occurs as communicative expression of a particular pious state; for example, the articulations of Christian piety are expressions of the pious mind-states of a believer in Christ. Second, although the species-consciousness relates to all human beings in an unlimited way, historically existing pious communities are limited by certain social customs and relationships which precede

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 30–9 (§ 5).
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 53 (§ 8.2).
\textsuperscript{21} The disposition towards the God-consciousness is an integral part of ‘subjective intelligence’, and the feeling of absolute dependence belongs to the essence of humanity. Ibid. 175 (§ 33.1), 225 (§ 46.1) and 331 (§ 61.4).
their formation, especially by preconceived ideas about inclusion and exclusion.\textsuperscript{22} At the same time, Schleiermacher thinks, the historical existence of positive religions\textsuperscript{23} is not a topic for dogmatic theology but simply points to the fact of piety as part of the ontological structure of human existence in relation with others and with God. The mere existence of Christian piety is not a proof for the existence of God but at best an indication for the religious dimension of human life; only the specific character of the Christian pious self-consciousness is a subject matter for dogmatic theology.\textsuperscript{24}

Schleiermacher’s definition of dogmatic propositions and piety challenges George Lindbeck’s claim that his view of religion and theology is ‘experiential-expressive’. Lindbeck correctly remarks that for Schleiermacher ‘contact’ with the divine occurs in the ‘pre-reflective experiential depths of the self’.\textsuperscript{25} But he misses the mark with his comment that for Schleiermacher the public expression of the internal experience (and religious symbolization in general) occurs as a non-discursive act. According to our theologian, the opposite is true. He states that every proposition of faith, whether Christian or non-Christian, has a discursive quality and expresses not merely a general religious experience but a specific determination of the pious self-consciousness. Christian propositions of the rhetorical kind are addressed, with either polemical or persuasive purpose, to fellow believers as well as to non-believers. After all, Christ himself communicated the message of God’s kingdom primarily by means of public speech.\textsuperscript{26}

The misunderstanding is rooted in his claim that according to Schleiermacher ‘the source of all religion is in the “feeling of absolute dependence”’,\textsuperscript{27} whereas this feeling is simply the common element

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 41–5 (§ 6.1–6.4) and 105–6 (§ 15.1).
\textsuperscript{23} The term ‘positive’ describes ‘the individual content of all the moments of pious life within a religious community, insofar as it depends on the original moment out of which the community itself originated as a coherent historical phenomenon.’ Ibid. 71 (§ 10, app.).
\textsuperscript{26} CG 1, 106–7 (§ 16.2).
\textsuperscript{27} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 21.
in all pious expressions and not the source of religion in general. Schleiermacher’s claim that the feeling of absolute dependence does not exist apart from a historical determination of the pious self-consciousness entails that it is itself an expression of piety but not the source of the latter. Lindbeck’s error goes along with a widespread terminological confusion between piety and religion. In *The Christian Faith*, the term ‘religion’ always refers to historically existing religious communities. Lindbeck and others, however, use it in the broader sense of ‘religiosity’. 28 In the end, Schleiermacher’s view of Christian piety is better suited to Lindbeck’s ‘cultural–linguistic’ model, according to which ‘religion is above all an external word . . . that molds and shapes the self and its world’. 29 In the end, Lindbeck’s distinction between an experiential–expressive and a cultural–linguistic model of religion (and theology) might be too schematic, at least in regard to Schleiermacher. 30

1.ii. The Essence of Christianity

Schleiermacher’s definition of Christianity rests upon two presuppositions about monotheistic piety and its manifestation in history. First, he claims that monotheistic religions characterized by the belief in one supreme and infinite being are the only forms of religion in which the feeling of absolute dependence is fully recognized. In every religion, God-consciousness and world-consciousness are inherent elements of the immediate self-consciousness, but only in the monotheistic religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity is the correlation of God-consciousness and world-consciousness constitutive for the pious self-consciousness of the believers. Second, he says that

28 See Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *The Triune God* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 8–9: ‘Schleiermacher argued that human-kind is intrinsically “religious”; that it is dependent for authenticity on the experience of the eternal; [and] that Christian faith is a particular … mode of such experience.’ A phrase like ‘experience of the eternal’ does not match with Schleiermacher’s concept of ‘pious mind-states’.


30 Lindbeck derives the description of the experiential–expressive model from Bernard Lonergan and insists that Schleiermacher was the first theologian who used it.
Judaism and Christianity (but not Islam) belong to the teleological type of monotheistic piety, in which the relation to an ethical task constitutes pious mind-states and shapes pious actions. In both religions, the pious self-consciousness is directed towards the advancement of the kingdom of God, and God is symbolized as commanding will. Whereas the pious self-consciousness of Judaism understands the believer’s ethical task in terms of divine punishment and reward, the Christian pious self-consciousness understands it in terms of divine request and human edification.\textsuperscript{31}

For Schleiermacher, the central elements of Christian piety are the emphasis on a contrast between the human inability and the divine reality of redemption and the belief in redemption as being accomplished generally and comprehensively by Jesus of Nazareth. In general, the term ‘redemption’ signifies a transition from a bad state, understood as captivity, to a better state. It includes the help provided in the process by another person as well as the better state that is attained. In the realm of piety, a bad state consists in the constraint of the vitality of the God-consciousness, so that the latter cannot be united with the determinations of the sensible self-consciousness. In short, redemption is ‘a liberating fact’ for the ‘bound’ God-consciousness.\textsuperscript{32} This definition does not set forth specific claims about the redeemer himself but simply explains the meaning of the term ‘redemption’. The defining characteristic of Christianity lies in the relation of all pious mind-states to the redemption accomplished by Jesus. Jesus’ redemptive activity is the historical origin of the Christian church, and the foremost task of the latter is the communication of this activity among its members and also among non-members.\textsuperscript{33}

Such a characterization does not imply that Jesus and his work of redemption are the only content of the Christian self-consciousness. The point is the relation of all pious stirrings to the redemption through Jesus, so that the free actualization of the feeling of absolute dependence in a given moment of time is regarded as an effect of

\textsuperscript{31} CG 1, 53 (§ 8.2) and 59–64 (§ 9).

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. 82 (§ 11.5).

\textsuperscript{33} Schleiermacher maintains that this definition is acceptable for every Christian believer, regardless of their ecclesial, confessional, or denominational differences (see CG 1, 148–54, § 27).
redemption, whereas a limited actualization points to the need of redemption.\footnote{Ibid. 74–80 (§ 11.1–11.4).} Since every pious community is based on free human actions, the individual presupposition of becoming a member of the Christian church lies in the certainty that through the redeemer’s influence the state of being in need of redemption has ended and the state of a permanent facility of pious stirrings has begun. According to Schleiermacher, this certainty is the faith in Christ or in Jesus as the redeemer. It is the only way in which a person enters the Christian church. In contrast, the lack of a consciousness of being in need of redemption is the main obstacle for attaining membership in the Christian church.\footnote{Ibid. 94–6 (§ 14.1).}

To sum up, piety is a universal feature of human nature, which entails the historical existence of various communities. It expresses itself as the feeling of absolute dependence and the individual possibility to actualize the God-consciousness (in correlation with the sensible self-consciousness) at any given moment of time, which constitutes a pious moment. In Christian piety, all pious moments are related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth, so that the Christian church is a pious community defined by the concept of redemption through Jesus. Systematically, Schleiermacher combines a philosophical concept of piety with a redemption-centred christological concept of Christian piety, in order to lay the ground for the dogmatic exposition that follows in the remainder of the book.

2. THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD AND THE WORLD

Schleiermacher provides a detailed explanation of the way in which redemption is achieved through Jesus of Nazareth (and mediated in the Christian church) in the second part of The Christian Faith, where he discusses the Christian pious self-consciousness under the antithesis of sin and grace. The division of dogmatics into two parts
results from the twofold approach to Christianity as one pious community among others and a particular religion with its own characteristics. This approach entails that there can be no reference to Christ in the pious self-consciousness without there being also a reference to God.\textsuperscript{36} Therefore, in Part I he offers an analysis of the common element in all expressions of the Christian pious self-consciousness apart from their determination by the antithesis of sin and grace (§§ 32–61). This element is the consciousness that finite being as a whole is absolutely dependent on God, and it also belongs to the piety of Judaism and Islam, although it is actualized differently in each of the three monotheistic religions.\textsuperscript{37} According to Schleiermacher, the feeling of absolute dependence is most fully recognized in the monotheistic religions, because there the correlation of God-consciousness and world-consciousness is constitutive for the pious self-consciousness of the believers. In Part I, he discusses the pious self-consciousness, as far as it expresses the relation between God and the world, the corresponding divine attributes and the corresponding constitution of the world.

2.i. Divine Preservation and the Naturzusammenhang

The analysis of the Christian pious self-consciousness apart from its determination by the antithesis of sin and grace is based on three claims about the feeling of absolute dependence. First, it is the only way in which finite being and infinite being coincide in the

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 172 (§ 32.1). It is important to notice that the reverse is not true, since the feeling of absolute dependence is not restricted to the Christian faith but open to everybody, by virtue of being human.

\textsuperscript{37} Schleiermacher himself does not draw this conclusion, because he combats the charge of being engaged in ‘natural theology’ (ibid. 162, § 29.2), but it follows from his remarks about the feeling of absolute dependence and about Christianity as a monotheistic religion. Although the God-consciousness is determined differently in each monotheistic religion, nothing occurs in one of them that is entirely absent in the others (ibid. 64–8, § 10.1). This claim does not deny the existing differences between them. Schleiermacher emphasizes that ‘a merely monotheistic piety, in which the God-consciousness in and for itself forms the content of pious moments, does not exist; but just as in Christian piety a relation to Christ always appears with the God-consciousness, in Jewish piety a relation always appears to the law-giver and in Islamic piety a relation to the revelation through the Prophet’ (ibid. 174, § 32.3).
self-consciousness. Second, it is an essential aspect of human nature. Third, it is very closely related to the consciousness of the world. The term ‘consciousness of the world’ is not simply another word for a person’s awareness that there is a world. Instead, it is an integral part of the self-consciousness, which connects the self to the world. It is also called the consciousness of the self as being part of the ‘coherent system of nature’ (Naturzusammenhang). All expressions of Christian piety presuppose and include the consciousness of being-in-the-world. Hence, every Christian pious moment always includes a consciousness of the self as being part of the world.

According to Schleiermacher, God does not interfere in the world through individual acts. Although both God and the world are co-determinants in the immediate self-consciousness, they are understood as being fundamentally different. God is the Whence of absolute dependence, while the world is the Whence of relative dependence and relative freedom; whereas God is an absolute and self-identical undivided unity, the world, as the sum of all contrasts and differences, is a relative and divided unity. The sharp distinction between God and the world demonstrates that Schleiermacher’s theology is neither pantheistic, in the sense that it implies an identification of God and nature, not panentheistic, as if the world somehow exists ‘in God’. He says that Christian propositions...
contain a superrational element, because they are not deduced from general principles but from an inner experience by which they are also applied. He explains that the occurrence of divine revelation in history is based on the original design of human nature and presents the highest development of the latter’s spiritual power. Christ’s historical appearance itself is neither absolutely supernatural nor absolutely superrational because his human existence presupposes a possibility in human nature to receive the divine being in the person of Christ. The eschatological goal of Christ’s redemptive effect consists in a situation in which the effects of the divine Spirit and the effects of human reason are no longer separated from each other. In short, the divine Spirit is the highest enhancement of human reason and consciousness.  

275, § 53.2). Rather, it is a ‘post-Kantian Spinozism’ with the four aspects of causal monism, complete determinism, higher realism and a largely nonanthropomorphic view of God. Lamm, *The Living God*, 160–97. It amounts to an ‘acceptable form’ of pantheism that is ‘neither a materialism nor a negation of theism’ (ibid. 119), closer to the neo-Spinozism of Herder and the Romantics than to Spinoza himself. Schleiermacher himself says that pantheism is compatible with piety, as long as ‘it somehow expresses some variety and form of theism [and is] not simply and solely a disguised materialistic negation of theism’ (*CG* 1, 58, § 8, app.). One can employ the common pantheistic formula of ‘One and All’ under the condition that God and world are distinguished ‘at least regarding their function’ (ibid.), so that the All can be conceived as being absolutely dependent on the One. Lamm points out that what Schleiermacher ‘objects to is making personality an attribute of God’ and that he ‘has nothing against a personal view of God, and in fact holds it as necessary’ but finds it far better to speak of ‘a living God’ than of ‘a personal God’, since this notion ‘alone can refute atheism and materialism [and also] expresses the love that underlies the unity in plurality, the connecting, living force of all things’ (Lamm, *The Living God*, 107–8).

43 *CG* 1, 86–94 (§ 13). Schleiermacher remarks in his second *Sendschreiben* that he consistently attempted to steer a middle course between rationalism (the belief that Christianity is universal and has to be judged by reason) and supernaturalism (the belief that historical revelation is superior to reason). He explains in a famous passage that in his own system the supernatural ‘always is a first but becomes something natural as a second. Thus creation is supernatural, but thereafter it becomes Naturzusammenhang; thus Christ is supernatural according to his beginnings, but he becomes natural as a purely human person, and the same is true for the Holy Spirit and the Christian church.’ Schleiermacher, ‘Über die Glaubenslehre. Zwei Sendschreiben’, 393. The point is that God’s new creation is in itself not alien to human nature, although the free initiating of a new beginning contains an inexplicable element. The issue will also arise in the discussion of Schleiermacher’s christology, see below, section 3.ii.a.
In order to elucidate the claim that the world exists in absolute dependence on God, Schleiermacher offers a reconstruction of the doctrines of creation and preservation. The doctrine of creation explains the creation of the world as one eternal act, whereby no change occurs in regard to God’s independence from the world or the world’s absolute dependence on God. The doctrine of preservation, which is more important, illuminates the feeling of absolute dependence and its relation to the world. It also offers a better understanding of the ontological difference between God and the world, the contrast between good and evil, and the anthropological difference between the spiritual and the sensible.\textsuperscript{44}

According to Schleiermacher, human experience shows that the feeling of absolute dependence is complete when human beings identify themselves with the whole world by uniting everything that appears as separated and positing it as one. The principal unity of finite being is expressed by the concept of the \textit{Naturzusammenhang}. The latter is not simply a description of the sensible realm as a whole designating the unity of self-consciousness, nature and history, but rather an epistemological concept that includes the possibility of coherent human experience and interaction with the world and with each other.\textsuperscript{45} The ‘inner certitude’ that everything is dependent on God coincides with the ‘complete conviction’ that everything is grounded in the \textit{Naturzusammenhang} as a whole, a coincidence that makes possible a development of the pious self-consciousness in correlation with every perception of and reflection on the world.\textsuperscript{46}

In an appendix to his discussion of divine preservation, Schleiermacher discusses some traditional ‘scholastic’ distinctions. One is the difference between preservation and cooperation, but the term cooperation implies a finite activity independent from the divine activity. He insists that the forces or activities of things and their being are both equally dependent on divine preservation activity powers.

\textsuperscript{44} It must be noted here that difference does not mean dualism. Any dualistic view about these topics would be inconsistent with the world’s absolute dependence on God. \textit{CG} 1, 253–4 (§49, app.).


\textsuperscript{46} \textit{CG} 1, 228 (§ 46.2).
Finite being always implies a force, and forces exist only in an activity. An idea of preservation that does not understand the relations or activities of finite being as being absolutely dependent on God would be ‘something as empty as a creation without preservation’. Another distinction is the idea of a divine government, which is used to explain ‘the fulfillment of divine decrees or the guidance of all things to divine ends’. Schleiermacher says it is correct if it points out that everything happening by means of the forces distributed in the world happens according to God’s original eternal will. But this is already implied in his overall idea of the determination of the sensible realm through the Naturzusammenhang. May it then be necessary to refer to the passive states of finite beings and, in this way, to complement the idea of preservation as a co-operation that is related to the active states of finite beings? He does not think so, since the object of preservation is the whole of finite being, which always includes the contrast between receptivity and productivity and hence also the passive states with their absolute dependence, especially since the passive states also affect our self-consciousness, in the form of perception and fellow-feeling.

Furthermore, there exists no rivalry between divine preservation and natural or human agency. The mission and work of Christ did not entail any miraculous changes in the natural order, such as the restoration of an original natural state. The only restoration that was the result of Christ’s appearance concerned the realm of human interaction, not the divine arrangement of the mechanism of nature. The revelation of God in Christ is a supernatural event not in itself but only in relation to the general human sinfulness. Correspondingly, divine preservation and natural causality are not separate from or mutually limiting each other but the same from two different perspectives. In order to explain this claim, Schleiermacher uses the distinction between particular cause and general cause and between the totality and the unity of being. He says that every singular finite being possesses a particular or partial and divided

47 Ibid. 232 (§ 46, app.). 48 Ibid. 49 Ibid. 236–7 (§ 47.1).
causality, since it is dependent not on one but on every other being. The general causality belongs only to that on which the partial and divided causality as a whole is dependent.\textsuperscript{51}

The concept of causality stands in a ‘most precise correlation’\textsuperscript{52} with the concept of absolute dependence, which means that it is superior to the other two traditional methods to establish the divine attributes, that is, delimitation and negation. God is not the first efficient cause, on which all intermediate secondary efficient causes within the system of nature are dependent, as some proponents of the cosmological argument for the existence of God thought. Instead, God is the absolute undivided causality, being principally different from the relative divided causality of the world, whereby absolute causality is opposed to relative causality, as eternity is opposed to temporality, but it is also equal in scope with the whole of relative causality, since everything finite is put under the divine causality. The opposition is expressed by the idea of divine eternity, while the equality is expressed by the idea of divine omnipotence.\textsuperscript{53} Eternity, when qualified by omnipresence, expresses the Absolute Inwardness of God as the One, distinct from the Naturzusammenhang; omnipotence, when qualified by omniscience, expresses the Absolute Vitality of God as being coextensive with the All, or the Naturzusammenhang.\textsuperscript{54} Hence, God is both transcendent and immanent, standing in a ‘stark contrast to the finite world or its totality, without at the same time being outside that totality’.\textsuperscript{55} On the one hand, everything ‘is and becomes entirely through the Naturzusammenhang, so that each (jedes) exists through All (alles)’. On the other hand, ‘everything is

\textsuperscript{51} CG 1, 229–30 (§ 46.2).
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 259 (§ 50.3).
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. 264 (§ 51.1). In Part I of The Christian Faith, the divine causality is divided into four original divine attributes, namely, eternity, omnipresence (the divine causality is identical everywhere in the world), omnipotence and omniscience (the divine causality is the highest form of life). They are called ‘original attributes’ because they point to the ‘inner productive disposition towards the God-consciousness’ (ibid. 263, § 50.4) as the underlying basis of the historical appearances of the pious self-consciousness.
\textsuperscript{54} Lamm, The Living God, 147, see CG 1, 266–7, § 51.2.
\textsuperscript{55} Lamm, The Living God, 164. Schleiermacher himself points out that the application of the difference of external or otherworldly and internal or inner-worldly to the being of God jeopardizes the divine omnipotence and omnipresence. CG 1, 58 (§ 8, app.).
and becomes entirely through the divine omnipotence, so that All undividedly exists through One’\textsuperscript{56} and, in fact, ‘cannot exist without the One’.\textsuperscript{57}

The equality in scope between divine and natural causality does not imply that God and humankind are interdependent. Schleiermacher categorically rejects the idea of any form of reciprocal effect or interaction between the world and God.\textsuperscript{58} The rule of equivalence between the opposite ends of a spectrum is relevant only for the understanding of the Naturzusammenhang and the reciprocity of human beings in and with the world, while it does not apply to the feeling of absolute dependence.\textsuperscript{59} Contrary to a prevalent orthodox criticism of Schleiermacher, the power of redemption is not a matter of sheer quantity, and there exists no measure of calculating the size of a person’s God-consciousness.\textsuperscript{60} In other words, the transition from sin to grace is not a quantitative matter.

### 2.ii. The Concept of Original Perfection

According to Schleiermacher, the feeling of absolute dependence entails the belief in the original perfection of the world in relation

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. 280 (§ 54.1).

\textsuperscript{57} Lamm, \textit{The Living God}, 122. The opposite claim, that the One cannot exist without the All, is not made. In another passage, however, she insists that for Schleiermacher the One is real only through the All: ‘divine causality exists only in and through finite causality’ (ibid. 169). She should have added that the claim does not refer to a particular causality of finite beings but to the general causality of finite being as a whole. Moreover, the question arises whether this implies that there is a necessity of the All corresponding to the ‘necessity of the One’ (ibid. 123).

\textsuperscript{58} CG 2, 381 (§ 147.2). This rejection is a basic tenet of Schleiermacher’s theology.

\textsuperscript{59} CG 1, 254 (§§ 46–9, app.). Dalferth, \textit{Theology and Philosophy}, 104, summarizes: ‘The totality of reciprocal interaction, interdependence and mutual influencing and being influenced is the world; God differs from the world because whereas everything depends on him, he depends on nothing; so that we cannot interact with him, although we could not interact without him.’ Hence, Schleiermacher denies that God’s will can be changed through human prayer. Instead, every prayer is part of the progress of God’s kingdom. It ‘does not arrive because someone prayed, as if the prayer here could be regarded in isolation as a cause in itself, but because the right prayer can have no object besides that which is part of the order of the divine good-pleasure’ (CG 2, 382, § 147.2).

\textsuperscript{60} CG 1, 96 (§ 14.2).
to humankind and the original perfection of humankind itself. The term ‘perfection’ means that the whole of finite being, with its effects on human being in the world and human interaction, makes possible the constancy of a pious self-consciousness. The term ‘original’ marks the distinction of the perfection from the merely quantitative perfection of a particular historical situation. It is a perfection that is the same for every moment and thus the inner structure of finite being as a whole. Original perfection is the unity of ‘all steadfast formations of being and all opposite functions of being’, a unity ‘through which the latter are equal in scope with the divine causality’. It entails that every finite determination of the self-consciousness can be traced back to the eternal omnipotent causality and that the God-consciousness can form a pious moment together with every sensible impression of the world. The basis for this is the certainty linked to the God-consciousness. ‘For if the God-consciousness were not founded in this way, it would be something contingent, thus uncertain and arbitrary.’ The belief in original perfection includes that the eternal omnipotence is revealed everywhere in the world via the feeling of absolute dependence and that in every pious stirring the world-consciousness (in conjunction with the God-consciousness) is related to All. The belief in the eternal omnipotence entails that the world is the complete revelation of this omnipotence and that the God-consciousness (in conjunction with the world-consciousness) is related in all of its stirrings to One.

The concept of the original perfection of the world points to the resources of human life in the world and the world’s openness for human influence. On the one hand, the world provides the human spirit with a multitude of incentives, that is, passive states that can become active states and thereby foster the actualization of the God-consciousness as a result of human productivity. On the other hand, it has an unlimited receptivity and offers manifold resources for original and creative activity of the human spirit. Both aspects, the provisions and the openness of the world, are interrelated and form the two moments of the original perfection of the world in relation to humankind.

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61 Ibid. 310 (§ 57.2).  
62 Ibid. 308 (§ 57.1).  
63 Ibid. 308–9 (§ 57.1).  
64 Ibid. 313–16 (§ 59).
The concept of the original perfection of humankind consists in the direction or disposition of the human spirit towards the God-consciousness as a ‘lively impulse’ and the consciousness of the ability to attain the states in which the God-consciousness can realize itself. The latter unites itself not only with stirrings of the self-consciousness by impressions of the world but also with stirrings by cognitive activities or the practical human influence on nature and society. Therefore, not only the receptive functions and the realm of piety but also the productive functions of human life belong to the original perfection of humankind. Moreover, the concept of the original perfection of humankind consists in the inclination to express the God-consciousness, especially in relation to a pious community, and the inclusion of the species-consciousness within the individual self-consciousness, which is the basis of the recognition of other persons as human beings and the presupposition for the ability to communicate and understand inner states by exterior expressions. The ‘intimate union’ of the species-consciousness with the individual self-consciousness and the resulting communicability of inner states is the social precondition of the church as a pious community. It is also the reason for the assumption that every person is principally receptive to the communication of the God-consciousness. In the light of original perfection, human nature seems to be capable of achieving a steadfastness of God-consciousness.

Schleiermacher’s definition of the original perfection of humankind leads to the thesis that the divine decree is best understood as a decree of the overall development of humankind, mediated through the redemption that was ‘enclosed in the idea of human nature from the beginning, though human beings were unconscious of it’. The historical realization of original perfection, however, is not found in Adam, in whom it would have been lost again, but only

65 Ibid. 321 (§ 60.1).
66 Ibid. 321–5 (§ 60). The idea of original perfection is presupposed in his soteriology, when he refers to a ‘never completely extinguished desire for the fellowship with God’ (CG 2, 170, § 108). Similarly, the essay on election spoke of a ‘desire for redemption which is the good that never completely disappears from human nature’. Schleiermacher, ‘Ueber die Lehre von der Erwahlung’, 214.22–4.
67 CG 1, 333 (§ 61.4).
in Christ, ‘in whom it has brought gain to all’.\textsuperscript{68} This claim leads directly to the theme of Part II, the Christian pious self-consciousness under the antithesis of sin and grace. The dialectic of Adam and Christ will be taken up again in Schleiermacher’s christology.

To sum up, the first part of \textit{The Christian Faith} explains that the feeling of absolute dependence is a part of every pious Christian stirring. The concept of absolute dependence refers not merely to individual persons but to the world as a whole; it is not only an existential category. God is an undivided unity and the Whence of absolute dependence, while the world is the unity of all divisions and the Whence of relative dependence and relative freedom. This sharp distinction refutes the idea of any reciprocal interaction between the world and God. The concept of the \textit{Naturzusammenhang} points to the coherence of nature and history as well as to human experience and interaction in the finite realm.\textsuperscript{69} Schleiermacher argues that the revelation of God in Christ does not originate in the realm of the \textit{Naturzusammenhang}, but he also says that it is only relatively supernatural, namely, in relation to the state of general human sinfulness. The absolute dependence of the world on God entails the original perfection of the world and of humankind, or the possibility that the God-consciousness can be actualized by anyone in any given moment of time. The possibility is based on the consciousness of a disposition towards the God-consciousness and on the resources and incentives that the world provides for human life. The disposition is a universal one. It is accompanied by an inclination to express the God-consciousness and by a union of species-consciousness and individual self-consciousness, which implies that no person is principally excluded from the communication of salvation through Christ. The argument foreshadows Schleiermacher’s rejection of the idea of eternal damnation. The universal quality and the teleological character of original perfection correspond to the universal scope of piety to the idea of a single divine decree that orders human history.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. 337 (§ 61.5).

\textsuperscript{69} Schleiermacher’s concept of \textit{Naturzusammenhang} does not have to entail a deterministic view of nature and history. The relative divided causality, which characterizes the world, guarantees human freedom. If anything in his theology is conceived along deterministic lines, it is the concept of God, based on the ideas of absolute causality and simplicity.
In Part II, Schleiermacher explains the specific determination of this decree and spells out more fully the redemption-centred character of Christian piety set forth in the introduction.

3. SIN, GRACE, AND REDEMPTION THROUGH JESUS

The analysis of the Christian pious self-consciousness, which Schleiermacher defined as the main goal of the book, is not complete until it has been explained how the feeling of absolute dependence is actualized in the Christian faith, which is qualified by the antithesis of sin and grace. This is the task of Part II (§§ 62–163). In the first three paragraphs, Schleiermacher connects Parts I and II by recapitulating and elaborating on several points from the introduction. He reminds us that the actualization of the God-consciousness occurs only in correlation with the sensible self-consciousness, which is characterized by the antithesis between the pleasant and the unpleasant. The two poles of this antithesis do not occur exclusively, because under the conditions of history there is never an absolute dominance or an absolute lack of God-consciousness. The God-consciousness is always advanced or hindered, and the content of a pious moment must be understood in light of this advance or hindrance. Therefore, a relation to Christ which puts the God-consciousness into the background and co-posits only Christ and not also God in the self-consciousness ‘could be very intimate, but strictly speaking it would not belong to the realm of piety’ and not be the subject matter of dogmatic reflection.

70 Ibid. 341–3 (§ 62.1–62.2).
71 Ibid. 344 (§ 62.3). Schleiermacher says ‘in the reality of the Christian life . . . there is neither a general God-consciousness without a co-posited relation to Christ nor a relationship with the redeemer which would not be related to the general God-consciousness’ (ibid.). This is an indication that the first part of The Christian Faith is not merely a description of the ‘form’ of a general God-consciousness, in abstraction from its particular Christian ‘content’. The distinction between form and content is appealing to understand the work as a whole, but it fails to take into account that the content of the Christian pious self-consciousness is described not only in Part II but also in Part I, since piety never exists apart from its historical actualization. A number of Schleiermacher interpreters have neglected this central point, for example Williams, Schleiermacher the Theologian, 58 and 106.
Moreover, Schleiermacher recalls that the eschatological goal of piety lies in the constant facility to develop the God-consciousness in every moment. Every backward movement of the God-consciousness is a turning away from God, which cannot be wanted, because piety is an essential element of human life. A person can only will the community with God, which is the ‘original conformity’ to the divine will. In Christian piety, faith assents to the divine will at work in the redemption through Jesus. He specifies Christian piety as the consciousness that the turning away from God is a human act called sin, while the community with God is based on a communication by the redeemer, which is called grace. The bondage of the feeling of absolute dependence does not imply the sheer absence of the God-consciousness, because otherwise human beings would not be responsible for sin and sin blindly. Similarly, the divine communication of redemptive grace and its human appropriation do not exclude each other, since the formation of the God-consciousness in correlation with the sensible self-consciousness always results from an individual human act.72

Thus, the stage is set for the analysis of the Christian pious self-consciousness under the antithesis of sin and grace, which constitutes the major part of the book. The first half describes the consciousness of sin or the corporate state of humankind before redemption, which is bound to decrease (§§ 65–85). The second half describes the consciousness of grace or the corporate power of redemption, which shall be limited by sin less and less (§§ 86–169). For our purposes here, the topics of sin, redemption and new life in Christ, divine election and eschatology are the most significant ones.

3.i. Sin and Original Sinfulness

Schleiermacher’s introduction to the discussion about sin sketches the classical problems of the Christian doctrine of sin: How can any human being be accountable for an act that contradicts his or her own vital impulse towards the God-consciousness? Can human sin co-exist with divine omnipotence? Is it possible that something that

72 CG 1, 344–7 (§ 63).
shall never be is generated? Does the existence of sin negate the original perfection of the world and of humankind?

In an ingenious move, Schleiermacher claims that a consistent treatment of sin in the light of redemption will resolve the difficulties. His basic point is that sin would not exist if redemption did not exist either. As a result, the doctrine of sin is located in the first half of Part II, between the doctrines of creation and preservation in Part I and the doctrines of Christ and of the Christian church in the second half of Part II. The main goal is to offer a satisfactory definition of sin and to clarify the relation between God and sin.

3.i.a. Sin and the Human Condition

Schleiermacher mentions three basic and interrelated aspects of human sin, before he discusses the concepts of original sin and real sin.

First, he defines sin as a positive antagonism of the flesh, that is, the lower soul-powers in their entirety, against the spirit. Sin is the hindering of the ‘free development’ of the God-consciousness caused by the autonomy of the sensible function of the self-consciousness. It is related to but not identical with the consciousness of sin. Every moment when the God-consciousness is only present but not the controlling factor constitutes a hindering, so that sin coincides with the consciousness of sin, which means that reluctance and not pleasure marks the highest self-consciousness. If the God-consciousness is not posited at all in a moment, sin is followed by the consciousness of sin. If it is posited and the highest self-consciousness has pleasure but with effort, the effort partially annuls the pleasure, since the person knows that a stronger influence from the sensible side would have undermined the control of the God-consciousness. The continuous awareness of sin can precede sin as a warning intuition, accompany it as an inner complaint, or follow it as regret. Sin and the consciousness of sin—and thus the God-consciousness—can be always related to each other, except for the states of sheer innocence and complete hardening, which do not occur in

73 Ibid. 353–4 (§ 65).
the Christian pious self-consciousness, where the consciousness of sin never exists without the consciousness of the power of redemption. Sin itself is merely the ‘hopeless inability’ of the spirit, outside the realm of redemption.\footnote{Ibid. 355–8 (§ 66).}

Second, sin is a power that is already present at the time when the disposition towards the God-consciousness has not yet emerged in a person’s life, although strictly speaking this is not sin but rather the seed of sin, since it does not yet constitute a hindering of the God-consciousness. The hindering and the ensuing consciousness of sin occur only and immediately once the development of the God-consciousness has already begun. It is part of the original perfection of humankind that the flesh cannot principally prevent the emergence of the spirit, despite its resistance when the latter enters the ‘realm of the consciousness’.\footnote{Ibid. 358–60 (§ 67). Schleiermacher agrees with the definition of sin as turning away from the creator but rejects the definition of sin as transgression of divine law. The latter, he says, can easily lead to an unwarranted distinction between God and the ‘eternal law’.} The antithesis of sin and grace is an antithesis that ‘manifests itself \textit{within} the state of grace, whenever the tendency to sin may momentarily reassert itself’.\footnote{Robert Lee Vance, \textit{Sin and Self-Consciousness in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher} (Lewiston, Queenstown, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), 116.}

Third, he argues that the existence of sin constitutes a disruption of human nature, which is caused by the unequal development of the intellect and the will. The intellectual preference of mind-states in which the God-consciousness can flourish needs to be appropriated by the will and thus precedes the attempt to attain them. The consciousness of sin always depends on a comparable existing good by which the consciousness of sin is conditioned and which can only result from the original perfection of humankind. Sin stands in contrast with original perfection and entails disturbances of the historical development of humankind through the one divine decree. It expresses the disjointed character of this development, without annulling or denying its unity and without abolishing the original perfection of the world and of humankind. This leads to the question whether sin is unavoidable and the consciousness of sin is merely a consciousness of the missing good. Schleiermacher’s answer is
negative. He argues that a comprehensive obviating of sin requires the certainty of an unhindered development of the God-consciousness until the latter reaches an absolute power, or a sinless perfection. Traces of sin accompany the most elevated human states, and only someone who has no share in it can produce a truly redeeming effect. Although the law causes knowledge of sin, it is only an imperfect representation of the good. It cannot provide for the possibility of obedience to the divine will, and knowledge of sin based on the law remains either incomplete or doubtful. According to Schleiermacher, a complete knowledge of sin is gained only through the sinlessness and spiritual power of a person with a perfect and pure God-consciousness.77

Against the background of his definition of sin, Schleiermacher interprets the classical distinction between original sin and real sin, which says that sin originates not only in but also beyond human existence. On the one hand, sin is grounded in the self, because human existence is characterized by individual productivity. On the other hand, the shape of sin depends on preceding external social factors, so that its existence cannot be blamed on one person or one human generation alone. The former point is expressed by the concept of real sin, whereas the latter point is expressed by the concept of original sin.78 On the basis of this distinction, he undertakes a revision of the doctrine of sin, which includes two main components.

First, he states that the sinfulness preceding any particular human action is a total incapacity for the good, which can be removed only by the influence of the redeemer. This does not imply that human beings lack the capacity to receive redemption or that the act of redemption requires a comprehensive recreation (Umschaffung). Employing his earlier distinction between human productivity and receptivity, Schleiermacher argues that the receptivity for the influence of redemption is part of the human disposition towards the God-consciousness, which in turn is part of humankind’s original perfection. The receptivity for the influence of the redeemer is not a form of human co-operation in the process of redemption but rather a yielding to its effects. This becomes clear from Jesus’

77 CG 1, 360–5 ($68). 78 Ibid. 366–8 ($69).
invitation to follow him in seeking God’s kingdom and from the practice of Christian proclamation, which always included the invitation to accept God’s grace.79

Second, he explains that traditional views of original sinfulness as the guilt of everyone and not merely a meta-personal evil is correct, as long as the connection between original and real sin is taken into account. He regards original sin as the sufficient reason for every real sin. It is present in everyone, so that merely external factors but not an inner change is needed for the actual development of the latter. From the observation that human efforts attain proficiency by practice, he infers that the growth of everyone’s sinfulness results from human practice stemming from individual productivity. At the same time, the existing sinfulness preceding and surrounding individual actions points to the corporate character of sin: ‘In everyone it is the deed of all, and in all it is the deed of everyone.’80 In other words, an individual person who sins is always the representative of the whole. Schleiermacher therefore maintains that original sin is best understood as the corporate act and corporate guilt of the entire human species. The knowledge of the sinfulness of all human beings, beyond a mere individual sinfulness, is gained through the extension of the personal self-consciousness to the species-consciousness. The common consciousness of sin also entails the recognition of a general, not only individual, need of redemption.81

The two components of the revision of the doctrine of sin lead to the rejection of a ‘fall’ of human nature. Schleiermacher regards original sin no longer as the result of a primal transgression of the first pair of human beings, which resulted in the loss of an original righteousness and the corruption of human nature. Instead, he argues that it is impossible to explain the origins of human sin without the assumption of an already existing condition of sinfulness. He maintains that apart from redemption human nature is identical, in that all human beings are equally sinful and guilty of sin. Neither sin itself nor redemption itself but the relation between sin and redemption constitutes the difference between individual

79 Ibid. 369–72 (§ 70.1–70.2).
80 Ibid. 377 (§ 71.2).
81 Ibid. 374–81 (§ 71) and 398–401 (§ 73).
human beings. Everyone who has been put in constant relation with the power of redemption is not susceptible anymore to the remaining sin inside and outside of him or her, because the power of sin is broken by the power of the God-consciousness. The sins of those who are regenerated cannot hinder the progress of the individual and general spiritual life: ‘within the state of grace sin has no present power—only the vestigial power of the past’.82

3.i.b. God and Sin

A fundamental problem of the Christian doctrine of sin is the question whether God is the author of sin. Throughout Part II of The Christian Faith, Schleiermacher insists that the divine attributes related to the consciousness of sin (holiness and righteousness) and those related to the consciousness of grace (love and wisdom) are two sides of the same coin, while the former are also part of the attributes discussed in Part I (eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience). The Christian tradition rightly insists, Schleiermacher says, that sin in itself cannot be the result of a particular divine activity. In general, he says, sin is related to redemption, which is coherent with his earlier claim that the consciousness of sin presupposes the determining power of the God-consciousness. He distinguishes between the claim that God is the origin of redemption but not of sin and the historical coincidence of the consciousness of sin with the consciousness of grace. ‘Since sin and grace are opposed to each other in our self-consciousness, God cannot be regarded as author of sin in the same way as He is author of redemption. But since we never have a consciousness of grace without a consciousness of sin, we also have to maintain that the being of sin, with and besides grace, is ordered for us by God.’83 The consciousness of sin always implies the lack of a divine communication to let the power of the God-consciousness become effective in human life. God cannot be the author of sin, since God’s commanding will is opposed to sin. But the consciousness of

82 Vance, Sin and Self-Consciousness, 184. See CG 1, 381–98 (§ 72), 409–10 (§ 74.4).
83 Ibid. 426 (§ 79.1).
grace and the actualization of the God-consciousness also presuppose the consciousness and existence of sin in the life of the believers. Hence, God is and is not the author of sin.  

Schleiermacher tackles the resulting problems of this dialectical thesis in three steps. First, he refers to the classical idea that human evils always participate in the good and that hence sin somehow participates in grace. Furthermore, sin has to be understood as a corporate deed. The idea of sin as a corporate deed does not express an accumulation of individual or communal acts of sin but refers to the fact that nothing, not even sin, can be considered apart from its origin in the corporate life of a community, in which there is always a certain intuition of and longing for redemption present. The principal exclusion of such a presence, for instance, through the assumption of a complete hardening, contradicts the integral human disposition towards the God-consciousness and imposes a ‘particularistic limitation’ on the power of redemption. Everything that existed before the appearance of the redeemer, including sin, was always already related to this appearance.

Second, the claim that God is not the author of sin as such but only of sin in relation to redemption does not indicate two perspectives on sin. Both aspects of the claim are necessary if the power of the God-consciousness is rooted in its particular communication. In the consciousness of those who already live in the ‘community of redemption’ it is clear that sin exists before they are regenerated and the communication of grace is only effective in the historical life of

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84 Williams remarks that authorship ‘may not be the happiest choice of terms, but it is intended to capture just that limited but important recognition of the tragic aspect of evil and suffering present in the Adamic myth and the book of Job’. Robert R. Williams, ‘Theodicy, Tragedy, and Soteriology: The Legacy of Schleiermacher’, Harvard Theological Journal 77 (1984), 411. Still, he fails to recognize the dialectical character of the thesis and mentions only the claim that God is the author of sin, without saying that for Schleiermacher God is also not the author of sin.


86 Ibid. 408 (§ 74.3). See also CG 2, 224 (§ 118.1).

87 CG 1, 426–8 (§ 80.1–80.2) and 443 (§ 82.2).
a person, which entails that sin has to be overcome also historically. Sin becomes a historical necessity. But this seems to deny any relation between the God-consciousness of the regenerated (the inner realm) and the existence of sin in general among those who are not regenerated (the outer realm), which would contrast with the demand always to observe the outer realm, towards which the inner realm is expanding. Therefore, a broader antithesis is assumed, the antithesis between the kingdom of God and the world, which is not simply identical with the antithesis between sin and grace. It contains the antithesis but also the co-existence of sin and grace. Thus, the dialectical thesis is valid inside and outside the Christian church, and it does not imply the believers’ indifference to the existence of sin in the world.\(^8\)

Third, Schleiermacher clarifies the classical statement that God is not the author of sin and that sin is grounded in human freedom. Sin is neither a closed entity nor a closed process, so that the scholastic question whether sin is a substance or an accident was beside the point. He modifies the traditional view that there can be no divine will or purpose regarding sin and sinful humankind and assumes a productive divine will for every finite being, including sin, not as particular wills but as part of the one divine will that brings forth the God-consciousness in its entirety. He uses the modification to refute certain claims that sin has a different origin than other finite beings, for instance, a demiurge (creator-god) or the devil. In this respect, sin either has no eternal causality or that its causality is somehow found in God. If the latter option is correct, both the communication and the limitation of the God-consciousness are rooted in the same divine will, like evil is always part of the good. But this contradicts the undisputed fact that God cannot effect or originate something that God prohibits.

Schleiermacher seeks to resolve the dilemma by appealing to Calvin’s distinction between God’s commanding will and God’s productive will. The former defines what is good and what is evil. He then refers to Paul’s reflections about the ineffectiveness of the divine commandment (Rom. 7:7–18) and the necessary completion of God’s commanding will through God’s productive will (Phil. 2:13).

\(^8\) Ibid. 428–9 (§ 80.3).
On this basis he argues that the very concept of sin presupposes a commandment and a commanding will opposed to sin, which cannot be the cause of it. Nevertheless, while God’s commanding will is absolutely perfect, the effects of God’s productive will cannot match this perfection under the conditions of history and entail an inadequacy to God’s commanding will. Therefore, sin as the human shortcoming over against God’s commanding will is at the same time grounded in the divine causality, since the latter effects everything. Schleiermacher concludes that sin can be grounded in human freedom only if it is also grounded in divine causality. If human beings exist as a result of divine ordering, sin should be regarded as being a part of that ordering too, even when it is also a product of human freedom.\(^89\)

In order to illuminate the subject, Schleiermacher offers a brief phenomenology of sin. On the one hand, a sinful moment consists of an expression of a sensible impulse, which, as part of finite reality, presupposes the co-operation of eternal divine causality. On the other hand, a sinful moment stands in contrast to the God-consciousness, which is also an expression of the divine causality. But these two aspects do not yet constitute a sinful moment, since the divine causality is not directed towards sin but towards the actualization of the God-consciousness. Moreover, if sin were defined merely as the powerlessness of the God-consciousness it would be no more than a negation, but such an understanding of sin is no more satisfactory than the understanding of sin as sheer lack. The negation or lack of the God-consciousness turns into a sin only when the God-consciousness negates its own powerlessness regarding the sensible function of the self-consciousness through the consciousness of God’s commanding will. The negation can occur before, during, or after the actual expression of the sensible function. Sin remains part of the divine causality and is related to redemption through the same, but this does not imply a divine causality for every particular occurrence of sin. ‘The commanding will of God, as His ultimate and complete will, could…never ordain sin \textit{per se}, but only with the ultimate effect of redemption.’\(^90\) The general sinfulness of

\(^{89}\) Ibid. 430–6 (§ 81.1–81.2).
humankind implies a general need of redemption, and the general need of redemption leads to the idea of a general redemption, as we will see in the next section.91

Schleiermacher’s understanding of sin is significant for his doctrine of election in two respects. First, he rejects the concept of an original human righteousness that was lost with the ‘fall’. Instead, he suggests that from the beginning human beings lived in a situation of sinfulness and replaces the term ‘original sin’ with the more fitting term ‘original sinfulness’. In doing so, he radicalizes the Protestant understanding of total depravity, which already played a significant role in his essay on election, as a correlate to the idea of God’s gracious, unconditional election. These revisions emphasize the unity of the divine decree in regard to its object, namely, humankind as a whole, and its content, namely, redemption. Second, he insists that sin must be understood strictly in the light of redemption, because the consciousness of sin presupposes the prior actualization of the God-consciousness, which for the Christian faith is the initial influence of the redeemer. Although God does not command human beings to commit sinful acts, God orders human sin in relation to the one divine decree of redemption. He thus gives up his earlier claim that sin does not exist in relation to God.92 Schleiermacher’s view of redemption, including general redemption, comes into sharper focus in his christology.

3.ii. Redemption and New Creation

In the introduction to The Christian Faith, Schleiermacher had defined the essence of Christian piety as the relation of all pious

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91 CG 1, 437–9 (§ 81.3) and 446 (§ 83.2). Interestingly, the idea of redemption through Christ as ‘being ordered for the whole human species’ (ibid.) appears for the first time in the paragraph about God’s holiness. Notice that for Schleiermacher, the definition of divine causality is complete only after the discussion of the divine attributes related to the consciousness of grace. Lamm comments: ‘with Schleiermacher’s exposition of divine wisdom is given the content (divine love), the aim (the Kingdom of God), the motive (redemption) and the structure (a harmonious work of art) of divine causality’. Lamm, The Living God, 223.

92 See above, Ch. 1, 4. The claim that God orders sin in relation to the one decree of redemption takes the reality of sin more seriously than the simple claim that sin does not exist for God.
mind-states to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth. A more precise description of the way in which redemption is achieved through Jesus and actualized in the Christian church is offered in the second half of the analysis of the Christian pious self-consciousness under the antithesis of sin and grace, which deals with the new life in Christ. He explains that the opposition to and overcoming of the situation of corporate sinfulness is the main effect of Christ’s appearance in history. Accordingly, two aspects characterize the situation of the redeemed: with regard to the old corporate life of sin, it is the ending of misery, with regard to the new corporate life of grace, it is the beginning of salvation.\(^93\)

At first, Schleiermacher outlines two general aspects regarding the foundation of the new life in Christ. On the one hand, redemption is effective in the new corporate life of grace through the communication of Christ’s sinless perfection or perfectly powerful God-consciousness. The continuity of the Christian faith is rooted in Christ’s productive activity, and the generation of faith is an effect of Christ’s sinless perfection. A key question, which will appear in various forms throughout Schleiermacher’s christology, is how the communication of Christ’s sinless perfection is possible, given the participation of Christians in the corporate life of sinfulness. His preliminary answer is that for the Christian faith the new life is hidden in the old. The communication of sinlessness is an inner experience that consists of a personal and a social element. On the one hand, the believer receives the impression of Christ’s perfection from the picture of Christ, which continues to exist in the Christian community as a corporate possession and bestows upon him or her a clear consciousness of sin as being part of the ending of misery. On the other hand, the communication of Christ’s perfection creates an unceasing impulse towards the actualization of the God-consciousness. The actualization of divine activity in history corresponds to a vivid receptivity on the human side. Divine activity is the supernatural element in the process of redemption, while human receptivity makes it possible for the former to become historical.

\(^{93}\) CG 2, 15–18 (§ 87). I consistently translate Schleiermacher’s term ‘Seligkeit’ with ‘salvation’. In my view, this captures the meaning better than the older term ‘blessedness’.
The continuity and identity of human nature, before the appearance of the redeemer and in the community with him, links the old corporate life to the new. According to Schleiermacher, the coherence between the two is grounded in the ‘unity of the divine thought’, which determines the course and development of human nature and history.\textsuperscript{94}

On the other hand, the term ‘redemption’ is inadequate to express fully the communication of a perfectly powerful God-consciousness, because it presupposes the existence of that which is opposed by redemption, namely, sin. The term ‘redemption’ cannot refer to the intention of the divine decree in the same way as it refers to its effects, since the intention categorically excludes sin, as sin is not part of God’s commanding will. He therefore calls the appearance of Christ the perfected creation of human nature. Christ is not only the redeemer but also the Second Adam and the author of the new life in accordance with God’s will. Furthermore, he is the Second Adam not only for himself, but he also effects the new creation of the regenerate, which is the preservation of his redemptive power throughout history. Christ’s appearance is the preservation of the implanted capacity of humankind to receive a perfectly powerful God-consciousness. At the same time, the historical realization of his mission does not occur in one instant but through the gradual spread of its effects.\textsuperscript{95} Here, Schleiermacher takes up a central point from the essay on election.

The concept of the perfected creation of human nature is related to the concept of preservation,\textsuperscript{96} but also to the concept of the single divine decree. Schleiermacher says that the creation of humankind included the imperfection of human nature (original sinfulness), although its perfection, through the appearance of Christ, was

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. 18–23 (§ 88). Schleiermacher says that in regard to three factors—Christ’s existence, the individual transition from the old to the new life and the new corporate life—the initial divine activity constitutes a supernatural event over against the corporate life of sin. At the same time, their appearance in history is something natural, namely, the outcome of the naturally perfect quality of divine power (ibid. 22, § 88.4, and 95, § 100.3).

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid. 23–7 (§ 89).

\textsuperscript{96} This was already noticed by Ernst Günther, \textit{Die Entwicklung der Lehre von der Person Christi im 19. Jahrhundert} (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911), 39. Günther focuses on historical questions and does not delve into a detailed systematic-theological exploration of the issue.
implanted in it from the beginning and does not presuppose a second divine decree or decision. The divine ordering of sin towards redemption and the gradual historical development of the God-consciousness in the individual person as well as in the whole human species express the unity of the divine decree in history. While *The Christian Faith* does not include a discussion of the divine decrees—a key topic for Reformed Orthodoxy—since ‘a proposition that articulates a divine decree is not an expression of the immediate self-consciousness’, Schleiermacher claims that if the effect of redemption on the world is correctly and comprehensively presented, then ‘thereby the essence of the divine decrees is also given’.97 He gives an analysis of this effect in the discussion of the redemptive activity of Christ (christology) and its effects on the world (ecclesiology).

His christology forms the first part of his description of the new life of grace and begins with a comment about the believers’ communion with God. He claims that Christians have communion with God in a fellowship where Christ’s sinless perfection represents the free spontaneous activity, while the believer’s need of redemption represents the free assimilative receptivity. Christ effects everything, but he does not effect it by himself alone, because without the vivid human receptivity for his effects no fellowship is possible.

The dignity and activity of Christ, or the person of Christ and the work of Christ, are inseparable. Christ’s dignity consists in the perfection of creation, while his activity consists in the work of redemption. This dignity and activity is unique and belongs exclusively to Christ. Otherwise, his appearance would be merely coincidental with the work of redemption, the communication of salvation would be a communal effort of many redeemers, or the perfection of creation would amount to nothing more than the release of an inherent human capacity.

### 3.ii.a. The Person of Christ

For Schleiermacher, a sound christology should pay attention to the community between Christ and the human believers as well as to

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97 *CG* 2, 28 (§ 90.2).
the being of God in Christ.  

His central christological thesis is that in Christ the ideal (das Urbildliche) became historical and was not related to singular moments or deeds but defined every moment of the redeemer’s entire life. Christ is not the ideal of all cultural expressions of a society (such as they appear in the sciences, the arts and in technology) but only the ideal of a perfectly powerful God-consciousness that informed and determined all moments of his life. The term Urbild emphasizes his unique dignity.

Schleiermacher’s christology deals from various angles with the key question whether an ideal appearance could ever become manifest in a particular historical being, since the concept of original sinfulness entails that the human species offers no possibility for the appearance of such an ideal. His basic answer is that Christ entered into the corporate life of sinfulness but did not stem from it. Christ’s unique spiritual strength and power is rooted in a creative divine act that is also the source of every spiritual life, and for two reasons this uniqueness does not exclude his true humanity. First, Schleiermacher draws an analogy by referring to the original difference of all human beings, which manifests itself most clearly in the life of unique individuals. Second, more convincingly, he says that the divine act that originates Christ’s ideality encompasses the whole creation, since the very concept of the human being as the subject of the God-consciousness is fulfilled in it.

The insistence on Christ’s true humanity leads to the question about the historical conditions of the generation of the ideal. Schleiermacher responds that the origin of human life cannot be fully understood anyway and that it therefore suffices to say that Christ developed his unique powers from the moment of conception.

98 Ibid. 50 (§ 96.1).
99 Ibid. 34–7 (§ 93). D. Lange points out that the concept of the historical ideal signals a distancing from Protestant Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment alike. On the one hand, Schleiermacher rejects a metaphysical grounding of christology in the doctrine of the trinity, since this would put in doubt the human nature of the ideal. On the other hand, he affirms the idea of a fundamental difference between Jesus and all other human beings as being necessary for a Christian understanding of redemption. Dietz Lange, Historischer Jesus oder mythischer Christus. Untersuchungen zu dem Gegensatz zwischen Friedrich Schleiermacher und David Friedrich Strauß (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1975), 147.
100 CG 2, 44 (§ 94.1).
onwards. He also points out, against docetic deviations, that in Christ a real development of God-consciousness took place between his childhood and adulthood. In particular, Christ’s perfect God-consciousness consisted in his sinlessness, that is, in the fact that he did not live under the opposition between the flesh and the spirit. The sensations of the pleasant and the unpleasant never gained control over Christ’s self-consciousness but remained within the limits of a calm consciousness and did not lead to feelings of desire or revulsion. The power of his God-consciousness remained qualitatively constant, even though he shared the same vicissitudes of life as other human beings. His spiritual development can be described as a continuous transition from purest innocence to a spiritual fullness of power when he was a grown-up. His humanity did not express itself in a spiritual activity but in the capacity to receive the ‘self-activity of the spirit’, which implies that any opposition between the Spirit’s dominance and the sensible function of the self-consciousness was excluded.101

Pushing his key question further, Schleiermacher discusses the similarity and difference between Christ and all other human beings. He argues that the redeemer’s sinlessness does not deny his humanity, since sin is not an essential part but a disruption of human nature. While Christ’s perfect God-consciousness distinguishes him from the rest of humankind, it still belongs to his human identity, because it expresses the perfection of human nature in the determination to live in constant community with God. Schleiermacher speaks of the being of God in Christ, without saying that Christ was God. This is consistent with his earlier claim that God’s being is fundamentally different from the being of the world. God’s being consists in sheer activity and undivided omnipresence, whereas any moment of history, nature and consciousness is marked by divisions and by the interplay of relative activity and passivity. The difference between God’s activity and the simultaneity of activity and passivity in finite being entails that there can be no being of God in a singular object but only a being of God in the world as a whole. The only exception to this rule is a situation in which the passive states are not purely passive but mediated by a vivid receptivity that posits itself

101 Ibid. 37–42 (§ 93.3–93.4) and 77–8 (§ 98.1).
over against finite being as a whole. Then, an individual living being can in itself represent the world as a whole. For the realization of such an exception, it is not sufficient that the individual is a rational being in whose self-consciousness the God-consciousness is also given, since such an imperfect God-consciousness is itself not a being of God in human nature but only if it is related to Christ. Christ is the original place for the being of God in human nature and the only person in whom there is a genuine being of God, since the God-consciousness determined every moment of his life; the perfect indwelling of God constituted his unique being and innermost self. Christ alone is the true mediator of God’s being in the world and God’s revelation through the world in that he bears the new creation that contains and develops the power of the God-consciousness.\footnote{Ibid. 43–6 (§ 94.1–94.2). This is a departure from established views: ‘Finally, someone said again “God was in Christ”, after “the being of the second divine hypostasis in Christ” was taught, or doubted, for such a long time.’ Günther, \textit{Die Entwicklung der Lehre von der Person Christi}, 45.}

The introduction to \textit{The Christian Faith} already stated that Christ’s appearance is ‘the result of the developmental power residing in our human nature as a species’.\footnote{CG 1, 88 (§ 13.1).} This statement is now complemented by the thesis that the beginning of Christ’s life was not only the preservation of this ‘developmental power’ but also a new and perfect implanting of God-consciousness, which exhausted the receptivity of human nature for the divine activity. Thus, it is at once something ‘irreducibly new’ \textit{and} the ‘preservation of the human’.\footnote{Lange, \textit{Historischer Jesus oder mythischer Christus}, 151.} The beginning of Christ’s life was an original and sinless act that produced the saturation of human nature with God-consciousness and therefore is called the perfection of creation. Whereas the appearance of the First Adam constituted the physical life of humankind, the Second Adam fully realized humankind’s spiritual life. In this process, the human nature as a whole underwent no changes, although there is a notable difference between the two stages. The spirit of life was equally communicated to both, but in the First Adam it remained sunken in sensuality and did not gain control over his sinfulness, whereas in Christ the spirit exerted its power constantly. Despite this difference, both moments of the creation of humankind and its perfection are
rooted in one undivided divine decree. The historical realization of
the divine decree in the person of Christ is a new and supernatural
event, not in itself but in relation to the old corporate life of sinfulness.105

Schleiermacher’s understanding of Christ’s dignity leads to a revi-
sion of the classical two-natures-dogma about the union of the
divine and the human in the person of Christ. He says that the
being of God constitutes the innermost power of Christ’s person,
from which his every activity proceeds, so that the human nature is
the receptive and representative organism of the divine power. The
belief that God was in Christ thus equals the belief that the Word
became flesh. Every moment of Christ’s life represents God’s becom-
ing and having become human, since every being and activity in him
results from the being of God in him.106 In the moment of unifica-
tion the divine was exclusively active and the human was passive. The
capacity of human nature for a union with the divine does not
indicate a human activity in this event, but in the union itself every
activity stemmed from both natures. In Christ’s historical existence
the divine decree of redemption, which is already included in the
decree of creation, became manifest at a particular point and mo-
ment in space and time.107

105 CG 2, 46–8 (§ 94.3).
106 Ibid. 57–8 (§ 96.3).
107 Ibid. 58–63 (§ 97.1–97.2). Schleiermacher’s christology has been subject to
severe criticism, and the second edition of The Christian Faith attempted to clarify the
christological statements of the first edition. The main problem consisted in the
relation between the ideality and the historicity of Christ. A good overview of the
discussion, including a comparison between the two editions, is provided by M.
Junker, who argues that Schleiermacher did not lay due weight upon the unique
quality of Christ’s being. Maureen Junker, Das Urbild des Gottesbewußtseins. Zur
Entwicklung der Religionstheorie und Christologie Schleiermachers von der ersten zur
zweiten Auflage der Glaubenslehre (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1990), 201. For her,
Schleiermacher does not succeed in explaining the ongoing relevance of the historical
person of Christ for the life of the Christian church. Is Christ merely the power that
guarantees the continuity of the Christian faith in history? Is he more than the
starting-point of a movement that afterwards could continue on its own? Or, as
I. A. Dorner puts it: Why should it be the exclusive function of the historical ideal to
effect not only the knowledge of redemption but also the ongoing life and growth of
the community of believers? See Isaak August Dorner, Entwicklungsgeschichte der
Lehre von der Person Christi, von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die neueste dargestellt,
vol. 2: Die Lehre von der Person Christi vom Ende des vierten Jahrhunderts bis zur
3.ii.b. The Work of Christ

According to Schleiermacher, Christ’s activity consists in the continuation of the creative and person-forming divine activity, from which also the person of Christ originated. It is a redeeming and reconciling activity, related to the three offices of king, priest and prophet. The discussion of Christ’s priestly office, which is central for Schleiermacher’s soteriology, offers a remarkable revision of the Christian doctrine of atonement.

Christ’s redeeming activity consists in the assumption of the believers into the power of his perfect God-consciousness, which corresponds to the divine role in the formation of the person of Christ. From the individual perspective, it consists in a person’s conversion. Christ’s work of redemption started with his earthly ministry and continues in the Christian church. Its object is not the individual person as such but the individual person insofar as he or she furthers Christ’s activity and efficacy towards others. The advance of the God-consciousness is a person’s own deed that remains tied to the original deed of the redeemer and his sinless perfection. Christ’s sinless perfection is a corporate possession, without ever being turned into an individual possession. The beginning of individual or communal fellowship with Christ is a person’s calling (Berufung), and the continuous share of the redeemer in the corporate life of grace is an animation (Beseelung).

Christ’s reconciling activity is the believers’ assumption into the power and fellowship of his unclouded salvation. From the individual perspective, this is a person’s justification, resulting in the believers’ corporate feeling of salvation. Schleiermacher admits that the hindrances of the pious life are painful indicators of the ongoing reality of sinfulness, yet they do not alter the ‘inner life’ of salvation itself, neither in Christ nor in the believer. In a similar way to the description of Christ’s redeeming activity, he distinguishes

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108 See Lange, Historischer Jesus oder mythischer Christus, 160.
109 CG 2, 90–3 (§ 100.1–100.2). The distinction between calling and animation corresponds to the distinction between the divine activity in the unification of the divine and the human, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the state of the union of the two.
110 Conversion and justification are the main topics in the doctrine of regeneration. See ibid. 153–82 (§§ 108–9).
between two moments of reconciliation: the beginning of reconciliation implies the forgiveness of sins, that is, the disappearance of the relation of ills to sin and of the consciousness of being worthy of punishment, while the lasting state of being reconciled is the true possession of salvation, because Christ is the centre of the new life and brings peace. The perfection of Christ’s reconciling activity consists in the fellow-feeling for misery, which is Christ’s suffering, whereas the perfection of the redeeming activity does not consist in suffering itself but in the self-abandonment to suffering. Schleiermacher adds that Christ’s redeeming and reconciling activity express the perfection of human nature in a twofold way. First, the assumption of human nature into fellowship with Christ results in a fellowship determined by a constantly powerful God-consciousness, sufficient to inform every moment in the believers’ life. Second, it results in a fellowship in which the steadfast good-pleasure effected by the dominance of the God-consciousness is unshakable.

Christ’s redeeming and reconciling activity are closely related to his priestly dignity, which consists of three aspects: first, his perfect fulfilment of the divine will, or the active and atoning obedience; second, his reconciling death, or the passive and substitutionary obedience; and third, his representation of the believers before the Father. The first and the second aspect, occurring simultaneously throughout all moments of Christ’s life, correspond to his redeeming and reconciling activity. The first aspect refers to his activity in carrying out the task of generating the new life of grace and to his active obedience. The second aspect refers to his receptivity for and response to the old life of sin that he overcame by the power of his perfect God-consciousness and to his passive obedience.

Christ was actively obedient by perfectly corresponding to the divine will, expressing the dominance of the God-consciousness in human nature ‘purely and wholly’. Christ’s perfect God-consciousness is not only the reason for the believers’ fellowship with him but also the main content of the Christian faith. The believers are able to fulfil the divine will when the principle of Christ’s life becomes also

111 Schleiermacher maintains that evil is the punishment for sin, although not in an individualistic sense. *CG* 1, 414–20 (§§ 76–7).
112 *CG* 2, 97–105 (§ 101).
the principle of their own life, or, traditionally speaking, when his righteousness is imputed to them. God sees the believers not in or for themselves but in Christ, as companions of Christ’s obedience. Apart from the conjunction with him, no person can be righteous before God.\textsuperscript{113}

Christ’s passive obedience is the suffering he endured through his fellow-feeling for human sinfulness, most strikingly (but not exclusively) during the confrontation with the persons and powers responsible for his execution.\textsuperscript{114} Christ’s death results in the victory over sin, which implies above all that ills are no longer regarded as a punishment of sin. His suffering was caused by the sinfulness of humankind and took away the divine punishment of sin, but he did not have to bear it himself. His willingness to suffer on behalf of humankind reveals a self-abnegating love that is the most complete illustration of the way in which God was in Christ and reconciled the world with Himself. In particular, Christ’s fellow-feeling reveals God’s love and God’s will to overcome sin. The believers therefore see God in Christ and regard Christ as the ‘most immediate participant in the eternal love that sent and equipped him’.\textsuperscript{115}

Schleiermacher guards himself and his readers against the misunderstanding that Christ’s death is an expression of divine punishment, as if Christ’s suffering equals the sum of all evil and is the measure of human sin. He maintains that the infinity of the corporate sin of humankind would then entail that Christ’s suffering is infinite too, which in turn would lead to the thesis that the divine nature in his person also suffered. This thesis, however, contradicts the axiom of divine impassibility, which Schleiermacher seeks to uphold.\textsuperscript{116} The misunderstanding is made worse by the belief that God transferred the punishment of sin from humankind onto Christ, so that Christ became the target of God’s wrath over human sin.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. 120–5 (§ 104.2–104.3). Christ’s obedience would achieve nothing if it did not result in the believers’ fellowship with Christ, in which ‘the principle that is moving him becomes ours’ (ibid. 125).

\textsuperscript{114} Schleiermacher rejects a reduction of Christ’s fellow-feeling to the physical sufferings during the crucifixion (ibid. 103, § 101.4).

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. 128 (§ 104.4).

\textsuperscript{116} For him, it is fundamental for the idea that God is a living God. He emphasizes the need to ‘exclude everything that necessarily implies a receptivity or passivity’ (\textit{CG} 1, 230, § 55.1).
Schleiermacher offers two arguments to refute this belief. First, he says, Christ indeed understood his suffering as the taking away of punishment, but this understanding was based on his fellow-feeling for human sin and not on his personal self-consciousness. If Christ was truly human, he could not assimilate the sin of others or make it his own, and due to his sinless perfection, he did not develop a consciousness of sin. Second, the belief that Christ suffered God’s wrath crudely presupposes the necessity of a divine retribution for human sin and neglects the insight that God’s righteousness orders ills as a punishment of sin in the corporate life of sinfulness.\footnote{CG 2, 128–9 (§ 104.4). See CG 1, 449–58 (§ 84).}

The critical evaluation of traditional views leads to a revision of the idea of substitutionary atonement (stellvertretende Genugtuung). Still, Schleiermacher does not simply reject the concept of atonement altogether, since he affirms the two key-points of the doctrine, namely, that Christ ‘did enough’ and that Christ’s suffering was substitutionary.\footnote{Schleiermacher argues that the reconciliation of the world with God in the person of Christ implies the rejection of any contrast between divine wrath and divine love, because such a contrast is not coherent with a Christian understanding of God and puts into question the reality of redemption through Christ. This does not entail that Schleiermacher rejects the validity of any ‘objective’ teaching of reconciliation or atonement, as Hans Walter Schütte claims in his essay ‘Die Ausscheidung der Lehre vom Zorn Gottes in der Theologie Schleiermachers und Ritschs’, Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 10 (1968), 391. It should be mentioned that the basis of Schütte’s analysis is not The Christian Faith but a famous sermon from 1830, in which Schleiermacher says that the wrath of God is not a topic for theology (see ibid. 388–92). Other interpreters claim that Schleiermacher rejects the idea of substitutionary atonement altogether. See for example Wolfgang Trillhaas, ‘Der Mittelpunkt der Glaubenslehre Schleiermachers’, Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 10 (1968), 302. But while Schleiermacher clearly distinguishes between substitution and atonement, he also insists that the term substitutionary atonement, while being ‘disputed in many ways but still holding ecclesial validity’, is defensible when it is modified (CG 2, 130, § 104.4).} His revision rather entails a new look at the relation between substitution, atonement, and Christ’s obedience, by specifically relating the atoning aspect to Christ’s active obedience and the substitutionary aspect to Christ’s passive obedience. On the one hand, Christ ‘did enough’ for humankind by being not merely the temporal beginning but also the inexhaustible and sufficient source of salvation. His atoning activity liberates the believers from punishment, but it is not substitutionary, as if the believers could
have begun the new life in Christ by themselves or were relieved from the necessity to continue the new life. On the other hand, Christ’s suffering was substitutionary in two respects. First, he extended his fellow-feeling towards everyone, including those persons who were not yet conscious of sin. This substitution, however, is not atoning, since everyone who is not yet aware of his or her sinfulness still has to become aware of it, in order to be assumed into the fellowship with Christ. Second, Christ’s suffering was substitutionary in the general sense that he was afflicted by the consequences of someone else’s sin for which he should not have suffered. He was affected in the place of those who were really sinful. Again, this substitution is not atoning, because it does not preclude other suffering of the same kind.\footnote{Schleiermacher points out that discipleship can include suffering and that until sin is finally overcome, even the suffering of someone who is only relatively innocent also has a substitutionary character (ibid. 131, § 104.4).}

Schleiermacher therefore replaces the concept of substitutionary atonement with the idea of Christ as atoning substitute (\textit{genugtuen-der Stellvertreter}). He puts a stronger emphasis on the person of Christ than the traditional formula that equally emphasizes the act of atonement as such. He says that Christ’s redemptive activity through his ideal dignity represents the perfection of human nature in such a way that God views the believers only in their union with Christ. Furthermore, Christ’s fellow-feeling for sinful humankind was strong enough to produce a redemptive activity sufficient to assume all human beings into fellowship with him. It also provides the completion of the imperfect human consciousness of sin and the liberation from anxieties about divine punishment of the sinners.\footnote{Ibid. 129–32 (§ 104.4).}

On the whole, Schleiermacher’s christology focuses on Christ’s appearance in history as redemption and as new creation. He argues that in Christ’s historical appearance the divine decree of redemption became manifest at a single point in space and time. Christ’s appearance in history represents the perfection of human nature. It is the beginning of the regeneration of humankind as a whole. Nevertheless, an important difference remains: Christ’s perfect God-consciousness implied a spiritual life without discontinuities, whereas the event of regeneration in the life of the believers marks a basic difference between the old life and the new life. Christ’s
redemptive work entails that he ‘did enough’ for the assumption of every person into fellowship with him. Thus, God sees not only the believers but every human being in Christ. In the next section, we will see how Schleiermacher ties together his argument and claims that the content of the one divine decree of redemption and new creation is a single and universal predestination to salvation in Christ, which is grounded in God’s good-pleasure.

3.iii. Election and Eschatology

The second section of Schleiermacher’s description of the new life in Christ contains his ecclesiology, which forms the largest part of the book. It deals with the situation of the world in regard to redemption and the incorporation of the individual into the Christian church, beginning with the doctrine of election and ending with eschatology. Like the propositions about the appropriation of salvation in his soteriology, the ecclesiological propositions are rooted in the discussion of the person and work of Christ; their content is ‘that which came into being through Christ’. The doctrine of election and eschatology relate the effects of Christ’s appearance to the origin and to the completion of the Christian church; they elaborate the claim that the church is the ‘complete revelation’ of the redeemer’s dignity, which corresponds to the claim that the world is the complete revelation of the eternal divine omnipotence.

The section begins with the general statement that everything posited in the world through Christ’s appearance and the communication of his sinless perfection ‘is concentrated in the community of believers, in which all regenerated persons always find themselves’. The subsequent discussion is divided into three parts that deal with the origin of the Christian church, its existence in opposition to the world and its future completion, when the opposition

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121 Ibid. 33 (§ 92.2).
122 Ibid. 29–33 (§§ 91–2). See above, n. 63.
123 CG 2, 207 (§ 113.1). The definition of the church as the community of believers in Christ does not entail a prejudice in favour of any particular church or confession but indicates that ‘where reborn persons can reach each other … some fellowship among them has to originate’ (ibid. 208, § 113.1).
between the Christian church and world will vanish. Since Christ’s appearance is the beginning of the regeneration of human nature as a whole, the Christian faith always includes the hope ‘that the church will grow and the world opposed to it will decrease’. The origin of the Christian church is discussed by the doctrines of election and of the Holy Spirit. The first doctrine deals with the role of the divine world-government in the generation of the Christian church, when those persons who shall form the church are singled out from the world. The second doctrine deals with the Holy Spirit as basis of the continuity of spiritual co-operation among the believers.

In two introductory paragraphs, Schleiermacher distinguishes between an inner community of regenerated persons, who through their ‘absolute constant willing of the kingdom of God’ live in the state of sanctification, and an outer community of persons who are called and who receive the ‘preparatory effects of grace’ from the inner community. The members of the outer community are reached by the proclamation of the gospel. They join the inner community when they are regenerated, and then they themselves help to foster the outer. A person’s new life and transition into the Christian church results from the corporate life of the believers and occurs gradually, not a-historically by means of ‘an absolute leap’. Schleiermacher links the doctrine of election to the concept of original sinfulness and emphasizes that no person possesses a privilege regarding the new life in Christ. The calling of a person into the outer circle of preparatory grace does not imply any merit on the human side, and the same is true in regard to a person’s regeneration, when the divine will grants a privilege to some persons over against others. Both events do not presuppose any pre-existing soteriological divide between certain persons. For Schleiermacher, the gift of

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124 Ibid. 211 (§ 113.4).
125 Ibid. 219 (§ 116.3).
126 The terminology is not entirely consistent here. In the discussion about the work of Christ, Schleiermacher described the calling of a person as the beginning of his or her fellowship with Christ, in the inner community.
127 Ibid. 211–15 (§ 114).
128 Ibid. 207 (§ 113.1).
129 M. Weeber says that it is a key ambition of Schleiermacher’s ecclesiology to pay tribute to ‘the essential equality among the believers’. Martin Weeber, Schleiermachers Eschatologie, 61 (my emphasis). He should have added that another ambition is the emphasis on the equality among all human beings.
grace is neither determined by human worthiness or unworthiness, nor does it reflect the logic of reward and punishment.\textsuperscript{130}

The doctrine of election is divided into four paragraphs. The first paragraph formulates the systematic–theological context of the doctrine, the second paragraph offers a reconstruction of the distinction between election and reprobation, the third paragraph defines the concept of predestination and the fourth paragraph inquires into the grounds of the divine election.

3.iii.a. A Single Predestination to Salvation

**Election and Reprobation**

The first paragraph begins with an explanation of the distinction between believers and unbelievers: ‘according to the laws of the divine world-government, it is not possible, as long as the human species exists, that all living persons are ever accepted equally into the kingdom of God founded by Christ’.\textsuperscript{131} Notwithstanding the need of redemption which is common to all human beings, there always exists a certain ‘unevenness’ between believers and unbelievers, since only the former participate fully in Christ’s perfection. In order to support his point, our theologian refers to the

\textsuperscript{130} CG 2, 217–20 (§ 116). According to D. Schlenke, Schleiermacher defines election as ‘the transition of the pious subject from the general outer circle into the particular inner circle of the church, which occurs at once with the constitution of the Christian faith (regeneration)’. Dorothee Schlenke, ‘Geist und Gemeinschaft’: Die systematische Bedeutung der Pneumatologie für Friedrich Schleiermachers Theorie der christlichen Frömmigkeit (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1999), 366. At first, this crisp definition seems useful, but eventually it does not do full justice to Schleiermacher’s position. First, it begs the question about the distinction between regeneration and election. For Schleiermacher, the two are not synonymous, since the latter term includes the process in which the believers are singled out from the world, which already begins with a person’s entry into the outer circle. Second, the expression ‘pious subject’ is not clear. Schleiermacher explicitly states that the ‘pious personality’ (as he calls it) of the Christian believer is constituted only through regeneration (CG 2, 148, § 106.1). Hence, the description ‘pious subject’ for a human being prior to his or her regeneration can be used only in a very weak sense, for example, as an indication that the God-consciousness is already present, but merely in the form of ‘single flashes that did not ignite, because it was not able to determine steadily the single moments of life’ (ibid. 147, § 106.1). But since for Schleiermacher piety occurs only in particular historical forms, it may be the best solution to avoid the term ‘pious subject’ in this context.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid. 220 (§ 117).
aforementioned rule that everything originating in one place spreads only gradually, not instantly, over the whole. He adds that the gift of grace is not simply inborn or given with a Christian upbringing, since every newborn person is equally a heir of Adam. At the same time, even during Christ’s own lifetime, there existed various degrees of receptivity for his preaching, dependent on the different presuppositions of his listeners. The unevenness of the historical development of the kingdom of God does not stand in contrast to the steadfast ‘inclination’ of the whole to enlarge the Christian church, but it entails that the growth of the latter depends on particular social circumstances as well as on ‘the mysterious process of attraction and revulsion’,\(^{132}\) which are both subject to the divine world-government. Although the ultimate criterion for election is God’s good-pleasure, this does not imply that one should cease to ask for the grounds of the latter. As an example, Schleiermacher refers to Paul’s question why the majority of Jewish contemporaries at the time did not believe in Christ and to the fact that many persons who grow up in a Christian context hear the gospel but do not join the community of believers before the time of their death. In response, he says that the reason lies in the relation of the natural order of events to the divine decree of redemption through Christ, which both are dependent on God.\(^ {133}\)

In the second paragraph, Schleiermacher prepares the ground for his revision of the concept of predestination. The thesis of the paragraph captures his view in a nutshell: ‘On the one hand, the Christian fellow-feeling is comforted by the earlier and later acceptance of some persons and others into the community of redemption. On the other hand, an irresolvable dissonance would remain if...we shall think of a part of the human species as being completely excluded from this community.’\(^ {134}\) The thesis resembles the argument of Schleiermacher’s essay, to which he refers in a footnote. In *The Christian Faith*, he seeks to construct a more comprehensive argument culminating in the idea of a single and universal

\(^{132}\) Ibid. 221 (§ 117.2). Schleiermacher adds that it could not be otherwise, because ‘the supernatural in Christ should become nature and the church should develop as a natural historical phenomenon’.

\(^{133}\) Ibid. 221–3 (§ 117.2–117.4).

\(^{134}\) Ibid. 223–4 (§ 118.1).
predestination to salvation. His starting point is the evidence that the human inability to love God and the consciousness of being in need of redemption, is sometimes answered by the revelation of divine grace, but sometimes this is not the case. The result is a soteriological division between believers and unbelievers and the question whether his other claim that Christ’s redemptive work does not presuppose a preexisting division between persons can be reconciled with it.

Traditional responses attributed the tension between God’s redemptive will and its limited historical success to differences in the divine determination of individual persons. Yet, Schleiermacher cautions against any ‘down-grading of our God-consciousness to particularism’, since he rejects special relations between God and human beings as being incompatible with the Christian doctrine of God and the relation between the world and God. Affirming both the universality of Christ’s redemptive work as well as the distinction between believers and unbelievers, he argues that the opposition between the believers and the unbelievers is at every point ceasing and that everyone who is outside the corporate life of grace will be at some point touched by the effects of divine grace and will become part of the new life in Christ.

In order to demonstrate the advantage of his thesis, Schleiermacher discusses two possible objections against it. His reply buttresses his criticism of particularism.

The first objection claims that it would have been better for humankind as a whole if Christ had appeared at an earlier stage. Schleiermacher responds by referring to Paul’s statement that Christ was born when the time was fulfilled (Gal. 4:4). He explains that the divine providence of humankind as a whole and the specific determination of the time of Christ’s appearance are ‘one indivisible

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135 Ibid. 224 (§ 118.1).

136 The Christian Faith does not include a separate chapter on providence, but the doctrines of preservation and predestination cover the basic ground of the topic. As we have seen, his view of preservation explicitly rejects parts of the traditional doctrine of providence, such as the concepts of divine co-operation and divine government. He also criticizes the term ‘Vorsehung’ as being less useful than the biblical terms ‘Vorherbestimmung’ and ‘Vorherversehung’ to express the relation of each part to the whole and the internally coherent structure of the divine world-government (ibid. 444, § 164.3).
revelation of divine omnipotence,’ so that the new spiritual life that originated at this time (and, one could add, in this place) cannot be surpassed.

The second objection suggests that it is always better for an individual to be reborn earlier rather than later. Schleiermacher replies that this view is unwarranted, since an individual is reborn when the right time has come for his or her regeneration. A believer is never reborn too late, because nothing prior to his or her regeneration led to another course of events. The order of historical events thus coincides with the order of regeneration. Even the claim that the previous life is retrospectively regarded negatively does not imply a spiritual disadvantage, since the inconvenience ceases to exist entirely with the certainty of forgiveness. As far as a person’s acceptance of the gospel is concerned, an early conversion reflects the original union of the divine and the human in the person of Christ, while a later conversion reflects the final saturation of human nature with Christ’s redeeming power, whereby the corporate effect of those who were reborn earlier is presupposed.

Schleiermacher’s thesis refutes two models, in which a group of persons is permanently excluded from the corporate life of grace. The first of these models suggests that the contradiction between the equality of all human beings and the inequality of believers and unbelievers disappears, as soon as one realizes that both are rooted in a divine ordination. According to the second model, either the original equality or the historical inequality is simply non-existent.

In regard to the first model, he argues that the inequality of believers and unbelievers cannot be the result of a divine ordination, since it is the result of Christ’s appearance and not inherent in human nature, unless one assumes, in a rather heterodox fashion, a salvific receptivity peculiar to some human beings but not to others. The assumption of an inherent inequality also contradicts the affirmation of both the original sinfulness and the original perfection of human-kind, although he does not mention this point. Another option would be the assumption of a decree by which God, in order to warrant redemption, put all human beings equally under the power of sin, while only some persons actually benefit from redemption.

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137 Ibid. 225 (§ 118.1).  
138 Ibid. 226–7 (§ 118.1).
This option, however, implies an arbitrary absolute divine decree, and even if this were acceptable, the problem remains that the believers’ pious fellow-feeling for the unbelievers leads to a feeling of misery, which diminishes the reality of their salvation. Schleiermacher also rejects the attempt to justify the concurrence of a general human inability towards salvation and a special gift of divine grace as the revelation of God’s mercy in the believers and God’s righteousness in the unbelievers. He thinks God’s righteousness would be also revealed if the universal potential of redemption was fully realized and everyone would become a believer. Furthermore, the idea of a separate revelation of God’s attributes falsely assumes that God is an unlimited being with limited attributes. He continues to argue that divine mercy and divine righteousness apply to all human beings in the same way.\textsuperscript{139}

In regard to the second model, Schleiermacher insists that the historical inequality of believers and unbelievers is a fundamental tenet of the Christian pious self-consciousness and cannot be denied. But one might deny the equality that results from the sinfulness of all human beings on the assumption of an original division of human nature. In this case, the idea of the unity of human nature is an illusion, and the unbelievers cease to be objects of the believers’ fellow-feeling, because they are not regarded as equal in the first place. Yet, he rejects this construction, since it implies again, like the first model, that certain persons are inherently receptive for grace while others retain an invincible opposition to it. The model also entails that Christ’s appearance would be the disclosure and confirmation of an already existing inequality and thus redemption would be merely a form of judgment. Finally, the assumption of an original inequality between human beings produces an irresolvable discord in the species-consciousness.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid. 227–9 (§ 118.2). ‘It cannot be admitted that there is a divided revelation of divine attributes, so that the latter would then be limited and God be an unlimited being with limited attributes. . . . Instead, righteousness and mercy must not exclude each other, and mercy must reveal itself to the same persons as righteousness does, which cannot be the case if some persons are constantly excluded from . . . salvation’ (ibid. 229, § 118.2).

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid. 229–30 (§ 118.2).
On the whole, Schleiermacher supposes that the main weakness of previous models of election consisted in their correlation of divine mercy and divine righteousness with two distinct groups of people. In order to overcome the dilemma, he suggests that the two divine attributes should be related equally to humankind as a whole. The thrust of his argument is directed against a doctrine of election that contradicts the unity of God’s will. From this perspective, he formulates two theses, which relate the unity of God’s will to the unity of God’s redemptive work and complete his reconstruction of the doctrine of election.

**Election, Predestination, and General Redemption**

a. The first thesis is simple but comprehensive: ‘The election of those who will be justified is a divine predestination to salvation in Christ’. The fact that Schleiermacher says ‘predestination to salvation in Christ’ and not simply ‘predestination in Christ’ underlines the redemption-centred character of his approach. Similarly, his soteriology pointed out that there is ‘only one eternal and general decree of the justification of humankind for the sake of Christ’. He now explains that the spiritual development of the individual believer is identical with his or her role in the historical development of human affairs, as the historical manifestation of justification is determined by the general world-order. In other words, the kingdom of the Son originates only in unity with the kingdom of the Father, and everything in the realm of grace occurs by the divine predestination, which is part of God’s omniscient omnipotence. In order to avoid the impression of an abstract determinism, Schleiermacher stresses that a person’s regeneration depends on his or her place in the world and its historical development (the realm of nature) as well as on his or her own particular inner life (the realm of freedom).

According to Schleiermacher, the fate of those persons who are outside the community of believers is not an absolute one, and there always will be human beings who have not been reached by the proclamation of the gospel, since Christ’s self-proclamation in

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141 Ibid. 231 (§ 119).
142 Ibid. 178 (§ 109.3).
143 Ibid. 233 (§ 119.1).
the church is an ongoing dynamic process. Due to the historical character of human life, every development includes a successive occurrence of events, so that in every moment of time the majority of human beings do not yet belong to the Christian church. While he regards the term reprobation as apt, as far as election manifests itself only in contrast to reprobation, it expresses nothing more than the indeterminate status of the unbelievers and can be best understood as a divine passing over (Übergehen).144 As long as they do not believe in Christ, the divine predestination is not visible in their lives and they are in the same situation that every believer once was in, but they never cease to be objects of the divine activity that constitutes the church and they stand under the same predestination to salvation in Christ as the believers.145

In this context, Schleiermacher considers Calvin’s view of double predestination.146 He regards it as inconsistent with the view that all human beings at some point will participate in the fellowship of the new life in Christ. An individual’s death does not constitute the end of God’s gracious work with this person, and the situation after death is merely an intermediate state. The Christian faith attributes to Christ the power over all human beings and does not presuppose a ‘blind’ divine preference or a contradiction between the purpose of salvation and the order of the historical process. Schleiermacher knows that classical Protestant teachings regard death as the end of the effects of divine grace. In such a case, he argues, Calvin’s theory is more coherent than the Lutheran view that the damnation of unbelievers is foreknown yet not predestined by God. While he does not mention that such a view leads to an inconsistent concept of the

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144 In his essay on election, Schleiermacher used the term ‘to overlook’ (übersehen). The verb übergehen has a more active connotation. It resembles the Latin term praeterire that was used by Reformed Orthodox theologians in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher does not simply abandon the term ‘to overlook’, since a few pages later he speaks again of a person’s ‘overlooking’ that is foreknown by God (CG 2, 236, § 119.3).

145 Ibid. 233–5 (§ 119.2–119.3).

146 He refers to Institutes III.21.5, where Calvin says that not all human beings are created equal; ‘rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined either to life or to death.’ Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 926.
divine will, as he argued in the essay, he points out again that the overlooking of some persons foreknown by God is still an act of predestination. In addition, he says that an affirmation of the universal predestination in Christ accompanied by the claim that some persons cannot be elected but only overlooked in Christ wrongly restricts the generality of redemption.\textsuperscript{147}

One possibility to avoid the problematic idea that those who die outside of Christ and are excluded from the fellowship with him are merely overlooked and not predestined is the suggestion that the persons outside of the fellowship in Christ are considered to be non-existent in the new creation. But the believers once also did not exist in it, and the concept of predestination can no longer be related to any individual persons. In order to be consistent, one would have to speak of the ‘one divine predestination, according to which the entirety (\textit{Gesamtheit}) of the new creation is called forth from the entire mass (\textit{Gesamtmasse}) of the human species’.\textsuperscript{148} Schleiermacher says that this formula is partially compatible with both the Lutheran and the Calvinist position, although eventually it clashes with their particularistic assumptions. If one claims that the persons who are excluded from salvation are overlooked by God, the entire mass of humankind always remains larger than the entirety of the new creation. If one thinks that those who are not elected will perish when they die and be annihilated, the entire mass of humankind is gradually transformed into the entirety of the new creation. Both views, however, still presuppose a particular distinction between persons who are elected and persons who are not elected, whereas Schleiermacher contends that the \textit{Gesamtheit} of the new creation is identical with the \textit{Gesamtmasse} of humankind, which corresponds to his affirmation of the universality of both sinfulness and redemption.

\textsuperscript{147} CG 2, 236–7 (§ 119.3). The last point corresponds to the view of the essay that reprobation occurs outside of Christ. Karl Barth’s revision of the doctrine in \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2 marks a fundamental break with this view.

\textsuperscript{148} CG 2, 237 (§ 119.3). He modifies Augustine’s statement that the redeemed are chosen from the mass of sinners through grace alone; he says that God’s predestination chooses the redeemed (ibid. n. 1). Due to the distinction between predestination and grace, however, it is a supralapsarianism, in contrast to Barth’s concrete supralapsarianism, in which predestination is identical with grace.
For Schleiermacher, the Calvinist position is also more coherent in that it does not attribute a wider range to God’s providence, or foreseeing, than to predestination, since the predestination of the conditions of election and reprobation equals the foreseeing of that which is conditioned. If God foresees reprobation and does not change the conditions in which it occurs, he has in fact also predestined the event of reprobation itself. Some are predestined as elements of the mass from which the ‘children of the kingdom’ shall be formed and others are predestined as the new creatures. Nevertheless, this view contrasts with Schleiermacher’s own formula and the thesis of an equality of the entire mass of humankind and the entirety of the new creatures. Eventually, the issue has to be addressed in connection with the question of a person’s condition after death in the discussion of the completion of the church (eschatology).\(^{149}\)

b. The second thesis explores the determining grounds of the divine election. As far as election \textit{influences} the divine world-government, it is based on the foreseen faith of the elect. As far as it is \textit{grounded in} the divine world-government, it is determined by God’s good-pleasure alone. The thesis generally applies to all free human actions. Each action contributes to the further development of the divine world-government but also results from preceding developments. This view presupposes that the particular formation of God’s kingdom occurs separately from the divine world-government in general. Thus, the question arises why everyone is equal in general, because of sin, but not everyone is yet regenerated. It seems as if in the event of regeneration the greatest power of the proclamation of the gospel encounters the greatest receptivity for it. Yet, such a naturalistic view remains unsatisfactory, since it neglects that the encounter itself depends on the conditions provided by divine direction. Hence, any inquiry into the determining reasons why this but not that person is regenerated has to look either to the absolute beginning, so that God’s divine good-pleasure is the ultimate reason, or to the final result, so that God’s foreknowledge is the ultimate reason. Both aspects belong together, since God’s foreknowledge is always related to God’s good-pleasure, and since the object of good-pleasure is

\(^{149}\) Ibid. 237–8 (§ 119.3).
always an object in its historical context, which also implies the foreknowledge of events. Schleiermacher concludes that a person’s election is determined by his or her foreseen faith in a specific moment of time and their optimal participation in the work of redemption. Since the share in the promotion of the work of redemption can be categorized under the concept of proclamation, it makes no difference whether one says that the divine election is determined by the foreseen efficacy of the proclamation or by the foreseen greatest strength of faith. The decisive criterion is whether and when an ‘extensive and intensive maximum can be reached in the overall context of the historical development’.

By taking into consideration the faith of the community of believers, the traditional understanding of divine foreknowledge, which focused on the faith of individuals, is modified. Schleiermacher considers the event of faith in the social and historical context of the formation of the kingdom of God in history, through the proclamation and acceptance of the gospel, and wants to overcome the limitations of a particularistic or ‘atomistic’ view of redemption, which focuses only on individual believers as such. The claim that God elects only those whose faith He strengthens and supports

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150 Ibid. 238–40 (§ 120.1). In regard to the relation of foreknowledge and good-pleasure, Schleiermacher refers to his comments on divine omniscience and the claim that there is no difference between God’s knowledge and God’s will (ibid. 240 n. 1; see also CG 1, 290–1, § 55.1). In the discussion of the divine attributes of love and wisdom, the concept of the divine world-government reappears. He says that the main task of the divine world-government is the formation of the Christian church in history—without any competition with the task of divine preservation, or the development of the natural world—and that the concept of preservation is completely defined only if the consciousness of grace is linked to the divine causality (CG 2, 441–3, § 164.1–164.2).

151 Ibid. 241 (§ 120.2). Schleiermacher says that regeneration constitutes ‘the spreading of the union of the divine with the human nature’, while justification constitutes ‘the temporal and singular continuation of the event of unification that began with Christ’s becoming human’ (ibid. 240, § 120.2). The distinction is hard to grasp, especially since the divine procedure is said to be the same. He also applies this response to the question of why the person of Christ was elected for the unification of the divine with human nature. He says that in Christ the supernatural was determined to become natural and be effective in history, which implies that the time and location of Christ’s appearance were the best to achieve the greatest effects for the spreading of God’s kingdom.
remains unconvincing if the faith of individuals is not perceived in the context of the overall effects of redemption.\textsuperscript{152} He also criticizes the view that God decided to reject unbelievers on the basis of their unbelief, since it implies an unwarranted distinction between a natural aversion towards the gospel as the \textit{basis} for non-election and a divinely determined aversion as the \textit{effect} of non-election. Instead, he claims that the ultimate determination of the response to Christ’s appearance and his redemptive work lies in God’s good-pleasure that determines the whole world, including the two main features of the historical formation of the kingdom of God, that is, the appearance of Christ and the variety of humankind in space and time, from which the kingdom of God is built. The latter becomes a part of the Christian pious self-consciousness, so that a person’s faith in Christ can be defined as the sharing in the divine good-pleasure in the person and work of Christ.\textsuperscript{153}

Schleiermacher affirms the thesis that the divine decree does not depend on a foreknowledge of an object (faith) that is not determined by the decree itself. He says that the concept of the foreseen faith of the elect points to the efficacy of the formation of God’s kingdom as being conditioned by particular historical constellations, in which the event of faith occurs. At the same time, his understanding of divine good-pleasure does not entail an arbitrary decree about certain persons, since he refutes the idea of a divine decree about individuals. In other words, God does not order the world through interdependent multiple decrees but through one unconditional decree by which the whole in its undivided coherence is what it is through the divine good-pleasure, a decree that comprehends the life of all human beings and the main content of which is their predetermination to become believers in Christ. The singularity of the divine decree does not exclude that the latter has particular effects in the lives of individual persons. The point is that these effects are not rooted in particular decrees but in one decree only.

Schleiermacher’s doctrinal theses imply two theological rules, which in his view are necessary for a consistent doctrine of election. First, the rule that no human being is determined by a particular divine decree, and second, the rule that the way in which redemption

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid. 241–2 (§ 120.2). \textsuperscript{153} Ibid. 243–4 (§ 120.3).
is realized, like everything else in the world, is a representation of divine good-pleasure and divine omnipotence. The equation of divine good-pleasure and omnipotence entails that the latter is also the ground of election. Furthermore, Schleiermacher reaffirms his rejection of the view that the distinction of the Christian church from the world implies the unbelievers’ permanent exclusion from salvation, since it leads to a problematic discord within the Christian pious self-consciousness, which questions the foundation of election in divine good-pleasure and the universality of God’s redemptive will.\textsuperscript{154} In short, Christ was sent not only to but also for all human beings.

In an appendix to the entire discussion about election, Schleiermacher points out that every individual participates in the corporate spirit of a nation and thereby carries the predestination to salvation in himself or herself, which is similar to Paul’s claim that every nation will sooner or later have a share in the Christian faith. The critical question is whether a person possesses those qualities that foster the acceptance of faith or those that present an obstacle to it. Still, the difference between the persons who will accept the gospel earlier and those who will accept it later does not lead to a division of humankind into two groups of persons. In the discussion about the work of Christ, Schleiermacher said that God sees the believers in Christ. He now extends this thesis and claims that God sees all human beings, not only the believers, in Christ alone. The effect of Christ’s priestly dignity is fully realized when each and every person has a share in the divine predestination to salvation.\textsuperscript{155} In the end, Schleiermacher arrives at a qualified affirmation of general redemption and universal election. The concept of Christ’s redemptive work coincides with the concept of a universal predestination to salvation. The historical fact that a majority of human beings does not belong to the Christian church expresses their temporary passing over but not their eternal exclusion from salvation. The concept of eternal damnation, which traditionally corresponded to the concept of eternal salvation, is revisited in his eschatology, but only in an appendix and after he has addressed several other issues that are related to the topic of election.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid. 245–6 (§ 120.4). \textsuperscript{155} Ibid. 246–8 (§§ 117–20, app.).
3.iii.b. Personal Immortality and the Completion of the Christian Church

The ‘ecclesial teachings about the Last Things’\footnote{Ibid. 416–17 (§ 159).} deal with two central issues: the future completion of the Christian church and the condition of the human being after death. The first issue relates to the goal of predestination, while the second issue touches upon the question about the range of the divine decree.

At the beginning of the discussion, Schleiermacher lists some fundamental problems. First, the Christian church cannot be perfected in the course of its historical existence because of the prevailing influence of the world, especially through the propagation of sin in every new generation but also through the existence of other, outdated and imperfect religions. Therefore, a presentation of its future completion, in which the fellowship with Christ is entirely free from the struggle between flesh and spirit, only serves as an ideal that can be approximated. Second, the Christian belief in the union of the divine and the human in the person of Christ has led to the development of diverse conceptions about the continuing existence of the human personality beyond death.\footnote{Ibid. 408–10 (§ 157).} Schleiermacher is aware of the limits of the human imagination in this respect and says that his propositions on eschatology do not possess the same dogmatic value as the preceding propositions.\footnote{Their lower status does not lessen the truth of the perfection and salvation mediated by Christ. The ‘general intuition of the imperishability of the spirit’ is not in doubt, but the particular conception of the continuity beyond death is not specified (ibid. 419, § 159.2).} Nevertheless, he offers a christological affirmation of the belief in personal immortality, which is grounded in Christ’s promises of his return to earth and the reunion with his disciples. These promises, he reasons, presuppose that the envisioned future fellowship between Christ and the believers is a fellowship between human persons. If Christ’s human nature is immortal, he concludes, then this must be true for every other human being as well.

He admits that the conclusion can be rejected, but he thinks alternative constructions are worse and, in fact, flawed, because
they lead to either a Docetic (in the first case) or a Manichaean (in the second case) result. One might say that only Christ possesses immortality. This claim, however, puts into doubt the true humanity of Christ: ‘it could not rightly be said that he was as a human being equal to us in every respect, except for sin’. Or, one might say that all human beings are mortal as the result of sin but that the believers receive immortality in their fellowship with Christ. This construction entails an unwarranted dualism between two groups of human beings or, if the equality of all human beings is upheld, it assumes a fundamental change of human nature before and after the event of regeneration. Therefore, Christ’s announcements about his own continuous existence imply the continuous existence of every human being. In correspondence to his idea of general redemption, Schleiermacher adds that Christ is the ‘mediator of immortality’ not only for the believers but for humankind as a whole, because the universal possibility of personal immortality is the precondition for the union of the divine and the human in the person of Christ as well as for the perfection and redemption of humankind.

A further complication results from the significance of the Last Things for the historical existence of the Christian faith. The question is how the future completion of the Christian church and the personal continuity beyond death are related to the reality of the believers’ fellowship in the here and now. Schleiermacher offers two complementary models to explain the relation and maintains that only the combination of the two models leads to an adequate eschatology: first, a model of development with the idea of Christ as saviour who will lead the believers to immortality, a process that begins in history but continues beyond individual death; second, a model of retribution, which is closely related to the idea of Christ as judge who will separate the believers from everything that belongs to the world and thereby lead his church to perfection.

159 Ibid. 414 (§ 158.2).
160 Ibid. 413–16 (§ 158.2–158.3).
161 Ibid. 416–18 (§ 159.1). He also declares that the precise relation between the future completion of the church and the continuity of personal existence cannot be determined, because it is not clear (1) how exactly the two will look like, (2) whether the future completion still allows for further improvement and (3) whether it occurs only ‘after the end of all things earthly’ (ibid. 418, § 159.1).
Schleiermacher links the resurrection of the body (§ 161) to the model of development, while the Last Judgment (§ 162) and eternal salvation (§ 163) are linked to the model of retribution. The foundation of the material elaboration on eschatology is provided by the discussion of the Return of Christ (§ 160). Thus, he puts together the ‘single images’ of eschatology ‘into one sensible whole, [because] the new form of existence is conditioned by the return of Christ, to whom everything that belongs to the completion of his work must be attributed’. He maintains that the clearest statements in the teachings about Christ’s return concern the completion of the Christian church but not the personal continuity beyond death. Still, in his discussion about the resurrection of the body he returns to the latter issue. In his doctrine of election, he described a person’s situation after death as an intermediate situation. He now suggests that it could last from the moment of death until the general resurrection but that this suggestion remains problematic, since it jeopardizes either the continuous identity of the individual person (if the general resurrection implies the creation of a new body) or the continuity of the Christian church as the fellowship of believers. The alternative would be the assumption of an individual resurrection at the moment of death, but this view may render the ideas of the Last Judgment, the return of Christ and the general resurrection implausible. Eventually, there remains a going back-and-forth between the two positions, and Schleiermacher cautions us that the various concepts of ‘the tying of the future life to the present life’ cannot be defined comprehensively.

Schleiermacher points out that the separation of the Christian church from the world, commonly associated with the idea of the Last Judgment, does not entail the completion of the Christian

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162 Ibid. 421 (§ 160.3).
163 Ibid. 426–8 (§ 161.2).
164 Ibid. 429 (§ 161.3). In the first edition of The Christian Faith, he claimed that the idea of an individual resurrection at the moment of death is not consistent with a ‘pure’ conception of the completion of the church. Schleiermacher, Der christliche Glaube (1821/22), vol. 2, 327 (§ 177.2). In the second edition, he softens the criticism by merely noticing the idea’s implication that ‘the perfected church grows only gradually from the life on earth that is simultaneously continuing with it’ (CG 2, 428, § 161.2). M. Weeber, who compares the two editions frequently, does not mention the change. See Weeber, Schleiermachers Eschatologie, 133–4.
church through the exclusion of all sin and imperfection from the realm of the believers, since these are the result of a struggle between flesh and spirit in the regenerate, not of an external conflict with unbelievers. As a result, two problems arise. On the one hand, the believers would enter the new life as persons in whom sin is still present, despite their separation from the world. On the other hand, any sudden exclusion of sin and imperfection would also jeopardize their personal identity, since it would signal the perfection of sanctification, which, however, must be conceived as the result of a living fellowship with Christ. A sudden event would make the fellowship with Christ superfluous, which would be unfortunate. Another problem is the relation between the inner separation from sin and each person’s receptivity for the effects of redemption. If Christ’s return would effect a change in accordance with one’s receptivity, then it would take effect with unequal speed and would entail a gradual process in the new life. If receptivity did not matter, the inner separation would be a sudden event and also take effect in the unbelievers, since they possess at least an infinitely small receptivity for redemption. Yet, the implication of ‘a sudden restoration of all souls into the realm of grace...is not entirely free from a dose of [something] magical’.

On the whole, the idea of the Last Judgment must be complemented by the idea of an unchanging and unclouded salvation that follows from seeing God or the most perfect fullness of a vivid God-consciousness. It remains undecided, however, whether the state of eternal salvation is achieved at once in the moment of resurrection or whether it develops gradually.

Notwithstanding the difficulties regarding the discussion about the completion of the Christian church, the completion of the believers’ fellowship with Christ implies the separation of the Christian church from sin and evil. Any assumption that a part of the human species is not touched and transformed by the spirit of the believers presupposes an absolute exclusion of certain persons from

165 CG 2, 431 (§ 162.1).
166 Ibid. 433–7 (§ 163).
167 M. Weeber comments that Schleiermacher proposes a ‘post-ethical’ view of the eschatological separation of the Christian church from every evil, since the fundamental operation of the ethical process, that is, the distinction between good and evil, becomes superfluous. Weeber, Schleiermachers Eschatologie, 141.
any contact with the believers, but it is doubtful whether this exclusion can be conceived consistently.\textsuperscript{168} For Schleiermacher, the biblical texts commonly cited in support of the idea of eternal damnation are not convincing and are countered by other texts that suggest a complete abolition of evil before the general resurrection.\textsuperscript{169} Furthermore, he objects to the use of the concept of eternal damnation, since every explanation of its meaning and effect remains inconsistent. Finally, he maintains that the concepts of eternal salvation and eternal damnation are mutually exclusive, since the fellow-feeling that the saved have for the damned, especially if one assumes a general Last Judgment where every person is aware of the other, overshadows their salvation.\textsuperscript{170} He concludes that for lack of better evidence and in the light of contradictory biblical testimony the claim of an eternal damnation cannot be developed into a Christian doctrine and should be treated ‘merely as the shadow of salvation or as the dark side of judgment’.\textsuperscript{171} It also conflicts with the idea of one divine world-government with one goal.\textsuperscript{172} For him, it is at least equally legitimate to assume the ‘milder view’ that the power of redemption eventually will bring forth ‘a general restoration of all human souls’.\textsuperscript{173}

4. SUMMARY AND CRITICAL EVALUATION

The concept of the single divine decree, introduced in the essay on election, structures the argument throughout \textit{The Christian Faith.}

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{CG} 2, 433 (§162.3).
\textsuperscript{169} Schleiermacher mentions 1 Cor. 15:25–6, where Paul speaks of death as the ‘last enemy’ to be conquered by God. Ibid. 437 n. 3 (§163, app.). Evidently, he thinks that the passage refers to the spiritual death of being separated from God. The equation of evil and death and the idea of their final overcoming are coherent with his assumption that sin, the ‘sting of death’ (1 Cor. 15:56), is ‘destined to disappear through redemption’. Robert R. Williams, ‘Theodicy, Tragedy, and Soteriology’, 409.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{CG} 2, 437–8 (§163, app.). The last point is taken straight from the doctrine of election.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid. 421 (§159.3).
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid. 444 (§164.1).
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid. 439 (§163, app.).
Schleiermacher combines the doctrine of preservation with a redemption-centred description of Christian piety and a universal understanding of Christ’s priestly dignity. In this reconstruction, the constitution of the world serves the progressive spread of the redemptive power revealed in Jesus. The doctrine of election culminates in the thesis of a single and universal predestination to salvation in Christ. Systematically, it is located in ecclesiology. The Christian church is understood as a pious community of the monotheistic type, with piety being a universal feature of human nature. The feeling of absolute dependence is the common element of all pious expressions and the highest form of the self-consciousness. Occasionally, it is equated with the God-consciousness, but Schleiermacher’s terminology, especially in the introduction, is not always consistent. The actualization of the God-consciousness in a given moment of time occurs only in correlation with the sensible self-consciousness; there is no religion as such, apart from its historical manifestations. Christian piety emphasizes the contrast between the human inability and the divine reality of redemption, or between sin and grace, and by the belief that redemption is comprehensively accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth and principally accessible for all human beings.

The first part of the book offers an analysis of the common element in all expressions of the Christian pious self-consciousness, apart from the antithesis between sin and grace. In monotheistic religions every pious moment always includes a consciousness of the self as being part of the world. The world as the totality of human interaction with the other and with their environments is absolutely dependent on God, but God is independent from the world. The world is a relative unity, while God is an absolute unity, to which human beings can trace their absolute dependence. The absolute causality of God is at once principally different from and equal in scope with the relative causality of the world. Everything that exists is rooted not only in the unity of finite being as a whole (the Naturzusammenhang) but also in the divine omnipotence; it is both interdependent and absolutely dependent on God, and there is no rivalry between divine preservation and human agency.

Schleiermacher affirms an original perfection of the world and of humankind, which implies that the God-consciousness is compatible
with every impression of the world in the self-consciousness and can be realized in any given moment of time. The world provides human beings with incentives for the development of states in which this realization can occur. It allows for the constancy of the God-consciousness and the historical development of piety. The original perfection of humankind includes a universal disposition towards the God-consciousness, which is characterized by the inclination to express the God-consciousness publicly in the pious community and by the union of self-consciousness and species-consciousness. Schleiermacher rejects the belief in absolutely supernatural events and the idea of a reciprocal interaction between the world and God. He is no forebear of process theology, although the concept of the absolute dependence of the world on God is not peculiar to Christianity and shared by all monotheistic religions. *The Christian Faith* emphasizes the unity of God and of the world but also the difference between the two.

In the second part, Schleiermacher offers a description of the particular content of the Christian faith and analyses the Christian pious self-consciousness under the antithesis of sin and grace. He rejects the concept of an original human righteousness that was once lost and says that from the beginning human beings lived in the context of sin. The appearance of Christ did not entail any miraculous changes in the natural order, such as the restoration of an original natural state. Instead of original sin, Schleiermacher speaks of original sinfulness, which implies a general need of redemption. He suggests that we regard sin exclusively in the light of grace and that God orders sin not in itself but in relation to the one divine decree of redemption, which encompasses the original perfection and the original sinfulness of humankind. The result is a modified supralapsarianism and a rejection of the idea of an initial ‘fall’ of humankind.

Schleiermacher’s christology supplements the thesis of a general need of redemption with the idea of general redemption. He argues that the divine will is identical with the work of redemption in and through the person of Christ. The divine decree of redemption became manifest at a particular moment in space and time. Its historical realization is a new, ‘supernatural’ event in relation to the old corporate life of sinfulness. Christ’s appearance in history is a new creation that represents the perfection of human nature and the
beginning of the regeneration of the whole human species. While Christ entered fully into the life of sinfulness, he did not stem from it. He is the ideal of a perfectly powerful God-consciousness that determined every moment of his life and entailed his sinlessness; he did not live under the opposition between flesh and spirit. Since sin is not an essential part of created human nature, Christ’s sinlessness does not deny his humanity, even if it distinguishes him from all other human beings. His God-consciousness expresses the perfection, not the abrogation, of human nature and is part of his true humanity. The climax of Christ’s reconciling activity is his self-abandonment to suffering on behalf of humankind on the cross. He is the atoning substitute, whose redemptive fellow-feeling extends towards everyone, including those who are not yet conscious of their sinfulness. It is strong enough to assume every person into fellowship with him. Hence, Christ ‘did enough’ for the redemption of all human beings. He is the perfection of creation, and the realization of his priestly dignity coincides with the one divine predestination to salvation by which the generation of the Christian church is ordered.

The starting-point of the discussion of election is the dilemma that arises from the simultaneous existence of believers and non-believers, on the one hand, and the benevolent divine will towards all human beings in Christ’s redemptive work, on the other hand. Unlike previous theologians, Schleiermacher rejects all explanations of the inequality of believers and non-believers which assume particular relations between God and individual human beings. The rejection corresponds to his emphasis on divine unity and the unity of the world. As in the essay, the distinction between believers and unbelievers is a result of the fact that the kingdom of God, like any other historical process, is realized gradually and not in one instant. At the same time, the revision of the traditional doctrine is now developed in a broader systematic framework. The emphases on the unity of God’s will and its identity with Christ’s work of redemption lead to an understanding of the single divine decree as the universal predestination to salvation in Christ. God’s mercy and righteousness pertain equally to all human beings. The assumption of two foreordained groups of persons and the belief in an eternal exclusion of a group of persons from the effects of Christ’s work betrays the general character of redemption and the universal mission of the
Christian church. It also contradicts the species-consciousness that is an integral part of the believers’ pious self-consciousness, and it causes a feeling of misery in the believers, which diminishes their salvation. Reprobation is a temporary passing over, but unbelievers and believers alike are the object of the divine predestination to salvation in Christ. God sees all human beings, not only the believers, in Christ. The determining grounds of election are the foreseen faith of the elect in the overall context of the historical formation of God’s kingdom and the divine good-pleasure. The latter determines the whole course of history, including Christ’s appearance, and is identical with the divine omnipotence.

Notwithstanding the affirmation of general redemption and universal election, Schleiermacher’s doctrine of election does not lead to an outright espousal of the idea of universal salvation, beyond the eternal salvation of those who die in fellowship with Christ, although he considers this idea to be at least equally justified as the assumption of an eternal damnation for the unbelievers. His eschatology gives an argument in favour of the possibility of personal immortality but offers no specific doctrinal propositions about the conditions of the future life, as far as the completion of the Christian church, the situation of the individual after death, or the fellowship of the believers with Christ are concerned.

The emphasis on the single divine decree remains unaltered between the publication of the essay and the second edition of *The Christian Faith*, while the earlier idea of a universal predestination to receive the Holy Spirit in the event of regeneration is now replaced by the idea of a universal predestination to salvation in Christ. The focus of the discussion of election on the process of individual regeneration is set in the larger context of the relevance of divine election for the generation of the Christian church, as the result of Christ’s appearance in history. Since the Christian church is the complete revelation of the redeemer’s dignity, the possibility exists that eventually every person will be included in the fellowship with Christ. While Christian piety is characterized by the relation of all pious mind-states to the redemption accomplished in Christ, the way in which this redemption is accomplished (in Christ and in the believers) is the outcome of a divine predestination that is defined in terms of divine omnipotence. The election of Christ is the divine decision of Christ’s
appearance in history for the sake of redemption and the determination of the conditions of the latter by the divine good-pleasure. Christ is the universal redeemer and mediator of salvation, but his appearance does not contribute specifically to the determination of the divine will and decree. Despite the christologically motivated affirmation of general redemption and rejection of eternal damnation, the overall reconstruction remains theocentric; it is grounded in the belief in God the almighty creator, even though ecclesiology is its context and christology its background.

At this point, the question arises whether Schleiermacher’s doctrine of election adequately recognizes his own distinction between the specifically Christian element in the Christian pious self-consciousness and the element that remains generally constant, the consciousness of the absolute dependence of the world. He asserts that the Christian pious self-consciousness is in every respect particularly determined by the antithesis of sin and grace, yet the understanding of the divine good-pleasure as a determining ground of election and its identification with divine omnipotence entails that the antithesis has no significance for the concept of election and predestination. The emphasis on divine unity eventually leads back to the concept of absolute dependence and to the idea of divine omnipotence. It seems that a synthesis of Part 1 and 2 can be achieved only at the expense of an adequate description of the particular determination of the Christian pious self-consciousness.

The above question demonstrates the fundamental systematic-theological importance of the relation between election and christology. We will confront a similar problem, albeit in a changed theological context, in Karl Barth’s early dialectical theology, which we consider in the following two chapters. While Barth’s thinking revolves around the question of God’s identity in relation to the world, whereas Schleiermacher’s doctrine of election is located in his ecclesiology, Barth’s reconstruction of the doctrine in the Epistle to the Romans and in the Göttingen Dogmatics shows a striking similarity to Schleiermacher’s position developed in the essay on election and in The Christian Faith.
From Reprobation to Election: Barth’s Revision of the Doctrine of Election in his 
*Commentary on Romans*

Karl Barth’s *Commentary on Romans* and his first series of lectures on systematic theology, the so-called *Göttingen Dogmatics*, constitute the key documents of his early dialectical theology after 1915,⁠¹ but their discussion of the topic of election has not received the attention it deserves. As the title of the former work indicates, it is not an enterprise in systematic theology but a commentary on a biblical book. At the same time, it is structured as a theological treatise that explores major themes of the Christian faith, following the order of Paul’s letter.⁠² It begins with an introductory chapter about the centre

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¹ The description ‘early dialectical theology after 1915’ implies that Barth’s theology after 1915 and throughout the *Church Dogmatics* always has been a form of dialectical theology. The implications of the changes that occurred in or around 1915 are under debate, but the point is increasingly accepted in current scholarship, especially after Bruce L. McCormack’s study *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Some of the changes in Barth’s thinking still need to be clarified. McCormack says that dialectical method, characterized in Barth’s essay ‘The Word of God as the Task of Theology’ (1922) as the awareness of the principal limitations of theology as a human undertaking, was ‘predominant’ in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* (ibid. 312). Yet, later he comments that ‘even then, dialectical method was not predominant’ (ibid. 437, my emphasis).

² Barth’s treatment of election in the first edition (1919) is less extensive, but main tenets of his later view are visible. Woyke comments on the relation between the two editions: ‘The revised edition of Barth’s *Romans* seems, at a first reading, to be a completely new book. The author himself states that hardly one stone of the first edition has been left on another. Yet upon close examination one finds that the discussion of predestination is much the same as that of the first edition. Most of the changes are in the general approach rather than in the treatment of this doctrine.’ Woyke, ‘The Doctrine of Predestination in the Theology of Karl Barth’, 60. Woyke shies away from the question whether the changes in the ‘general approach’ really
of the Apostle’s message—God’s saving righteousness revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16–17)—and then addresses the topics of anthropology (chapter 2), the law, christology and justification (chapter 3), faith and history (chapter 4), eschatology (chapter 5), grace (chapter 6), Christian freedom (chapter 7), the Holy Spirit (chapter 8), the church (chapters 9–11) and ethics (chapters 12–15).

The doctrine of election comes into focus during the interpretation of five passages, Rom. 5:12–21, 7:7–13, 8:28–32, 9:6–20 and 11:25–32. It is also mentioned at various other points throughout the book. The material will be divided into three parts. First, I will outline Barth’s concept of predestination and its relation to the concept of God. Then, I will analyse the concept of original unity and its relation to the dialectic of election and reprobation. Finally, I will consider the relation between the doctrine of election and christology and the consequences for Barth’s position. Since the book claims to be a commentary, I will at times compare Barth’s interpretation with current exegetical discussions. Although this can only be done selectively here, the issue merits careful attention, since the border between historical exegesis and dogmatic theology is not a very clear one, even in New Testament commentaries.

1. PREDESTINATION AS AN ACT OF GOD

Throughout the book, Barth correlates the concepts of predestination, election and reprobation to the duality of faith and unbelief.

3 Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1954), vi.

4 See the conclusion by Cristina Grenholm, *Romans Interpreted. A Comparative Analysis of the Commentaries of Barth, Nygren, Cranfield and Wilckens on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1990), 143: ‘Any simplified characterization of the commentaries as either dogmatic or historical has been shown to be impossible.’ In each of the four authors, there is a complex ‘relation between reconstructive and constructive interpretations’.

warranted Barth’s claim that the first edition was turned upside down by the second. See Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1954), vi.

H. Bouillard pointed out quite correctly that Barth’s interpretation of Rom. 9–11 treats references to ‘Israel’ consistently as references to the Christian church. Henri Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, vol. 1: *Génèse et évolution de la théologie dialectique* (Paris: Aubier, 1957), 60. As a result, it does not consider the role of Israel or Judaism and their relation to Christianity.

See the conclusion by Cristina Grenholm, *Romans Interpreted. A Comparative Analysis of the Commentaries of Barth, Nygren, Cranfield and Wilckens on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1990), 143: ‘Any simplified characterization of the commentaries as either dogmatic or historical has been shown to be impossible.’ In each of the four authors, there is a complex ‘relation between reconstructive and constructive interpretations’.

He agrees with the traditional Christian view that human beings are either elected or not elected by God to become believers in Christ. In correspondence to the Reformers’ idea of justification by grace through faith, he maintains that a person’s faith in Christ is characterized by his or her acceptance of God’s opposition to the human predicament of sin and death, an opposition that is revealed once and for all through the appearance of God’s new world of righteousness in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. The topic of resurrection appears already in the opening pages of the book. Initially, Barth’s interpretation is rather conventional. He says that Jesus is discovered in it as the Messiah: ‘The resurrection is the revelation, the discovery of Jesus as the Christ, the appearance of God and the recognition of God in him.’ The next step, however, is more radical. The resurrection, Barth says, does not merely demonstrate God’s victory over death and the liberation from sin, but above all it is an expression of God’s judgment and the universal crisis of humankind. The believers’ ‘affirmation of the resurrection as the turn of the aeons [is at the same time] the affirmation of the divine No! in Christ’. The term crisis means that the ‘new day’, which has begun for everyone, includes not only a beginning but also a passing away. Hence, the Christian faith entails the believers’ fundamental willingness ‘to let the word of reconciliation ... be set up as judgment upon oneself’. The understanding of the resurrection as a form of divine judgment does not diminish the reality of salvation. Barth’s point is that the forgiveness of sins and the establishment of human righteousness before God are achieved by God, not by human beings. They are an expression of God’s faithfulness, when God confronts humankind

5 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 34–5, 41, 67, etc.
7 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 6. He uses an image that became famous: in the resurrection, the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh ‘like a tangent touches a circle, without touching it [and] as the old world’s boundary, as a new world’.
8 Ibid. 14.
9 Ibid. 44.
10 Ibid. 307–8, with a reference to 2 Cor. 5:19–20.
‘with His No as the wholly other, as the Holy. And the faith of a human being consists in the reverence that accepts this No.’\textsuperscript{11} The Christian faith acknowledges that God’s righteousness and God’s act of justification are an ‘impossible possibility’.\textsuperscript{12} This phrase does not refer to some logical paradox that is resolved by divine intervention. It has a specific theological function, by pointing to God’s acting as the sole origin of human righteousness. God achieves what is impossible from a human perspective. The ‘impossible possibility’ is the unique divine possibility of resurrection and new life, whereas the ‘possible possibility’\textsuperscript{13} is the human possibility of sin. The divine possibility never becomes a human possibility. Barth readily acknowledges the subjective side in the human relation to God, but he insists that it always stands in a ‘twilight’ or, referring to Rom. 5:20–1, ‘under the law of death, [be it] the most inferior or the most superior religious experience’.\textsuperscript{14}

According to Barth, the appearance of the new world in Jesus Christ is the content of the gospel of salvation, which confronts human beings with the choice either to accept and stand up to God’s judgment or to avoid it. ‘The seriousness of the gospel of salvation consists in the fact that it posits a choice: it is a scandal for the person who cannot stand up to [God’s] antagonism . . .—it leads to faith for the person who cannot escape the necessity of the antagonism.’\textsuperscript{15} This does not imply that Christian theology deals primarily with the relation between God and the individual believer. It rather focuses on God’s address to humankind as a whole. In particular, it emphasizes that the possibility of becoming a believer is grounded in an eternal decision, eternal not in the sense that it lasts forever but that it precedes and transcends every singular moment of time. Barth says that ‘seriously understood there are no “Christians”. There is only the eternal possibility for all, at once accessible and inaccessible for everyone, to become Christians.’\textsuperscript{16} ‘The whole “Christian” life would not refer to the gospel of salvation, it would be human decoration, dangerous religious residue . . . if it wanted to be an expression of having and being rather than one of want and hope. If it wanted that, if it changed from being a Christ-ity (Christus-tum) to being

\textsuperscript{11} Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 17.  
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 53, 68, 175, etc.  
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 175.  
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 163.  
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 14.  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 305.
Christian-ity (Christen-tum), to a peace accord or just a *modus vivendi* with the world as it exists on this side of the resurrection, then it would have nothing to do any longer with the power of God.’\(^{17}\) He insists that the generation of faith always remains God’s own work and that it is rooted in ‘the mystery of the divine predestination to salvation’.\(^{18}\)

Barth voices two fundamental objections against the traditional view of election with its roots in Augustine, which he regards as a ‘mythologizing’\(^ {19}\) construction. First, he rejects the (mis-)understanding that predestination can be explained in terms of cause and effect. The event in which a person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ and thus a witness to the resurrection, is not simply one historical incident among others which was predestined by God and bound to happen. Although the human act of faith occurs within a historical context, it can never be deduced from or identified with the latter, because its origin always lies in God’s self. The act of faith does not occur when a human being has recognized God but when God has recognized a human being. Barth strongly emphasizes the supra-temporal (though not pre-temporal) character of divine predestination, in order to exclude any possibility of making faith into one object among others in the order of cause and effect: ‘God stands over against humankind as origin, not as cause.’\(^ {20}\) God’s revelation in

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\(^ {17}\) Ibid. 12. ‘Every assertion of a human ... possession of ... the divine ... pulls the latter down to the level of time, objects and humankind’ (ibid. 87). W. Ruschke has shown that the polemic against the human claim to ‘have’ or to ‘possess’ God is characteristic for the whole book. Werner M. Ruschke, *Entstehung und Ausführung der Diastasentheologie in Karl Barths zweitem Römerbrief* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987), 17–20 and 95–100.

\(^ {18}\) Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 308. In the first edition, Barth emphasized the divine origin of predestination equally strongly and postulated that ‘our predestination to salvation lies immediately in our being in Christ’. Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Erste Fassung)* 1919, ed. Hermann Schmidt (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 346 (my emphasis). In the second edition, the claim to an immediacy in the divine–human relationship disappears.

\(^ {19}\) Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 332. The term ‘mythologizing’ is used here as a synonym for ‘simplistic’ or ‘reductionistic’.

\(^ {20}\) Ibid. 342. In the first edition, Barth’s interpretation of the potter-image in Rom. 9:21–4 stressed the unity rather than the distance between God and humankind. ‘Whether a person answers Yes or No, he or she must answer God. Whether one comes out of the divine workshop as friend or foe of God, as Moses or Pharaoh, one must ... express the unity with God, execute the will of God, which corresponds to the hour of his or her genesis in this work-room. The origin in God, which for every
Jesus Christ, although universal and objective in character, is ‘no psychological, historical, cosmic, natural given, not even one of the highest order’. Human acting is neither the cause nor the effect of divine willing: ‘there does not exist any direct, intuitable relation between human responsibility and God’s freedom but only the indirect, undeducable, unexecutable [relation] of time and eternity, creature and creator’.

Barth does not want to dispute the existence of such a relation. He is rather ‘trying to strip away any possibility of making faith a psychological given. But he did not want to deny that faith “exists” in a highly actualistic sense, in the moment of revelation.’ His view of revelation comes close to Schleiermacher’s understanding of the single decree being directed towards the Naturzusammenhang as a whole, although a significant difference remains. While Schleiermacher rejects any interaction between God and human beings, Barth assumes an acting of God toward humankind and a corresponding acting of humankind toward God, the qualification of which (as idolatry or as true worship) is dependent on God’s decision. Yet, the human response to God does not entail the establishment of a continuous relation between a human being and God. The relation always remains indirect and unintuitable.

Second, Barth rejects the attribution of election and reprobation to predetermined quantities of individual persons, since this neglects that God’s eternal predestination is related to humankind as a whole and is not a one-time event but occurs time and again in history, when a human being is addressed by God’s Word. The divine predestination is the foundation of the Christian faith, but it is not a pretemporal decision by which God has determined once and for all who will and who will not believe. It is ‘one divine doing’ that constitutes the true unity of all human beings and not the distinction person, in every moment and in every epoch can mean promise or judgment, mercy or wrath, glory or perdition—the origin in God does everything.’ Barth, Der Römerbrief 1919, 381. God’s acting is primary in both editions: ‘God Himself raises the question about God and answers it.’ Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 44.

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21 Ibid. 72.
22 Ibid. 340.
23 McCormack, Karl Barth’s Dialectical Theology, 257.
24 See above, Ch. 2, 1.
25 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 387.
between two separate kinds or groups of persons, as traditional versions of the doctrine assumed. ‘Over against the eternal double predestination everyone is in the same position, Jacob is in every moment of time also Esau, Esau is in the eternal moment of revelation also Jacob.’ As a divine possibility, election ‘is always also the possibility of the reprobate. God’s Yes shines even into the last depth of His No, precisely because the latter is so radical, because it is the divine No.’ Although Schleiermacher rejects the idea of double predestination altogether, he also rejects an individualistic understanding of election and reprobation, as we have seen.

Moreover, Barth explains that the prefix ‘pre’ in ‘predestination’ is not a temporal but a principal qualification that underscores the indirect and broken character of any human relationship with God. He asserts that God’s revelation confronts the whole of humankind with the divine ‘non-being’ and ‘non-given’ and thereby imposes a limitation on religious beliefs and practices:

The truth of human love for God lies in God and not in the human being: it is grounded in God, realized in God, … God recognizes it, and in God it is

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26 Ibid. 332.
27 Ibid. 387. ‘The two contradictory decisions stand next to each other in the same person at the same time…. There is no being elect (Erwähltein) that could not be followed by a being reprobate (Verworfensein), no being reprobate that could not be followed by a being elect.’ Karl Barth, ‘Biblische Fragen, Einsichten und Ausblicke’ (1920), in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1925), 75. Barth’s criticism of the particularistic view is coherent with the recent exegetical finding by T. Eskola, who concludes that Paul does not assume an ‘eclectic election’ that took place ‘beforehand’ or ‘a scheme of predeterminative election’. Timo Eskola, *Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 172, 175.
28 McCormack’s comment on the similarities between the doctrines of election in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* and in the *Church Dogmatics* needs to be modified accordingly: ‘The innovation which Barth introduced into the Reformed doctrine of predestination consisted in his rejection of the classical division of the human race into two groups … whose numbers were fixed and determined from eternity-past by God’s decree.’ Karl Barth’s *Dialectical Theology*, 372. Schleiermacher is Barth’s forefather in regard to this ‘innovation’, and the innovation is already found in the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*. In fact, it is already intimated in the first edition, when Barth asserts that the divine predestination does not entail a ‘dreary, rigid, ready made dual partition of history by the will of God’. Barth, *Der Römerbrief* 1919, 384.
29 Barth, *Der Römerbrief* 1922, 342.
existential, only in God. And this divine knowledge occurs eternally and unintuitably, before, above and after all time; it is therefore never identical with human knowledge within time but is the crisis, presupposition and superseding of all human knowledge.30

The crisis and superseding of human knowledge does not imply that human beings cannot know God at all. Barth’s point is that ‘God wants to be known through God.’31 In other words, human beings can know God by participating in God’s self-knowledge.32 Since this participation cannot be achieved from the human side, it has to be generated and determined by God. In good dialectical fashion, Barth says that the knowledge of God ‘creates human knowledge time and

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30 Ibid. 308–9. This claim coincides with Barth’s view of faith as ‘absolute miracle’ (ibid. 117). In contrast, the first edition regards faith as the one instance of a direct relationship between God and a human being, created by the Holy Spirit. Barth, Der Römerbrief 1919, 160. In the first edition, Barth also used the concept of the ‘absolute decree’ but defined it, unlike his Reformed forebears, as a term that expresses the certainty of the believers’ hope rather than the aloofness of God’s will. It is identical with a decision that originated not in this world but ‘stands behind them as their eternal, heavenly, otherworldly, divine basis of life (Lebensgrund), which has its foundation in the Christ’. Since the basis of the ‘truth of our being’ is in God and thus unshakable, no ‘temporal eventualities can overcome it, wherefore we do not postulate but know that all things must work for the best to those who love God… In the Christ, we are placed under the absolute decree, [under] the positive divine mark that all things now bear’ (ibid. 346).

31 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 384. A similar statement is found in the first edition of the book. Barth says that God’s love, given to the believer as a gift of God’s Spirit, entails the ‘regained knowledge of God, through which God immediately knows Himself and is known’. Barth also makes the bold claim that God’s love becomes the essential basis (Wesensgrund) of the believer, even if it remains God’s own property. Barth, Der Römerbrief 1919, 158. In the second edition, he carefully avoids all statements that could suggest human possession of God’s grace, but even the first edition already relativized such claims by describing the human role as participation in a ‘movement’ with a ‘living origin’ and a ‘certain goal’ (ibid. 148). I. Spieckermann notes a terminological change regarding the Lordship of Jesus: from the opposition between ‘(sheer) ideality and full reality (that realizes the ideality)’ in the first edition, to the opposition between ‘ideality and existentiality (that is occasioned by the harsh human character of Jesus’ cross … and is realized only as an extreme case on the margins of human possibility)’ in the second edition. Ingrid Spieckermann, Gottes-erkennen. Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1985), 128 n. 127.

32 In this event, human knowledge is conformed to God’s knowledge and not vice versa: ‘God’s self-knowledge does not become analogically related to a prior human knowledge of Him in revelation; … God’s act is the analogue, ours is the analogate.’ McCormack, Karl Barth’s Dialectical Theology, 17.
again by superseding human knowledge’.\textsuperscript{33} Human knowledge of God is an act of faith, and like faith it is rooted in the mystery of divine predestination, that is, in God’s own being and acting.\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, he maintains, the doctrine of election should not be focused on the (individual or communal) human act of electing God but on the divine act of electing the human: ‘The person who as a human being elects God has to make room for the human being who is elected by God. . . . This is the meaning of double predestination, the opening up of God’s “mystery”, the goal of the freedom of God.’\textsuperscript{35}

Like Schleiermacher, Barth does not deny that individuals are elected by God. His main concern, however, is not with the individual’s election of God but with God’s election of the individual.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief 1922}, 210. Here, it is important to remember that Barth does not yet treat the knowledge of God in a systematic–theological manner. The above quote occurs in an ethical context, in which he asks how human beings can know and obey God’s will. In regard to the relation between election and ethics, Barth calls the concrete love of another human person an ‘intuitable analogy of the believer’s own election’ (ibid. 437). Other passages contrast God’s knowledge and human knowledge. See ibid. 498, against Spieckermann, 133 n. 162, who interprets the phrase as an objective genitive (‘knowledge about human beings’), which contradicts the context of the argument.

\textsuperscript{34} Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief 1922}, 160. Barth also distinguishes between the knowledge of God and the subject matter of this knowledge. This distinction corresponds to the traditional distinction between the act of faith (\textit{fides qua creditur}) and the content of faith (\textit{fides quae creditur}).

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. 401. J. F. Lohmann’s thorough analysis neglects the idea of human participation in God’s self-knowledge and thus misunderstands Barth’s rejection of an objective givenness of God and faith. In a critique of Barth’s interpretation of Rom. 5:5, Lohmann says that while the Spirit is not a material object among others, Paul insists that it is given to assure the believer’s hope, whereas Barth only acknowledges its non-givenness. Johann Friedrich Lohmann, \textit{Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus: Die Rezeption des Neukantianismus im ‘Römerbrief’ und ihre Bedeutung für die weitere Ausarbeitung der Theologie Karl Barths} (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 310. Barth indeed says that the gift of the Spirit transcends the objectivity of the human sphere. In this respect, it is ‘intuitable and comprehensible only as non-given’. Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief 1922}, 135. Yet, he also makes a claim that Lohmann neglects. According to Barth, ‘there is an “I”, a “we”, a “heart” of the human being that is able to love God’. Its basis is God’s gift that grounds a person ‘in God’, so that ‘the “unintuitability of God” (Rom. 1:20) . . . can become revealed and intuitable’. Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief 1922}, 135. When the love of God is ‘given’ to a person, it does not become his or her possession. Evidently, Barth seeks to uphold the \textit{extra nos} of grace.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 332. This aspect is also emphasized in the first edition, although it does not lead to an explicit critique of the particularism of traditional views on election: ‘Only the free God Himself decides, in regard to the progress of His cause, whom He will “love” and whom He will “hate”’. Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief 1919}, 368.
theocentric emphasis and the assertion that human beings have no direct ontic or noetic access to God’s being and acting does not imply that humankind remains detached from God’s acting. On the contrary, Barth claims that the divine act of predestination constitutes humankind’s ultimate concern, to borrow a phrase from Paul Tillich, because ‘God enclosed everyone in disobedience, in order to show mercy on everyone’, as Rom. 11:32 says. For Barth, this verse is the key to the Epistle and to Christian theology as a whole. Our thinking about ‘God, righteousness, the human being, sin, grace, death, resurrection, law, judgment, salvation, election, reprobation, faith, love, hope . . . as well as the question which categories one should use to decipher these Ur-Worte is decided in the light of the understanding or misunderstanding of this verse’.37

The verse has a twofold significance. First, it points out that the content of the divine predestination is God’s unconditional mercy. Second, Paul’s claim suggests a modification of the concept of double predestination. Although the concept has been a stumbling block for centuries, it does not need to be rejected, Barth argues, as long as it does not imply the protological determinism favoured by previous accounts of election and as long as it is clear that it refers to a movement.38 It can be used as a category that points to the teleology by which God’s salvific acting is directed, namely, from reprobation to election.

Barth’s revised concept of double predestination leads to the rejection of a division between the hidden God and the revealed God. Such a division would correspond to the concept of a predetermined twofold divine will for the elect and for the reprobate. He insists, however, that God is truly revealed in Jesus Christ: ‘the hidden, the unknown, the incomprehensible God, for whom nothing is impossible, is . . . our Father in Jesus Christ. . . . The Deus absconditus is as such the Deus revelatus in Jesus Christ.’39 The christocentric understanding of God’s self-revelation underscores that faith in Jesus

37 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 407.
38 This is already emphasized in the first edition, see Barth, Der Römerbrief 1919, 384: ‘The revelation of the eternal double predestination is . . . the momentary expression of a movement.’
39 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 407–8.
Christ is a specifically defined eschatological event in which the humanly impossible is achieved by God. He asserts that the human being, who as a human being can only make room, decrease and wither, is saved, justified and risen: saved as the lost one, justified as the unjustifiable, risen from the dead—the impossible event, being made possible in Christ, that God ... proves Himself to be God not only in His wrath but wholly other (ganz anders) in His mercy.\footnote{Ibid. 401. The famous phrase of God as ‘totally other’ is often misunderstood in a dualistic fashion. For Barth, however, God’s ‘total’ otherness here does not mean merely the opposition to but also (and more importantly) the foundation of that which is ‘other’ over against God: ‘The other over against every being, everything known, given, temporal and human ... would be in no way the totally other over against these things, if its original, fulfilling, eventually affirmative significance for them were not recognized in every respect’ (ibid. 90).}

Barth’s understanding of predestination as an event ‘in God’ emphasizes the free character of God’s being and acting. It suggests that all statements about God include the consideration of humankind as the object of God’s universal judgment and grace. God’s revelation in the death and resurrection of Christ qualifies the human predicament as the crisis or judgment under which every human being, not only the members of the church, finds himself or herself. The concept of double predestination is the basis of the universal possibility of election or reprobation, which is grounded in God alone.

Barth’s emphasis on divine predestination as the sole basis for human knowledge of God is an expression of his dissent from liberal theology. For Barth, the fundamental problem of liberal theology consisted in its presuppositions about the way in which human beings can achieve true knowledge of God. He agrees with his predecessors that the ontological and epistemological basis of human knowledge of God must be identical, yet he does not think that this identity can be guaranteed by human religiosity. Unlike Wilhelm Herrmann and Albrecht Ritschl, he does not regard the individual appropriation of the Christian faith as a valid criterion for the truth of the latter. If the truth of the Christian faith is identical with the divine subjectivity immanent in the individual reality of religious experience, Barth claims, then the warrant of the Christian
faith in principle remains undecided and undecidable. It becomes impossible to distinguish between a statement or an action that is truly directed toward God’s revelation and a statement or an action that merely expresses a claim to God’s revelation. As a result, the knowability of God and of God’s will would be decided on the grounds of the individual appropriation of revelation and become a question of sheer power.

Barth argues that it is not sufficient to distinguish the imperfect human expression of faith from the truth of God’s revelation and that it is necessary to criticize the confines of the act of faith itself. The criticism leads him to a new theological approach, which locates the truth-claim of the Christian faith exclusively in God’s self-revelation, so that the latter becomes also the critical criterion of its appropriation by human beings.41 In this context, two aspects of his early doctrine of election are particularly significant, first, the theocentric revision of the concept of predestination and second, a dialectical understanding of election and reprobation, which is designed to correspond to the ‘inner dialectic of the subject matter’.42 The dialectic entails that God’s revelation not only constitutes the universal crisis of humankind, but it also demonstrates God’s will to constitute all human beings anew. In and through Christ’s death and resurrection the possibility of reprobation ‘turns over in God: toward the election and partnership of humankind [with God]’.43

2. REPROBATION AND ELECTION

Barth’s theocentric view of election stands in close proximity to the supralapsarian view that the decree of predestination, including

42 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, xiii.
43 Ibid. 328.
election and reprobation, is logically prior to the decree of creation. Unlike traditional supralapsarians, however, he adds that reprobation is not a goal in itself but follows the eternal act of election in Christ like shadow follows light: ‘Reprobation exists only as the shadow of the light of election.’ He explains that the sin actualized in Adam and the righteousness revealed in Christ are a transcendent
disposition of humankind, whereby the second act has the priority over the first one. Sin is the supra-temporal falling away of humankind from its unity with God, an unhistorical original event that determines human history as a whole and also effected the disobedience of the first pair of human beings. In accordance with his critique of an anthropocentric and individualistic view of election, the rift in the divine–human relationship does not imply an absolute distinction between believers and unbelievers. The falling away of humankind from its unity with God cannot be adequately understood apart from the universality of God’s judgment and grace in Jesus Christ. Humankind is at once irrevocably separated from but also irrevocably bound to God: ‘Beyond optimism and pessimism, when the “emptiness” of the cosmos is understood in its origin, as the unintuitable falling away of the creature from the creator, there is hope. It is the hope for the unintuitable unity of creator and creature,

44 Ibid. 386. Barth continues with a display of sparkling dialectics: ‘God’s No is merely the backside of God’s Yes. Esau is only Esau as far as he is not Jacob. . . . God’s Yes can only consist in the turnover of His No. Jacob is Jacob, because he is not Esau.’

45 Ibid. 149–50 and 159. The view of sin as a transcendental disposition of humankind, by which human beings remain attached to the old aeon, has a parallel in Schleiermacher’s thesis of an original sinfulness. Lohmann says that for Barth ‘sin constitutes the transcendental essence of humankind’. Lohmann, Barth und der Neukantianismus, 286. Barth’s remark that sin is ‘the specific weight of human nature as such’ (Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 151) reminds Lohmann of the extreme view of the sixteenth century Lutheran theologian Matthias Flacius. There are two problems with this interpretation. First, Lohmann overlooks that, for Barth, the transcendental disposition of humankind includes not only sin but also the righteousness revealed in Christ. Second, he does not recognize Barth’s rejection of particularism and thus fails to see that the terms sin and righteousness do not simply characterize individual persons but the relation of humankind to God. Barth’s position is far from that of Flacius. It is central for both editions of the Epistle to the Romans that the divine No can only be recognized because it is already overcome by the divine Yes. This is the core of Barth’s ‘Realdialektik’. See Michael Beintker, Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barth’s (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1987), 36.
which has been restored in the death and resurrection of the Christ.'

Barth argues that a material contrast exists between Adam and Christ, which is rooted, however, in their common origin, in the divine predestination to election and reprobation, which precedes the reality of both grace and sin. The sin and death on the side of Adam and the righteousness and life on the side of Christ define the whole of human life and of humankind, ‘whereby the Yes of the One is the No of the Other, and vice versa’. Adam exists not by himself

46 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 293.

47 Spieckermann, Gotteserkenntnis, 134. The same emphasis is found in the first edition, when Barth mentions ‘the divine realism and universalism, which we advocate’. Barth, Der Römerbrief 1919, 117. ‘The promise, in the Bible, is meant realistically, not moralistically . . . universally, not sectarian’ as an ideal or program of those who are in the know (ibid. 134). The point is crucial for Barth’s critique of the ideological support for the militaristic nationalism that accompanied the outbreak of World War I. In particular, he was critical of the religious war-mongering in Germany: ‘The absolute thoughts of the gospel are simply suspended until further notice, and in the meantime a Germanic battle-religion is put into force, with Christian garnishing, through a lot of talk about “sacrifice” and the like.’ Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen, 4 September 1914, Barth—Thurneysen: Briefwechsel; 1:10. Such an outburst was not a new phenomenon in Germany and had a precursor in the hysteria during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870–71. The military victory in 1871 was regarded by leading circles of the German bourgeoisie as God’s judgment over an allegedly depraved France. Karl-Heinrich Höfele, ‘Sendungsglaube und Epochenbewusstsein in Deutschland 1870/71’, Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 15 (1963), 265–76. In the following decades, this religious nationalism developed into a racial supremacism: ‘During and after the Franco-Prussian war, many German Protestants came to believe not only that God had granted them a victory over their archenemy, but also that by doing so God had significantly elevated them. In the years that followed, the notion of a new covenant between God and the German people was . . . filled with considerations of power politics, and it was closely linked to considerations rooted in Darwinism. After the 1880s . . . the belief in a new covenant gradually gave way to ideas of German uniqueness and German superiority based on power and race.’ Hartmut Lehmann, ‘“God Our Old Ally”: The Chosen People Theme in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth Century German Nationalism’, in William R. Hutchison and H. Lehmann (eds.), Many Are Chosen. Divine Election and Western Nationalism (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 104. Barth’s refrain that God alone is the divine judge and that no person is exempt from God’s judgment sounds even more powerful against this historical background.

48 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 154. Barth stresses the contrast between Adam and Christ with a Yes–No antithesis, although he translates the word typos (Rom. 5:14) as Vorbild and not as Gegenbild. O. Hofius criticizes this common translation but admits that the translation Gegenbild is without semantic parallel. He also agrees that the person and work of Adam as well as of Christ determine all humankind. Otfried Hofius, ‘Die Adam–Christus-Antithese und das Gesetz’, in James D. G. Dunn (ed.), Paul and the Mosaic law (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 181.
but only as the ‘backward moment of the movement that is victoriously directed forward in the Christ’.\footnote{Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief} 1922, 149.} Despite the unequal quality of election and reprobation, the old world of sin and the new world of righteousness are equally dependent on God.\footnote{Ibid. 157. God’s rejection of human sin does not lead to the rejection of created reality as such. Already in his famous lecture ‘Der Christ in der Gesellschaft’, Barth offers a cautious affirmation of the world ‘as it is’: ‘The original is the synthesis, from which the antithesis, but especially also the thesis itself, originates. The insight into the genuine transcendence of the divine origin of all things allows us . . . to understand everything that is and exists as being in God, to understand it in its relation with God.’ Thus, the antithesis is ‘more than a sheer reaction to the thesis. Instead, it . . . also originates in the synthesis, comprising in itself and superseding the thesis’. Barth, ‘Der Christ in der Gesellschaft’ (1919), in \textit{Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie}, 51, 60.} The idea of the original unity and historical separation of God and humankind does not regard Adam and Christ as two representatives of humankind in a static polarity to each other. The contrast between Adam and Christ is not perceived as a ‘metaphysical’ dualism but as a ‘dialectical’ and teleological dualism that is determined by ‘a movement, an act of knowing, a way \textit{from here to there}’.\footnote{Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief} 1922, 155. ‘God’s way! Hence, no . . . stable “reality”. . . . The idea of Adam and Christ must not entail a cosmic dualism.’ Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief} 1919, 189–90.} The divine origin and the divine goal of the human destiny is veiled in the duality of Adam and Christ and unveiled in their unity, although it remains unintuitable: ‘there is no “and” in God, no duality, but only a superseding of the first by the second. God is the one, eternally the God of Jacob . . . but we cannot comprehend God other than in duality, in the dialectical duality, in which one must become two, so that two truly can be one’.\footnote{Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief} 1922, 342. ‘A protological–eschatological monism is the presupposition of the immanent duality of reality.’ Beintker, \textit{Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths}, 66.} God’s reprobation (of the elect) and God’s election (of the reprobate) are ‘unintuitably one and the same in God’.\footnote{Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief} 1922, 405.}

The relationship of Adam and Christ indicates that the divine reality ‘urges forward from guilt and fate to reconciliation and redemption; for the crisis of death and resurrection, the crisis of faith, is the turn from the divine No to the divine Yes and never
simultaneously the reverse as well’. Hence, the Lutheran scheme that the believer lives as one who is sinful and justified at once is rejected: ‘I cannot be sinner and justified. I can only live in the turn (the irreversible turn!) from sin to grace.’ For Barth, the superseding of the first aspect by the second one is a defining element of the relation between sin and grace. Their relation is ‘a genuinely

54 Ibid. 155. Once again, Lohmann does not fully recognize Barth’s dialectic. While he correctly notes that the life of Jesus does not figure prominently in the book (which is equally true of Paul’s letter), he is misguided when he says that Barth ‘attributes greater significance’ to the death of Christ than to the resurrection and that for Barth ‘the priority of the “No” over the “Yes” is the “conditio sine qua non for the understanding of the Epistle to the Romans”’ Lohmann, Barth und der Neukantianismus, 298–9. Barth does not speak of a ‘priority of the “No” over the “Yes”’ or of the cross over the resurrection. On the contrary, he emphasizes the ‘radicalism’ of the resurrection and says that ‘a negation that would remain as negation besides the position, would be no genuine, no critical negation; it soon would itself have to be negated again. Resurrection as alien history besides the other histories would not be resurrection, for what should then rise? A presupposition that would not verify and fulfill itself in regard to all that is given, would be no final presupposition. . . . The other, over against everything . . . objective, temporal, human, . . . would be in no way its totally other, if it were not recognized, in every respect, in its original, fulfilling, finally affirming significance’ (ibid. 90). Lohmann acknowledges that for Barth the resurrection is ‘the negation of all this-worldly positions and negations’ (Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 446). He contends, however, that the rest of the passage contradicts Barth’s intention to give priority to the ‘Yes’. Barth continues that the ‘resurrection occurs on the boundary of a this-worldly negation’ and that its ‘intuit-able parable’ is the physical death of Jesus (ibid.), but he does not simply infer a primacy of ‘No’ over ‘Yes’. The matter is more complex than Lohmann thinks. Jesus Christ is the boundary of history precisely as the ‘bodily, corporeally, personally risen one’ (ibid. 183), not as a principle of negation (or affirmation). On this basis, Barth asks what the resurrection (as crisis) means for the human situation and answers: ‘The “lowlands” of our contingent life events have relatively more testimony value than the high points. We stand deeper in the No than in the Yes. We would almost like to postulate that the understanding of this disruption of the equivalence of view-points about life is . . . the conditio sine qua non for the understanding of the Epistle to the Romans and its message’ (ibid. 446). Hence, the conditio sine qua non is not related to the contrast between judgment and grace, as Lohmann assumes, but to human life in the crisis of God’s revelation. Lohmann reduces Barth’s ‘scheme’ of ‘No’ and ‘Yes’ to the difference between cross and resurrection (Lohmann, Barth und der Neukantianismus, 299), while for Barth the resurrection constitutes a universal crisis by revealing God’s Yes and No, so that it is not simply a ‘Yes’ that follows upon a ‘No’. For Barth, the difference between cross and resurrection rather equals, if anything, the difference between reconciliation and redemption. See Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 82.

55 Ibid. 187.
dialectical one [and] consists in the superseding of the first element by the second, and thus the sequence is irreversible. Nevertheless, the affirmation of a ‘definite turn’ from the old world of sin to the new world of righteousness does not diminish the universal reality of God’s judgment. The victory of grace over judgment, love over hate and life over death is only real as an eternal event in God, while it remains hidden to human intuition under the conditions of time and history. The crisis of humankind before God, which is revealed in Jesus Christ, is not subsequently solved when a human being is elected to become a believer, because it is brought about by revelation itself. ‘It is the crisis in which we recognize ourselves as sinners and understand for the first time that we do not know God, that what we have thought of as God (whether as present or absent) is the No-God of this world.’ The existence and reality of the Christian faith is always marked by its unrecognizability and people who appear as unbelievers can be elected by God without their election being recognizable by others. This is what Barth means when he repeatedly asserts that God is known as the alien and unknown God!

He continues that God is ‘the hidden abyss and the hidden home at the beginning and at the end of all our ways’ and that ‘the greatest distance between God and humankind is their true unity’. In order to understand this twofold claim, it is crucial to notice that the unity between God and humankind does not belong to the realm of human history but to the world of original creation and ultimate

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56 Ibid. 167. Thus, ‘the simultaneity of being sinful and being righteous . . . is put into question here’. Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths*, 218.

57 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 143. The irreversibility of election and reprobation is also mentioned in the first edition: ‘Election is always prior and original, [it is] God’s real purpose for humankind and . . . the truth of all history . . . The reprobation, however, is always merely an incident, an interference . . . that carries in itself the necessity of its eventual removal.’ Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1919*, 457. Thus, ‘all singular elements, the ones who now are elect and now are reprobate, are not once and for all in their current situation but only temporarily’ (ibid. 385).

58 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 332.


60 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 41.

61 Ibid. 11, 52, 65, 73, 88, 345 and 353.

62 Ibid. 21 and 88.
redemption, the world of primal history (Ur-Geschichte).\textsuperscript{63} God’s address to human beings does not occur as a history within history but as ‘the foundation of everything that becomes historically and psychologically intuitable as an impression of revelation, as adoration and as faith. It is, however, never and nowhere identical with the latter.’\textsuperscript{64} While faith and knowledge of God indeed occur in history, human beings are the subject of this faith and this knowledge only in so far as they are reborn as eschatological new creatures, as the ‘not we’\textsuperscript{65} who exist by grace and faith alone: ‘I am not this subject, as far as it is … the radical Other over against everything I am. And—I am this subject, as far as what it does—its predicate: faith—consists precisely in the constitution of the identity between the new human being and myself … [This identity] is true only by virtue of this predication. By faith alone, I am what I am (not!).’\textsuperscript{66} In every moment of time the identification of the old with the new person still needs to be actualized. The liberating divine judgment always needs to be proclaimed and heard anew. It never entails an objectively given ‘redeemed-ness’\textsuperscript{67}

Barth’s critique of faith and knowledge does not seek to express a general truth about human nature. It is based on the character of God’s revelation, as an event that includes God’s veiling and making Himself unrecognizable. God’s communication with humankind begins with the creation of a ‘yawning abyss’ that poses ‘the starkest offence’\textsuperscript{68} to human religiosity and its common sense. As long as

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 63 Ibid. 117. ‘Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, is the end of time, he can be understood only … as Ur-Geschichte.’ Ibid. 5–6. Barth uses the concept of Ur-Geschichte not as a historical concept that points to a primal event but as a christological category, related specifically to God’s self-revelation in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Ruschke, Entstehung und Ausführung, 39–41.
\item 64 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 67.
\item 65 Ibid. 141 and 185. ‘Grace is the principal opposition against the determination by sin, to which all of our human possibilities … are subject. … As God’s force and power over humankind, it is never and nowhere identical with the doing or non-doing of this human being; but it is the (unintuitable) truth of this human being, the (impossible) true possibility of his or her doing or non-doing, his or her true being (to be defined as his or her non-being)’ (ibid. 196–7).
\item 66 Ibid. 125–6.
\item 67 Ibid. 159. This is what B. McCormack means when he states that the triumph of grace over sin is real only when it is considered ‘from the standpoint of God’. McCormack, Karl Barth’s Dialectical Theology, 268.
\item 68 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 73.
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a human being does not leave it up to God to bridge the abyss, he or she acts under the condition of sin. This does not mean that God’s acting toward humankind excludes all subjective aspects. Barth’s point is that the latter stands necessarily under God’s judgment. He argues that the human striving for knowledge of God is already an act of sin, because it always rests on the presupposition of living no longer in immediacy with God, the loss of which is indicated in the knowledge of good and evil. ‘Originally, humankind lives in paradise . . . where no above and below . . . no beyond and beneath exists (for in the “and” the fall lurks!), where the cosmos is one with creation and humankind is one with God, where everything natural is as such sacred as well, because the sacred is natural too.’ Sin, as the reality and the possibility of the rift between creator and creature, is not simply a contingency of human life but finds its explanation (yet not its cause) in God’s own mystery. In other words, it is the possibility of humankind’s ‘predestination to salvation or to damnation’, which affects every person in the same way. In every moment of time, under the conditions of history and in separation from God, a human being can reckon only with the possibility of being rejected by God. Yet since this rejection itself is eternally overcome in God, he or she can believe in God’s Yes beyond every Yes and No, which has been revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here, we find the ‘positive’ aspect of the impossible possibility of redemption.

On the whole, two aspects regarding the relation between election and reprobation are central for Barth. First, he asserts that the possibility of reprobation is overcome eternally in God and that the old world of Adam is truly surpassed by the new world of Christ. The crisis of election and reprobation is solved by God alone, so that the believer remains confronted with the possibility of reprobation in every moment in time. His or her election becomes a reality—and therefore a possibility—through God’s grace alone; on this side of the

69 Ibid. 229.
70 Ibid. 226, 228.
71 Ibid. 181.
72 Beintker accurately observes that the ‘drift’ toward an eschatological universalism in Church Dogmatics II/2 does not signify a fundamental change in Barth’s view. Beintker, Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths, 39–40.
resurrection, the human relation with God is an impious one: ‘God’s wrath is God’s righteousness revealed to unbelief, apart from and without Christ.’ Unbelief is the universal human condition, but God even in His wrath ‘affirms the existence and the condition of this world [and] suffers for us’. God’s judgment and wrath are never separated from God’s mercy and love. In accordance with his criticism of individualistic views of election, Barth rejects the division between God’s righteous wrath (as if it were for unbelievers only) and God’s gracious love (as if it were for believers only), mirroring Schleiermacher’s rejection of a division of God’s righteousness and mercy in accordance with the distinction between unbelievers and believers.

Second, the individual outcome of the twofold possibility of faith and unbelief is not predetermined by a divine decision made before time, separating the elect and the reprobate. It is decided, time and again, in the event in which God addresses a human being. At the same time, the content or purpose of the divine decree is qualified by the ‘turn from reprobation to election’ in God, which expresses God’s eternal will regarding humankind as a whole. The relation between the historical event of faith and God’s eternal decree remains as difficult to conceptualize as the encounter between the old and the new world in the resurrection of Jesus. But what is clear is that Barth’s view, once more, is similar to Schleiermacher’s view of a single divine will and decree.

Systematically, the doctrine of election ties Barth’s theological epistemology to a christocentric soteriology. It is an important part of his attempt to give an adequate answer to the crisis with which

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73 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 19. When one speaks of Barth’s ‘theology of diastasis’, it is important to remember that the diastasis is not an anthropological or existential given but understood as the result of a divine act. J. Ries summarizes poignantly: ‘There exists no relation between humankind and God, but only a relation between God and humankind: the relation of reprobation and election. The only relation of the so-called natural human being to God is not established through some mediating analogy but through his or her reprobation by this God who reprobates because He elects’, Johannes Ries, *Die natürliche Gotteserkennnis in der Theologie der Krisis, im Zusammenhang mit dem Imagobegriff bei Calvin. Aufweis der Grundlagen und Versuch einer Kritik* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1939), 124.

74 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 333.
humankind is confronted as a result of God’s revelation. On the one hand, all human beings are equally affected by the duality of divine predestination and thus by God’s judgment and God’s grace. On the other hand, both election and reprobation are determined by God’s redemptive will revealed in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. The final question that needs to be addressed in this chapter is to what extent Barth’s christology already has an impact on his doctrine of election.

3. JESUS CHRIST AND GOD’S UNIVERSAL FAITHFULNESS

According to Barth, the human claim of one’s own right and freedom over against God only delays the question of the right and freedom of God. The concept of divine predestination signals the avowal of such a delay, by affirming the contrast between God and human beings. The avowal has to occur ‘if God shall be recognized, over against the being, having and doing of human beings, as God’. Barth’s emphasis on God as the sole agent of predestination is coherent with his claim that ‘the reality of the divine depends on its universality’. Every person is equally affected by the revelation of God’s judgment and by God’s predestination, and no person can claim a privilege in relation to God. The famous emphasis on the ‘infinite qualitative difference between God and humankind’ implies that

75 Ibid. 342.
76 Ibid. 87.
77 ‘We can only . . . believe that we believe. An intuitive, historical–psychological determination and definition of believers over against non-believers is impossible’ (ibid. 126). This does not imply that the reality of faith is fictional: ‘for “what” do we believe, insofar as the faith that stands in the light of . . . Christ’s cross not only seems [to be] faith but is faith, not only vacuum but content, not only human faith but divine faithfulness? We believe that Christ died in our place, and we died with him. . . . If we believe, we are turned away from sin’ (ibid. 182).
78 Ibid. 340. Schleiermacher speaks of an ‘infinite difference between God and every finite being’. Schleiermacher, CG 2, 146 (§ 105, app.). The charge of an abstract opposition between God and human beings, which has been often leveled against Barth’s early theology, is misguided (see above, n. 40) and would fit better Schleiermacher.
the church and the world stand under the same promise and the same judgment and makes it impossible to conceive them as two separate groups of persons.79 The community of the elect is not ‘a quantitatively discernible assembly, not a *numerus clausus*, not a *numerus* at all, not a tangible historical Israel as such’.80 With equal verve, Barth emphasizes the saving character of the Christian faith: ‘If we believe in Jesus we believe in the reality and universality of God’s faithfulness.’81 The term ‘faithfulness’ is the translation of the Greek word *pistis*, which is commonly translated as ‘faith’.82 God’s faithfulness is the source of God’s righteousness. The righteousness that makes possible what is otherwise impossible ‘does not originate in the law but in God’s faithfulness’.83 It is unveiled ‘when God’s faithfulness meets the faith of a human being’, when a person encounters ‘the existenti-ality of Jesus as Lord, as the risen one, as the one in whom to believe’.84

Barth defines faithfulness as a christological concept by saying that Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection is the personification of God’s righteousness and as such ‘the first and the last word of God’s faithfulness toward humankind’.85 He affirms the possibility of

79 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 390.
80 Ibid. 344.
81 Ibid. 81.
82 Initially, Barth’s translation drew some criticism, and in the second edition he used it less frequently. He did not abandon it, since in some passages (e.g. Rom. 3:3) *pistis* clearly refers to God’s faithfulness. Other Pauline terms are marked by a similar ambiguity. See Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, xvii. The translation does not imply a diminished significance of justification by faith alone, as some critics thought. On the contrary, Barth now says that ‘sola fide, *by faith alone*, the human being stands before God and is moved by God: God’s faithfulness can only be believed, precisely because it is God’s faithfulness! More [than believing] would be less’ (ibid. 87). In regard to Rom. 1:17, J. Dunn offers a defense of Barth’s translation (‘God’s righteousness is revealed in the gospel, out of faithfulness for faith’), which is shared by other exegetes. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 43–4. Or it is possible that the phrase ‘for faith’ emphasizes the phrase ‘through faith’ and does not imply a change of the subject. The meaning would then be: the righteousness of God is revealed through faith and solely through faith, so that ‘divine salvation is restricted to faith only’. Eskola, *Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology*, 108.
83 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 366. J. Dunn thinks that the proximity of the terms faithfulness and righteousness can be an argument in favour of Barth’s (occasional) translation of *pistis* as God’s ‘faithfulness’. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 44. Similarly, E. Käsemann defines God’s ‘righteousness’ as God’s ‘covenant-faithfulness’. Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 3rd edn 1974), 27.
84 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 366.
85 Ibid. 80.
salvation for every person who believes in Jesus Christ and thereby accepts God’s judgment over himself or herself:

there is a claim to deliverance from God’s wrath: there, where all claims are resigned, put down by God Himself, where God’s No is accepted as final; . . . there, where the history of God and humankind begins of which no story can be told since it always happens, and does so eternally;66 there, where one dares . . . to put oneself on the line and love the unfathomable God. This is what is at issue in Jesus Christ.87

God’s faithfulness is an expression of God’s perseverance. It enables human beings to acknowledge God’s righteousness time and again, on different historical occasions.88 In variation of a model from Barth’s theological epistemology, one could say that a person’s faith in God is his or her participation in God’s faithfulness to Himself, or a person’s righteousness is his or her participation in God’s justification of Himself, which is displayed in God’s unceasing acceptance of human beings and their world. ‘Being strong in our weakness, we are righteous before God: God justifies Himself before us, but thereby He also justifies us before Him.’89 The event of justification by grace through faith implies the participation in God’s acceptance of humankind, but it does not lead to an identity of the foundation of faith with the historical reality of faith. It is ‘intuitable as the unintuitable,’90 like God always is known as the unknown God, for believers and unbelievers alike.

Barth’s idea of an indirect knowledge of God is illuminated by his use of Martin Luther’s theology of the cross.91 He claims that those who are chosen by God to become believers in Christ are chosen ‘to be conformed to the likeness of God’s Son’ (Rom. 8:29), particularly his death on the cross, and that ‘the Son of God came into the world . . . under this likeness, under this incognito, under the banner of this

86 The point is that stories are narratives with a past, present, and future, but for Barth, the encounter of God and humankind is not an event with a past and a future.
87 Ibid. 50.
88 Ibid. 70.
89 Ibid. 127.
90 Ibid. 67.
91 On Barth’s use of Luther’s theology of the cross at the time of the second edition, see the careful analysis by Beintker, Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths, 209–15.
event, which characterizes and dominates the life of Jesus’. Therefore, the primary calling of those who love God and proclaim the reconciliation of the world is to be witnesses of Jesus’ death and only in this context witnesses of his resurrection. Barth’s emphasis on the incognito and hiddenness of God’s revelation does not entail a diastasis between the ‘vessels of wrath’ and the ‘vessels of mercy’ (Rom. 9:22–3). On the contrary, Barth says that in time everyone belongs to the former, while in eternity everyone belongs to the latter. In other words, no human being is forever lost. While the reality of the new world and of humankind, revealed in Christ’s death and resurrection, is not directly accessible in history, the opposition between God and world does not entail a dualism between creation and redemption or between fall and redemption or an eternal diastasis between God and humankind. The reason for this is the logical priority of election over reprobation. God’s gracious turn towards humankind is the true expression of God’s will: ‘The election of grace is it!’

At this point, Barth’s argument is formally close but materially still far from the christocentric conception of the doctrine of election in Church Dogmatics II/2. He says that the human being who is lost and condemned, represented by Esau (but not excluding Jacob), might carry God’s wrath as a substitute, so that the human being who is elected for salvation and represented by Jacob (but not excluding Esau) can have access to God’s own righteousness, ‘which is veiled in wrath and unveils itself out of wrath’. In his later revision of the doctrine, Barth still holds on to a dialectical view of the relation between reprobation and election, yet the representative person who carries the divine wrath is no longer Esau but Jesus Christ, the Son of

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92 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 307.
93 I. Spieckermann paraphrases: ‘The cross only in the light of the resurrection, the resurrection only in the reflection of the cross—this is the formula that binds God and humankind to each other, by separating them, in order to reflect the radical pre-givenness of God’s self-binding to humankind in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an absolute presupposition.’ Spieckermann, Gotteserkennnis, 125.
94 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 343.
95 Gnadenwahl gilt! (ibid. 396).
96 Ibid. 344. The dialectic of veiling and unveiling will be explained in greater detail in the Göttingen Dogmatics.
God. As we will see in the last chapter, the revision of the doctrine leads to a fully developed theology of the cross, which spells out the consequences of the earlier claim that the crucified Christ in his dereliction is the carrier of God’s promise, as Barth says shortly after the completion of the book.

According to Barth, God’s faithfulness in Jesus Christ is the basis for the act of faith as well as the content of faith. It reveals that Jesus is not only the redeemer of the old world of sin and death but also the new human being of God’s kingdom. Being justified and elected by God, Jesus lives and dies not for his own sake but for the sake of humankind. Having put himself under God’s judgment, Jesus dies in the place of sinful humankind and the latter dies with him, so that a new humanity, although still unintuitable, can appear beyond the old world of sin and death. His resurrection from the dead is the revelation of the unintuitable divine glory and contradicts the fatality of Jesus’ intuitable human life: ‘The judgment born by Jesus is righteousness, the death he dies is life. The No to humankind proclaimed by this event is God’s Yes. The opposition of humankind to God disclosed [in the resurrection] is the reconciliation.’

97 ‘For this reason, faith in God’s predestination means . . . : faith in the non-reprobation of the human being, non-faith in his or her reprobation, because the one who is reprobate is not the human being. The one who is reprobate is, in God’s eternal decree, God Himself in His Son. For God’s self-giving consists in this . . . that God gave and sent His Son, so that the latter would be reprobate and we would not be reprobate.’ Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 182–3. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 167. Barth also applies the dialectic of Esau and Jacob to the relation between Israel and the Church. Paul’s term ‘Israel’ no longer refers to the Christian church, as it did in 1922.


99 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 160.

100 Ibid. 72 and 182.

101 Ibid. 183. Barth emphasizes the universal significance of Christ’s reconciling death. In commenting on the phrase that ‘Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5:8), he uses the traditional concept of a satisfactio vicaria. Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 137. Recent exegetical studies support the argument. M. Gaukesbrink points out that in Rom. 5:1–11 the concept of Christ’s vicarious atonement (stellvertretender Sühnetod) stresses the certainty of Christian hope based on God’s love. It occurs in the context of a reflection on the soteriological implications of the idea of justification by faith, which Paul discusses in Rom. 4. Martin Gaukesbrink, Die Sühnentradition bei Paulus. Rezeption und theologischer Stellenwert (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1999), 130. See also Charles B. Cousar, A Theology of the Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 44: ‘Paul expresses the death [of Christ] as at least representative, if not substitutionary.’ This comment is remarkable, since it comes from an exegete who seeks to protect the ‘vitality and expressiveness of [Paul’s] metaphorical language . . . against the pressure for logical precision’ (ibid. 87).
The revelation of God’s righteousness and humankind’s reconciliation with God in Jesus’ death and resurrection has as its content God’s gracious will for humankind and the rendering impossible of reprobation through election.\textsuperscript{102} Despite the differences in the overall argument, this claim comes very close to his later christocentric position in \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2. Notwithstanding his insistence on the contrast between God and humankind and on God’s freedom to elect and to reprobate according to God’s own will, Barth asserts that Jesus Christ is ‘the miracle of the divine Yes spoken to unredeemed humankind. He is the redeemer. He is the individual, having become one out of two and standing existentially before God, in whom the reprobation has been overcome and absorbed by election.’\textsuperscript{103} The dialectic of God’s No and God’s Yes reflects the paradox of God’s righteousness in ‘the identity of His wrathful holiness and His absolving mercy’,\textsuperscript{104} and the unity of God is revealed exactly ‘in its full unintuitability . . . in the cross of Christ.’\textsuperscript{105}

In regard to the relation between the divine purpose of salvation and Jesus’ death on the cross, another comment comes close to Barth’s later christocentric revision. In the interpretation of Rom. 3:25 he says that Jesus is ‘from eternity destined by the decree of God as the place of reconciliation, and now, in time, he is put in front of human beings, into history’.\textsuperscript{106} This claim resembles his later thesis from \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2 about the identity of predestination with the eternal election of Jesus Christ, although he does not yet draw any conclusions regarding the relation between Jesus’ reconciling death and God’s own being, since his position is more eschatological (and actualistic) than protological. He asserts that God’s faithfulness is identical with

\textsuperscript{102} Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief} 1922, 389.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. 402. Barth reminds us that ‘it is the \textit{divine} possibility that we want to regard as key to the “mystery”, as end of the dark windings of church history, in which we find ourselves’.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. 137.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. 378.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. 79. Exegetically, the point may be an overstatement. J. Fitzmyer thinks that the verb ‘to set forth’ is a reference ‘not so much to the divine plan of salvation as to the crucifixion’. Joseph Fitzmyer, \textit{Romans. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary} (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 349. This view is shared by Dunn, \textit{Romans}, 179 and Käsemann, \textit{An die Römer}, 90–1.
forgiveness, redemption and new creation.\textsuperscript{107} Moreover, in the context of a future eschatological salvation, the hardening of human hearts by God is only a temporal determination: ‘Eternity as the limitation of time is clearly its end, and eternity as the origin of time is its goal.’\textsuperscript{108} Hence, the work of Jesus Christ entails the hope that the duality between faith and history does not preclude the possibility of an eventual restoration of humankind and a return ‘into the unity with God, which is now and here completely lost’.\textsuperscript{109}

At the end of his interpretation of Rom. 8, Barth says that ‘the love of God in Jesus Christ is the union of God’s love for humankind and humankind’s love for God’. In God’s love, ‘our love triumphs. In it, the point is reached, where the unexecutable identity is executed. But … we can neither execute this unity nor even conceive of it as executable.’\textsuperscript{110} This statement shows that it is wrong to posit a contrast in Barth’s theology between a negative dialectical phase during the 1920s and a positive dogmatic phase in the \textit{Church Dogmatics}. The claim that ‘Barth’s own self-critical, dialectical discourse constitutes a form of negative theology, [which] is also affirmative’\textsuperscript{111} is defensible, but it should then not be limited to the \textit{Church Dogmatics}, since it already applies to his earlier writings. Indeed, there occurred a shift in Barth’s theological development, but it stemmed from a christological insight and reaches further than the relation between negative and affirmative aspects of his theology.\textsuperscript{112}

On the whole, Barth’s understanding of election is closely related to the concept of God but not significantly shaped by his christology, notwithstanding the obvious ‘drift toward universal reconcili-

\textsuperscript{107} Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief 1922}, 89.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. 400.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid. 403.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid. 313.
\textsuperscript{111} Graham Ward, \textit{Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, First Paperback Edition, 1998), xviii. Ward’s position is not entirely consistent, since he can also speak of ‘the sheer agnosticism of Barth’s position as it is developed in the writing of the second edition of \textit{Romans}’ (ibid. 92). One wonders whether his preface to the paperback edition, in which the first quote appears, is a disclaimer of certain one-sided statements in the earlier edition.
\textsuperscript{112} See McCormack, \textit{Karl Barth’s Dialectical Theology}, 358–67.
The doctrine is based on a soteriological foundation, which explains the lack of a distinction between the faith of the individual and of the community of believers. The resurrection of Jesus Christ points to the God in whom reprobation is eternally overcome. Barth’s emphasis on the unity of God’s will corresponds to his claim that God’s judgment does not supersede the original unity of God and humankind and the identity of divine origin and divine goal but leads to a reunion of human and divine righteousness: ‘The end is also the goal. The redeemer is also the creator.’ The contribution of Christ’s historical appearance to the determination of God’s will is not clear. Barth’s emphasis on original unity in his commentary on Romans leads to similar problems as Schleiermacher’s elaboration on the idea of absolute dependence, and when he asserts that God’s will is revealed in Jesus Christ who personifies God’s universal faithfulness and righteousness, it remains unclear how the eternal history between God and humankind is related to the history of Jesus Christ. It is questionable whether Barth’s thinking, at this stage, ‘is open toward the later characteristic christological centering of election’. The assertion that in Jesus Christ reprobation has been overcome and absorbed by election is already implied by the idea of Jesus Christ as the ’mirror’ of election, which was used by leading Reformation theologians to emphasize the close link between divine election and

113 Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der ‘dialektischen Theologie’ Karl Barths*, 39. A historicized version of universal reconciliation is found in the first edition of the commentary: ‘As far as we can observe God’s workings, there has never occurred a pure, complete and final reprobating and leaving behind of a human being or an epoch, but there has always been, even if only very unclear, hidden and unconscious, a concurring electing besides the reprobating, a carrying along besides the leaving behind.’ Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1919*, 430–1. Although the direct appeal to history disappears in the second edition, election and reprobation remain modes rather than results of God’s acting.

114 For example, the event of resurrection is simply identified with the origin of the Christian church: ‘only where there are graves, there are resurrections’ (Nietzsche)—but wherever there are graves, there are resurrections. Where the church (not by human decision, but by divine verdict!) comes to its end, there it has its beginning.’ Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 401, referring to a passage from Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*.

115 Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 51.

human salvation. Barth argues that humankind’s reprobation is overcome in Christ because of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, but he does not yet say that Christ’s reconciling death is the result of God’s self-determination to be God in a covenant with humankind.

In the next chapter, we will see that the similarities between Barth and Schleiermacher are deepened in Barth’s first systematic–theological treatment of the topic, three years after he had completed the second edition of his commentary on Romans. Before that, a final word on the exegetical quality of the commentary is in order. Important points of Barth’s revision of the doctrine of election are supported by recent exegetical scholarship. Hence, the early charge that no ‘craftsmanship of exegesis is able to remove th[e] “mythologizing”, “quantitative” conception from the Epistle to the Romans’ does not stand up to scrutiny. Paul’s discussion in Rom. 8:28–30 and Rom. 9 does not centre on the question whether God knew beforehand (pre-temporally) which individuals would later be saved. It rather conceives of election as the calling of human beings in history, through the proclamation of the gospel, and relates it to a ‘resurrection Christology’. This gives his construction a distinctly eschatological outlook and challenges the individualism of traditional views. Equally, the claim that God has chosen a certain number of human beings for salvation, or that divine mercy pertains only to the elect, is ‘not compatible with the teaching of Paul’, who believes that Christ’s reconciling death includes every human being precisely because every descendant of Adam stands equally under God’s judgment: ‘God enclosed everyone in disobedience, in order to show mercy on everyone’ (Rom. 11:32). Both judgment and mercy are universal aspects of God’s being. Paul stresses the radical depravity of humankind as well as the generality of redemption through Christ:

117 See Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 68–72 (ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 64–7), where he discusses the unresolved question whether human beings are not only saved but also elected in Christ. The Reformers failed to recognize that Jesus Christ is not only the mediator but also the subject of election.
118 Bernhard Dörries, Der ferne und der nahe Gott. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Theologie Karl Barths (Gotha: Leopold Klotz Verlag, 1927), 103.
119 Eskola, Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology, 172.
120 Ibid. 182.
‘All human beings have first been predestined to damnation. … On the basis of this first predestination, Paul’s universal soteriology is Christocentric. In a general sense, all men have been “elected” to find salvation in Christ.’\(^{121}\) He does not assume a limited atonement, an idea that is found especially in seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy, since ‘Christ died for the sins of all the descendants of Adam.’\(^{122}\)

\(^{121}\) Ibid. 185.

\(^{122}\) Ibid. 184 (my emphasis). Barth’s critique of historical–critical scholarship is well known. It is summarized in the preface to the 2nd edn: ‘I would like it if the historical–critical [theologians] were more critical! For the decision how to understand “what stands in the text” cannot be made through an occasionally interspersed evaluation, determined by some arbitrary perspective of the exegete, of the text’s words and word-groups, but only through an engagement of the internal tension of the concepts that are offered by the text with more or less clarity, an immersion that should be as flexible and open-minded as possible.’ Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, xii. The passage must be understood in its context. It was motivated by his desire not to rest content with the question what the text meant in the first century. Today, most exegetes have moved beyond historicist presuppositions, and it is perfectly acceptable in the scholarly guild to raise ‘the question of the meaning here and now’. Krister Stendahl, ‘Biblical Theology. Contemporary’, in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, vol. 1 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 422. But it is equally clear that Barth does not draw a strict distinction between the original intention of the author and the text’s meaning at later points in history. Stendahl wrongly assumes that ‘Barth speaks as if it were a very simple thing to establish what Paul actually meant in his own terms’ (ibid. 420). While Barth indeed presupposes an identity of the subject matter throughout the centuries, he certainly does not think it is easy to determine what Paul meant. On the contrary!
To Believe or not to Believe: The Doctrine of Election in the Göttingen Dogmatics

Despite a few minor changes, the resemblance of Barth’s and Schleiermacher’s views on election is also visible in Barth’s first lecture course in systematic theology. The name Göttingen Dogmatics has become the customary English title for a three-semester introductory course that Barth taught in summer of 1924, the winter of 1924–5 and the summer of 1925, during his last year as Honorary Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Göttingen (Lower Saxony). The lectures were officially announced as ‘Unterricht in der christlichen Religion’ in emulation of John Calvin’s main theological work. Barth chose the title as a compromise and made clear on the first day of lectures that he was not satisfied with it. If matters had gone his way, the course would have been simply called Dogmatik, but this weighty title was officially reserved exclusively for courses taught by his Lutheran colleagues. Evidently, Reformed Theology was regarded by the Lutheran theologians in Göttingen (and elsewhere) as an enterprise of a Protestant group with a limited claim to the Evangelical truth.
Barth examined the doctrine of election as one part of the doctrine of God in six lectures between 11 and 19 December 1924, under the heading ‘The Gracious Choice’. The discussion is preceded by three paragraphs on the knowability of God (§ 15), the essence of God (§ 16) and the attributes of God (§ 17); two subsequent paragraphs deal with the doctrines of creation and providence (§§ 19–20). By placing the doctrine of election in the doctrine of God, before the topic of creation, Barth follows the arrangement of the nineteenth-century textbook on Reformed Orthodoxy by Heinrich Heppe, which he used as his primary source for the course.

1. THE FUNCTION OF THE DOCTRINE

Barth begins the paragraph with a brief consideration of the location of the doctrine of election within the doctrine of God. The preceding three paragraphs inquired into God’s knowability, God’s essence and God’s attributes. He remarks that the discussion in these paragraphs already presupposed the reality of God’s revelation, understood as a divine address to humankind and a human encounter with God. The presupposition seemed to justify a description of ‘the mystery denoted by the word “God”...as though it were a static, objective...

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4 UcR 2, 166–212 (§ 18). ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 440–75. Throughout the paragraph, Barth mostly speaks of the ‘doctrine of predestination’, but since the paragraph is called ‘The Gracious Choice’, I use the term ‘doctrine of election’, in order to maintain an overall terminological consistency. The change has no bearing on the content of the argument.

5 Heinrich Heppe, Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche, dargestellt und aus den Quellen belegt, rev. and ed. by Ernst Bizer (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 2nd edn 1958). The location of the doctrine of election as well as the overall structure of the doctrine of God in the Göttingen Dogmatics come close to Barth’s later elaboration on the topic in the Church Dogmatics, vol. II. In both versions, the dogmatic material is organized according to the content of the proclamation of the church, though it is arranged differently. The Göttingen Dogmatics deals with God (chapter 4) in relation to humanity (chapter 5), specifically, what God does for humanity, namely, reconciliation (chapter 6), and what humanity finds in God, namely salvation (chapter 7). The Church Dogmatics deals with God’s self-revelation (vol. II) in creation (vol. III), reconciliation (vol. IV—incomplete) and redemption (vol. V—unwritten).
entity’. Yet, for two reasons such a procedure has not proven to be successful during the inquiry. On the one hand, the object or, rather, subject of theological reflection did not remain a mere object but constantly demanded the involvement of the interpreter himself or herself, who therefore cannot conclude the process of conceptualization as intended. On the other hand, it withdrew ‘into an impenetrable darkness’, leaving the interpreter with preliminary concepts that may or may not result from and lead to knowledge of God. Barth concludes that the difficulty and disturbance of the theological enterprise occurs not despite but rather in accordance with the subject matter of its inquiry. Theology is fundamentally different from other theoretical (scientific), practical, or aesthetic endeavours, because God is ‘never and nowhere without a relation, without a turning toward human beings, that the foedus, the covenant as the decree of His will, is eternally in God Himself. And even in the relation God does not cease to be fully and truly God.’

At this point, the doctrine of election comes into play, because it can function as a systematic–theological reflection of the particular determination of God’s acting toward and upon human beings. It points to the distinction between the statement that ‘God lives, God knows, God wills’ and the statement that ‘God does this very specific thing, He is the God of the gracious choice.’ Structurally, the doctrine of election is located at the end of the doctrine of God. It

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6 UcR 2, 167. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 441.
7 Ibid. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 441. In the discussion of divine eternity and omnipresence, Barth points to ‘the downright devastating negativity of all those divine aseity-attributes’. He continues: ‘Where space and time are not only made infinite, that is, not only realized or idealized, but negated, everything just comes to an end’ (ibid. 160). ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 435. These are stark formulations that indicate Barth’s on-going acknowledgement of the divine negativity and the limits of theological knowledge. It should be noticed that this acknowledgement by Barth is not confined to the 1920s but is still visible in the Church Dogmatics, see for example, Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/1 (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 4th edn 1958), § 27.1: ‘The Hiddenness of God’.
8 UcR 2, 12. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 326. The claim that God is never God without a relation to human beings anticipates Barth’s position in Church Dogmatics II/2. The more traditional Reformed terminology that is used here (covenant, decree, etc.) marks a shift in style from the commentary on Romans.
9 UcR 2, 213.
10 Ibid. 171. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 444.
stands at the transition from the reflection on God’s being to the reflection on God’s acting and holds the same position that it held in the arrangement of the dogmatic compendia of Reformed Scholasticism after 1630.\textsuperscript{11}

The novelty of Barth’s approach consists in a different understanding of the relation between the concept of election and the concept of God. The old Reformed systems set up the doctrine of election as a theory of God’s special decree concerning the salvation or damnation of human beings, as a subdivision of God’s general decree regarding the eternal providence over everything that God created. In Barth’s view, the fundamental issue in the debate over predestination, election and reprobation consists in the fact that God’s address to humankind is not, and does not have to be, always recognized as such when it occurs. He points out that there is always ‘the possibility of another case’,\textsuperscript{12} in which God’s address is not heard or not understood, and he insists that the Christian faith always must reckon with both the positive and the negative possibility, whether it thinks about the proclamation of the Word, the meditation on Scripture, or the event of revelation itself.

While this view is consistent with the view of the Reformed Scholastics, Barth goes a step further and asks about its implications for the concept of God. He claims that the twofold possibility to believe or not to believe is not simply an expression of human finitude or fallibility, or other anthropological conditions, but the result of a ‘divine–eternal reality’.\textsuperscript{13} In other words, it is rooted in God. Not only the act of faith, ‘the decision for the possibility of real knowledge of God’,\textsuperscript{14} and the act of unbelief but also the possibility of the twofold outcome must be regarded as an expression of God’s will. Hence, the claim that God ‘elects the human being by grace and gives

\textsuperscript{11} Before 1630, the arrangement of dogmatic topics in Reformed theology was diverse: ‘An examination of the sixteenth century systems and, indeed, of the seventeenth century systems written before 1630 reveals . . . several different placements of the doctrine of predestination.’ Richard A. Muller, \textit{Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins} (Durham, N.C.: The Labyrinth Press, 1986), 3.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{UcR} 2, 169. ET \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, 442.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 170. ET \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, 443.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. ET \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, 443.
him or her faith . . . is comprehensible only through and with its reversal: He reprobates the human being in His righteous wrath and denies faith to him or her.\textsuperscript{15}

Barth’s argument shows a genuinely Protestant emphasis that characterized his theological thinking ever since his first commentary on Romans: God’s gracious election is not a gift or a promise that can be administered and realized at will by Christian believers or institutions. Furthermore, he seeks to achieve a clearer understanding of God. He regards the partial failure of God’s address to humankind in history as an expression of divine silence and thus as a sign of God’s activity; God does not have to speak, and indeed God does not always speak. It would be a contradiction in terms, he maintains, if the divine attribute of personal vivacity excluded God’s concrete acting as a living person who is free to act or not to act in this or that way. The possibility that God reveals or withholds His life-giving Word is ‘the freedom . . . of God’s predestination’.\textsuperscript{16} The doctrine of election points to the ‘God who acts concretely’,\textsuperscript{17} and thus becomes the presupposition of the subsequent doctrines in the \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, which deal with God’s works in relation to the non-divine Other.

The theocentric approach to the doctrine resembles Barth’s position in his commentary on Romans, although the latter work did not yet include a systematic–theological reflection about the location of the doctrine, and the topic of election arose from the understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God’s righteousness. Notwithstanding this difference, a close relation between the concept of divine election and the concept of God characterizes both works. It highlights the claim ‘that we are with

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 213 (my emphasis). C.-D. Osthövener comments that, according to Barth, God is not only the author of the contingent facts of faith and unbelief when they occur but also of their contingency itself. Osthövener, \textit{Die Lehre von Gottes Eigenschaften}, 125. This is why Barth speaks of God’s eternal act of predestination.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{UcR} 2, 174. ET \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, 446.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 171. ET \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, 444. I disagree with Osthövener’s hypothesis that Barth’s theocentric intentions lead from an initial interest in the concretely acting God to an ‘absolute indetermination of God’. Osthövener, \textit{Die Lehre von Gottes Eigenschaften}, 126. The dialectic of reprobation and election and Barth’s tilt toward a supralapsarian position could be rather called an overdetermination of the concept of God.
our faith or unbelief in God’s hand and power’.\textsuperscript{18} Barth’s elaboration on God’s revelation as a revelation in hiddenness shows to what extent such a claim represents a radicalization of the traditional Reformed emphasis on God’s sovereignty.

2. GOD’S REVELATION IN HIDDENNESS

At the beginning of § 18, Barth states:

If *veiling* is the content of His unveiling and *unveiling* the purpose of His veiling, the human being is evidently put under a twofold possibility grounded in God’s self: God’s *hiddenness* in His revelation might become the reason for . . . misjudging (verkennen) God . . . Or God’s *revelation* in His hiddenness might become, through the Holy Spirit, the reason for his or her faith and obedience and thus for the knowledge of God.\textsuperscript{19}

He qualifies the twofold possibility of faith and unbelief and says that it is the crisis in which humankind finds itself as the result of God’s revelation. The qualification is in accordance with his thinking in the commentary on Romans. He explains further that the diagnosis of a crisis is coherent with the preceding deliberations in §§ 15–17, which formed the first stage in the development of the doctrine of God by exploring the indirect knowability of God, the ambiguity of the definition of God’s essence and the divine attributes that are the conditions for the reality of God’s revelation.\textsuperscript{20} For our purposes, it is helpful to recapitulate briefly the content of these paragraphs.

First, Barth correlates the indirect character of God’s knowability to the veiling, in which God makes Himself known to humankind.\textsuperscript{21} It does not imply that God is partially known and partially unknown. The point is that God veils Himself, *in order to* be known: ‘unveiling

\textsuperscript{18} UcR 2, 172. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 445.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. 166. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 440.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 173. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 445. In general, the crisis-motif is still important for the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, albeit it appears less frequently than in the commentary on Romans: ‘In Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God has been revealed over all flesh, the judgment [has become] *universal*, the crisis *absolute*’ (ibid. 140. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 420).

\textsuperscript{21} ‘Once more: the indirectness of our knowing is the correlate of the veiling, in which God gives Himself to be known’ (ibid. 20. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 332).
is the purpose of His veiling’. God’s hiddenness is the presupposition of revelation. Human beings know God by participating, through the Holy Spirit, in God’s knowledge of Himself. Thereby, God remains the ‘primary subject’ of human knowledge of God and the human being becomes its ‘secondary subject’, not by its own decision but through God’s willing and doing and without attaining a direct knowledge of God, since ‘God is directly and openly manifest only to Himself’. Here, one can notice again that for Barth the possibility of unbelief, being one aspect of the principal limitation or crisis of human knowledge of God, is an integral aspect of God’s revelation and not simply a necessary implication of human finitude or fallibility. The idea of an indirect human participation in God’s self-knowledge is important for the discussion of election, because it emphasizes that the subject of election is God, not human beings.

Second, human knowledge of God includes not only a cognition (Erkennen) but also a comprehension (Begreifen). At the same time,
God’s revelation also entails that human concepts of God remain somewhat inadequate. An irreducible ambiguity concerning the definition of God’s essence remains, which is expressed most poignantly in the need for a simultaneous affirmation of God’s personality and God’s freedom or aseity. Barth explains that God reveals Himself as a real person, yet without merely being one person among others, since God is ‘absolutely unique’. The uniqueness entails a crisis for human understanding and for other gods, who are merely idols over against the true God: ‘Knowledge of God means by definition the most radical twilight of the gods.’

Third, Barth defines the divine attributes as the conditions under which God makes Himself known in revelation. The main point here is that the concepts of God, for example, the divine attributes of personality and aseity, express God’s being and not merely human concepts of God. The distinction between human concepts of God and God’s being, in which the truth of the former resides, has been a key-element of Barth’s theology since his dissent from theological liberalism. He now adds that the doctrine of election serves as the concise explanation of this distinction and therefore becomes the ‘apex’ of the doctrine of God.

To return to the discussion of election, Barth’s detailed elaboration on the idea of the twofold possibility of faith and unbelief begins with a reference to the critical element that the theologian encounters when he or she analyses the concept of revelation, which is the fact

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29 Barth reverses the epistemological sequence in the thesis that God is incomprehensible, by saying that inadequateness is not a general presupposition but rather the result of God’s revelation: ‘revelation, therefore incomprehensibility, therefore inadequate concepts. In other words: because and in so far we recognize God, we know about His incomprehensibility’ (ibid. 57. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 358).

30 Ibid. 69. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 368.

31 Ibid. 151. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 428.

32 Ibid. 214. Apex is not the same as centre. In the prolegomena, Barth cautions against the attempt to posit a central doctrine from which all other doctrines can be retrieved, like the doctrine of justification in Lutheran dogmatics: ‘Strictly speaking, there is no dogmatic material principle, no single basic proposition.’ UcR 1, 365. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 302. According to Barth, the centre and principle of Christian dogmatics is the word of God itself. It lies beyond the scope of the capacities of fallible human language. The consideration of the systematic order and arrangement of theological topics is concerned with the construction of dogmatics not from but in accordance with a preceding principle.
that God’s revelation principally occurs in hiddenness. God’s Word, he says, addresses humankind with ‘the veil of a hard, puzzling and unimpressive objectivity’.\(^{33}\) According to Barth, this is true for the proclamation of the gospel, the writings of Scripture and the historical appearance of Jesus Christ, which offers a picture of weakness, doubt and limited significance, that is, a typical picture of human existence on earth. But the critical element also has a positive meaning. The precondition of revelation consists precisely in the fact that God appears in hiddenness, since God is directly known only to God, while human beings can perceive and know God in no other way than in the unimpressive objectivity in which God chooses to make Himself known. God’s unveiling, as the event in which a human being recognizes the fullness of God’s revelation, is the purpose of His veiling, as the resurrection of Jesus is the gospel of the crucified Son of God.\(^{34}\) Barth cautions us that although unveiling is the purpose of veiling, its occurrence in history is neither necessary nor predictable. On the contrary, he says, the sole necessary fact is the hiddenness of God’s revelation: ‘Hiddenness as an obstacle to the knowledge of revelation is given and intuitable. Hiddenness as a gracious divine event that makes possible the knowledge of revelation is not given and not intuitable.’ As a result, the first case, previously called ‘another case’, in which God’s revelation in hiddenness does not lead to faith, is ‘most necessary’, whereas the second case, the confession of faith, is ‘most improbable’.\(^{35}\)

The claim that the twofold possibility does not signify a balance of two equally possible options leads to the key question of the doctrine of election: how can a human being come to faith, if the hiddenness of revelation is necessary and therefore the possibility of unbelief likely to become realized? It is clear that, in Barth’s view, the human being does not elect God on his or her own terms but God elects the human being, so that the decision between the two possibilities of faith and unbelief ‘does not rest in our hand but in God’s hand’.\(^{36}\) The focus is on the electing God, not the electing or elect human being, which is the same position that he held in the commentary on

\(^{33}\) UcR 2, 174. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 446.
\(^{34}\) Ibid. 175. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 447.
\(^{35}\) Ibid. 177. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 449.
\(^{36}\) Ibid. 180. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 451.
Romans. The new question is, what exactly happens when some persons believe and others do not believe. Barth responds to the question with an extended analysis of the concepts of election and reprobation and particularly the implications for the relation between humankind and God. The response includes a qualified defense of the traditional supralapsarian view of election.\(^{37}\)

According to Barth, one question in the Reformed quarrel between supralapsarian and infralapsarian theologians was whether in the logic of the divine will predestination (to salvation or damnation) precedes or follows the decree to create and to permit the Fall of humankind. The other question was whether God’s ultimate goal is the revelation of divine righteousness and mercy in the act of election and reprobation or the revelation of God’s omnipotence, wisdom and goodness in the act of creation. In each case, the supralapsarians favoured the first answer, while the infralapsarians favoured the second.\(^{38}\) For Barth, the supralapsarian position has the advantage of giving a clearer explanation of the claim that Christian theology deals with the ‘God who acts concretely’.\(^{39}\) Its greatest strength lies in the implication that God’s gracious will is the beginning and end of God’s ways with humankind. God’s revelation and address to humankind confronts every person with ‘the crisis of God’s righteousness and mercy’,\(^{40}\) and the supralapsarian view particularly underscores the redemptive goal of this crisis. It emphasizes that humankind as a whole ‘was from all eternity and will be in all eternity…nothing but an object of the righteousness and mercy of the divine willing’\(^{41}\).

\(^{37}\) In his lectures on the theology of Reformed Confessions (1923), Barth praised the Canons of Dort for not excluding the supralapsarian position: ‘As soon as one’s interest is directed toward the concept of God, toward the one who predestines instead toward those who are predestined, it is unavoidable to emphasize God’s unconditional elective freedom also vis-à-vis the first human being, that is, the created person as such.’ Karl Barth, *Die Theologie der reformierten Bekenntnisschriften. Vorlesung Göttingen Sommersemester 1923*, ed. Eberhard Busch (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1998), 347. ET *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. Darrell Guder and Judy Guder (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 223.

\(^{38}\) *UcR* 2, 200–1. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 466–7.

\(^{39}\) Ibid. 171. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 444.

\(^{40}\) Ibid. 202. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 468.

\(^{41}\) Ibid. 203. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 468. The divine predestination is ‘the mystery of creation and redemption and consummation.’
The difference in Barth’s understanding of the supralapsarian position, in comparison with those Reformed theologians who defended it in the seventeenth century, consists in a teleological qualification that is summarized in the statement that ‘the Yes breaks through out of the No...election out of reprobation...as the undeniable goal of God’s ways’. This statement, which is clearly reminiscent of the teleological understanding of election in his commentary on Romans, leads to an extensive systematic elaboration on the concepts of election and reprobation. Since Barth has explained that reprobation is the likely case, he deals first with reprobation and then with election.

3. THE TELEOLOGY OF GOD

Barth starts the discussion by raising the question whether the concept of reprobation is necessary. His answer is straightforward: ‘Reprobation must correspond to election as the latter’s shadow side; as certainly as the possibility of unbelief corresponds...to the possibility of faith...Whoever says A has to say B too, whoever is serious in saying elect has to say with equal seriousness...reprobate.’ Barth says that if the phenomenon of unbelief has its roots outside the divine will, the claim that faith is exclusively grounded in God’s will is put into question. Similarly, if there exists a human possibility to remove the basis of unbelief, the basis of faith would be established, in part or in whole, by a human act too, and eventually it would no longer be faith in God’s revelation and the promise of community with God through faith in God’s Word. After the affirmation of the concept of reprobation, Barth proceeds with a detailed explanation. He begins with a critique of traditional views on predestination, election and reprobation and thereby extends his previous criticism of ‘Augustine and the Reformers’ to post-Reformation Protestant Orthodoxy.

42 Ibid. 206. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 470.
44 Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 308.
The immediate cause for his critique is Johann Heinrich Heidegger’s definition of reprobation as a divine decree by which certain human beings were not elected and remain in the general misery of damnation. In particular, Barth objects to the use of the phrase ‘certain human beings’, which entails the existence of two strictly separate groups of individuals, the elect and the reprobate, whose division is known only to God. For Barth, this view is an error that led to an unfortunate abstraction of the divine decree from its author, that is, God. He also regards it as unbiblical.45

Barth hastens to add that he does not intend to deny the character of the divine predestination as an eternal, unconditional and double predestination. He claims that his criticism is coherent with such a characterization, as long as two points are kept in mind. First, the adjective ‘eternal’ does not mean pre-temporal. As the elaboration on the divine attributes makes clear, God is not only timeless or independent over against time but also temporal (though not finite), that is, omnipresent and co-existing with every moment of time.46 Second, the concept of a double predestination is useful, as long as it is regarded as a statement about God’s acting. Barth argues that ‘certain human beings’ are indeed affected by the divine electing and reprobating, but neither are these individuals affected only as the elect nor other individuals only as the reprobate. Instead, all are affected at all times as elect and reprobate. As in the commentary on Romans, the concept of double predestination is revised.47

45 UcR 2, 183. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 453. The same critique is found in his lectures on the theology of the Reformed Confessions in 1923: ‘In turning the decretum absolutum, which is an extremely profound statement about God, into a teaching not merely about humankind but about these and those persons, one thought anthropologically rather than theologically, even if one did so with logical consistency. In particular, the doctrine of a numerus clausus of the elect is no good; it ties God to particular human beings, when the meaning of the whole is precisely the freedom of God… Thus, I could also sign the second chapter of the Canons of Dort [regarding the doctrine of atonement] only with the reservation that no consequences are drawn from it for this or that individual person.’ Barth, Die Theologie der reformierten Bekenntnisschriften, 335–6, 338. ET The Theology of the Reformed Confessions, 216, 218. In Church Dogmatics II/2, Barth retracts his praise for the idea of a decretum absolutum as ‘an extremely profound statement’.
The confessional schools in the wake of the Reformation gradually abandoned their earlier theocentric emphasis, by focusing more on the human situation of being predestined than on God’s act of predestining, and thus introduced a strong deterministic connotation into the doctrine of election. This development started when Protestant as well as Roman-Catholic theologians in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century increasingly asked for a fixed divine decree regarding this or that person, instead of understanding the doctrine in the context of God’s living being over against history and humankind. Barth claims that God is free to elect this person and reject that person as well as to elect this person now and reject him or her at a different time. The divine freedom manifests itself in the eternal act of predestining in the various situations of human beings vis-à-vis God. It is not manifest in the situations themselves and as such, as if they were closed off from the rest of time and from God’s time, that is, from eternity.48

In order to illuminate the character of God’s acting upon human beings, Barth distinguishes predestination from (pre-)determination. He defines the latter as a decision by which God would have determined the acting with humankind for every moment of time in a specified manner, ‘so that God would become vis-à-vis humankind the prisoner of His own gracious or ungracious decision’.49 He argues that God’s way of acting cannot be simply deduced from the circumstances of the events that occur on this way. Such a deduction would be an abstraction; it ‘mechanizes a truth that has its foundation in God’s inexhaustible life’.50 According to Barth, the correct view regards God’s eternal predestination as an act in which God remains free toward everyone at all times and asserts that the outcome of the divine decision in time can never be predicted. This position implies that God’s decision to elect or reprobate is always made anew and not

49 Ibid. 184. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 454.
50 Ibid. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 454. For Barth, God’s ‘inexhaustible vitality’ is identical with God’s ‘unsublatable subjectivity in His revelation’ (UcR 1, 120. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 98), which has no special content ‘besides the fact that it is His revelation’ (ibid. 116. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 96). At this point, the doctrine of election and the doctrine of God’s triunity, which for Barth arises from the consideration of God’s subjectivity, converge.
bound by a preceding division of human beings into two groups of persons; in his own words: ‘all are at every moment under the divine Either–Or; all can be elected or reprobated at every moment’. The idea of divine predestination, as a fundamental description of God’s acting upon human beings, is an expression of God’s lasting freedom to say either Yes or No to a human being. Barth maintains, like Schleiermacher, that his critique of a particularistic understanding of election is coherent with the biblical witness, especially in Rom. 9–11, and with the Christian understanding of God.

After his admission to a ‘hole in the cloak of my orthodoxy’, Barth proceeds with the definition of reprobation. His thesis is that in the event of reprobation a human being experiences nothing special but simply remains with himself or herself, and the ‘bourgeois economy continues to be undisturbed’. It is principally a negative act, a ‘passing over’ similar to the hiddenness of revelation, and not an active rejection. It is the believer, not the unbeliever, who becomes ‘like a stranger’ to himself or herself. Barth points to 1 Tim. 2:4 (God ‘desires all human beings to be saved and to come to the knowledge of faith’), a verse often cited as a proof text in favour of the idea of universal salvation. He remarks that this verse does not merely say it is God’s will that all shall be ‘helped’, as Luther’s translation of the Greek text reads, but that all shall be ‘saved’. In particular, he asserts that this is God’s revealed, written and proclaimed will. Nevertheless, the problem remains that there exists the real possibility of unbelief, despite the proclamation of the Word and the offer of God’s grace. God sometimes refuses to grant human

51 UcR 2, 207. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 471. In the commentary on Romans, Barth made the same point in a different way. He says that over against the divine predestination ‘everyone is in the same position, Jacob is in every moment of time also Esau, Esau is in the eternal moment of revelation also Jacob’. Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 332.

52 UcR 2, 186. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 455. Barth also points out that his critique is coherent with the thought of Calvin and Augustine, and although it reaches beyond their writings, it remains true to their intentions. The main target of his critique is now Protestant Scholasticism and no longer ‘Augustine and the Reformers’. This shift brings him closer to Schleiermacher’s historiography of the doctrine, especially in the essay on election.

53 Ibid. 183. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 453.

54 Ibid. 186. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 456.
beings the infallible efficacy of grace. The question is whether God should be blamed for such a withholding, as the theocentric understanding of election and reprobation suggests.55

Barth responds in three steps. At first, he insists on the accountability of the human being addressed by God’s Word. He asserts that he or she has no reason for a complaint, because he or she has heard it and could recognize it. Second, he draws a fine line between God’s general offer and specific refusal of the irresistibility of grace, which implies that God’s saving grace is also present when it is not efficient. Lastly, in order to distinguish the latter view from fatalism, he maintains that ‘this apparently twofold will is after all only one will, the will of God’56 and that it is pointless to argue against it, since God is principally righteous. Like many theologians before him, he appeals to Rom. 9:20: ‘But who are you, a human being, to bring forth a case against God?’

The threefold response leads to an expansion of the definition of reprobation as an event in which nothing special happens to a person. He points out that God’s address always occurs in the context of human guilt that stems from the rebellion of the creature against its creator and the divine wrath that follows upon it. Human life is marked by a fundamental ambivalence, which is neither nature nor fate but the inevitable result of the human separation from God, which is called sin. ‘As a sinner against God,’ Barth says, ‘humankind is . . . eternally damned and lost, that is, convicted through God’s righteousness.’57 Hence, the act of unbelief itself is not the cause of God’s punishment. When a human being does not respond to God’s address in faith, God’s wrath simply remains intact. At the same time,

55 Schleiermacher faced the same problem in his discussion of Lutheran objections to the Augustinian–Calvinist doctrine of election. Barth accepts the claim that 1 Tim. 2:4 refers to every human being, whereas Schleiermacher expresses exegetical doubts that are due to a narrower understanding of the words pantas anthropous in 1 Tim. 2:1–2. See Schleiermacher, ‘Über die Lehre von der Erwählung’, ibid. Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen, 180.1–9. Remarkably, on this point contemporary conservative Reformed theologians agree with the Reformed ‘father’ of liberal theology: ‘This does not mean . . . that God saves everyone. It may refer to God’s general benevolence in taking no delight in the death of the wicked, or to God’s desire that all types of people (v.1 note) be saved (i.e., God does not choose His elect from any single group).’ New Geneva Study Bible (New King James Version), (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, Atlanta, London, Vancouver, 1995), 1909, note on 1 Tim. 2:4.

56 UeR 2, 188. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 457.

57 Ibid. 189. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 458.
Barth insists, without going into further discussion of the issue, that this does not absolve the person of his or her responsibility. Sin is also not caused by God, he says, even if it is God’s will that a person remains reprobate: ‘it is nothing but righteousness, when God condemns and punishes the human being, who is hardened because he or she sins’. Nevertheless, the affirmation of God’s righteousness and the stress on human responsibility for sin do not entail that the relation between God and the sinner is completely broken off. In concluding the discussion about reprobation, Barth points to the possibility that a person might recognize God’s hidden will in the facts of his or her rebellion against God. While he does not explain how this recognition occurs, he explains that it is not an end in itself but rather ‘the beginning of the end of reprobation [and] the transition to election’. The claim is decisive for the ensuing definition of election and for Barth’s modification of the anthropocentric and individualistic understanding of the doctrine.

Barth begins his discussion of the idea of election with a quote from the Canons of Dort (1619): election is ‘the immutable purpose of God, by which He elected, before the foundation of the world . . . according to the good-pleasure of His will, out of sheer grace a certain number of human beings . . . to salvation in Christ’. He does not offer a detailed commentary on the formula but simply calls it a good definition. Above all, he approves of the implication that election and reprobation are not regarded as standing besides each other symmetrically as equally true and equally real. The purpose of the divine act of predestination, he says, is always the electing, not the reprobating. The latter ‘does not occur for its own sake but for the sake of the revelation of God’s righteousness, so that God’s electing may reveal God’s mercy and that in the whole . . . God Himself may be known’. God’s revelation to a human being announces in a clear fashion his or her election: ‘Whoever is addressed by God in Christ through the Spirit, is thereby

58 Ibid. 190. ET Göttigen Dogmatics, 459.
59 Ibid. 191. ET Göttigen Dogmatics, 459.
60 Ibid. 191–2. ET Göttigen Dogmatics, 460. Despite his approval of the quote, Barth’s correction of the particularistic understanding of election and reprobation is also directed against Dort’s claim that God elects ‘a certain number of persons from the mass of humankind’.
not reprobated but elected.\textsuperscript{61} The same cannot be said of the event of reprobation, which is also an essential part of God’s revelation, but with the sole purpose of serving God’s turning toward human beings. Barth insists that ‘the way . . . leads from reprobation to election, not vice versa’.\textsuperscript{62} He points out that there is no equality or symmetry between the two and that the concept of double predestination also does not imply a bipolar structure of God’s acting and being. God’s word ‘does not say No but Yes, even if this Yes always again breaks through out of a No’.\textsuperscript{63}

Barth then addresses two controversial (among Lutheran and Reformed theologians) issues in the debate over election. First, he mentions the question of divine foreknowledge and the idea that a person’s election does not depend on the foreseen faith of the believer. Like Schleiermacher, he finds the Lutheran distinction between God’s antecedent will, generally directed toward salvation, and God’s consequent will, particularly directed toward the election of those of whom God foresees that they will come to faith in Christ and persevere in it, untenable. Any definition that bases salvation on God’s foreknowledge rather than God’s foreordination introduces a misleading ambiguity into the doctrine of election. Faith, he insists, is in every sense secondary to election.\textsuperscript{64} This claim is consistent with a second claim that includes another defense of the Reformed against the Lutheran position, concerning the question whether the human participation in Christ’s meritorious work has a bearing on the decision who is elect and who is not elect. Barth agrees with the Reformed side that the reconciling effect of Christ’s death does not in itself contribute to God’s decision to elect or reprobate, even if

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. 192. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 460.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. 193. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 461. Barth cites Rom. 11:32 in support of his point and says that the argument resembles one of the key insights from his ‘years of wrestling’ with Rom. 9–11 (ibid. 183. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 453).
\textsuperscript{63} UcR 2, 194. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 461. The divine No is ‘the veil’ that is broken through by the divine Yes (ibid. 198. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 464). The image of a veil that needs to be ‘broken through’ is not easy to understand, since it seems to contrast with the claims that ‘veiling is the content of unveiling’ (ibid. 166. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 440) and that God makes Himself known in unveiling (ibid. 20. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 332).
\textsuperscript{64} Barth shows the same astonishment as Schleiermacher, when he wonders how any serious Lutheran theologian could have ever clung to the opposite view. The ‘Pelagian tendencies of the times’ evidently remained unchanged. See above, Ch. 1, n. 14.
God does not elect individual persons in themselves but in Christ who is the head of the community of believers. He adds that the specific power that enables a human being to believe in Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit, who is the particular element of the divine election and whose action qualifies election as gracious. The Spirit is effective in the Christian church and makes Christ present to the believers.

The generation of faith and knowledge of God through God’s revelation and through the Holy Spirit is a particular event in the life of a human being. In correspondence to the idea of a turn from reprobation to election, knowledge of God is established when a human being recognizes his or her situation of ‘general darkness’ as an expression of God’s judgment and, at the same time, knows that even when the case of humankind seems to be lost, God’s hidden will is present. The recognition implies the knowledge of God’s hidden will even in a person’s rebellion against God and the admission that God’s judgment is just and he or she a sinner. Whoever knows himself or herself as being rejected by God, knows of himself or herself as being elected too and with that receives a share in God’s grace, because ‘when God is known … in judgment, God is known entirely and thus in His grace too’. Correspondingly, Barth says that the hidden God as such is also the manifest God and rejects again the division between a deus absconditus and a deus revelatus.

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65 UcR 2, 195–7. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 462–3. Barth could have added another point in support of his view: the claim that God’s election depends on the individual appropriation of Christ’s merit puts into question the general nature of Christ’s redemptive work. Such an argument would have implied a dissent from the traditional Reformed idea of limited atonement.

66 Ibid. 200. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 466.

67 Ibid. 198. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 464.

68 Ibid. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 464. Barth further comments that the elect live by an alien righteousness, ‘while in their possessing and enjoying, in their ordinary piety and morality, they find themselves principally in the same situation as the reprobate world around them’ (ibid. 199. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 465). This view differs from the commentary on Romans, where Barth said that ‘sin is related to grace like possible to impossible. A grace that has sin as a possibility next to itself is not grace…. The one on whom grace is bestowed is not the sinner. There is a perishing and recreating of the human being between the two’ (Barth, Der Römerbrief 1922, 171). The emphasis on the radical difference between the old life in sin and the new life in Christ in the commentary on Romans is close to Schleiermacher’s position in The Christian Faith, when he argues that the sins of the regenerate living in the state of sanctification are always already forgiven. CG 2, 189–98 (§ 111).

69 UcR 1, 179. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 146. See above, Ch. 3, n. 39.
The emphasis on the priority of election over reprobation does not lead to the affirmation of an eschatological universalism. Barth distinguishes his own belief that electing and not reprobating is the goal of God’s ways from the claim that the election of all human beings is the goal of God’s ways. This distinction is coherent with his principal criticism of any particularistic limitation of election. He affirms that in Christ ‘the teleology of God becomes visible, which is the source of our certainty of election and salvation’. Nevertheless, he points out, God is not only the electing God but also the one who elects in freedom. One must continually look for God’s decision there ‘where it has been made from eternity (but precisely from God’s living eternity!) for time and is made in time, in this and that way, according to God’s will’. If one went beyond the claim that ‘God is on the way with every human being’, he admonishes us, one would engage in an ‘enthusiastic metaphysics’. At this point, Barth mentions the theology of Schleiermacher, for the first and only time in the entire paragraph. He alleges that Schleiermacher affirmed an election of all human beings as the end of God’s ways and opted for the dismissal of the concept of reprobation. While the first part of the allegation is correct, the second one is false. Barth mistakenly thinks that Schleiermacher rejects the concept of reprobation altogether, which is not the case. He does not reject the concept of reprobation but only the concept of an eternal reprobation or damnation, which was implied in the view of a particular decree for the reprobate corresponding to a decree for the elect. Barth equally rejects such a view, and his claim that ‘God is on the way with every human being’ comes close to Schleiermacher’s position.

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70 UcR 2, 207. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 471.
71 Ibid. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 471.
72 Ibid. 211. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 475. On the exegetical side, T. Eskola suggests a similar line of reasoning by Paul. A basic difference between universal atonement and universal restoration is preserved, he argues, because Paul’s understanding of predestination and election is ‘Christocentric, not anthropocentric. The death of Christ gains atonement for sins, but it does not yet deliver salvation to individuals.’ Eskola, *Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology*, 185–6. Eskola refers to Barth’s early view of election but incorrectly attributes to it the idea of universal salvation (ibid. 186 n. 75).
73 UcR 2, 211. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 475.
On the whole, Barth’s doctrine of election in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* retains the theocentric emphasis of his commentary on Romans and the focus on God’s address to a human being in history. The twofold possibility of faith or unbelief is constitutive for the divine address and the human encounter with God and that it concerns believers as well as unbelievers in every moment of time anew. The idea of an eternal double predestination of humankind as a whole is for Barth the clearest expression of the actualistic character of God’s free grace. God is free and God remains free in His acting, because otherwise God would not be God: “‘He has mercy upon whomever He wills, and He hardens whom He wills.’ Here, we have it: the concept of the eternal double predestination, and this is the only thing we really get a hold of from the peak of the Pauline dialectic.”  

The concept of an ‘eternal double predestination’ is not a new feature of Barth’s theology in the 1920s. It appeared already in the *first edition* of the commentary on Romans.  

Barth defines the concretely acting God who effects faith and unbelief as the God who elects and reprobates. Reprobation is the event in which God withholds the gift of faith and leaves a person to the consequences of his or her own virtues and vices and the righteous judgment on them. It is not an end in itself but always oriented toward election or, more precisely, toward election for salvation as the goal of God’s acting. Barth criticizes the traditional view that there exist two predetermined groups of persons, the elect and the reprobate, and says that it infringes on God’s freedom to elect and reprobate. Instead, he argues that every human being is never once and for all either elect or reprobate.  

While Barth is aware that previous views did not imply a neat symmetry between election and reprobation, his teleological understanding of the relation leads him to a clearer emphasis on the unity of the divine will and decree, which was also advocated by Schleiermacher. God’s righteousness and God’s mercy are set in correspondence to each other, unlike in previous versions of the doctrine, when

75 See Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1919*, 384.
God’s righteousness was attributed to the reprobate as representatives of sinful humankind, while God’s mercy was attributed to the elect as representatives of those who received God’s grace. For Barth, however, God’s mercy and righteousness are not revealed through the elect and the reprobate respectively but through God’s act of electing and reprobating, which is related to all human beings.

Moreover, the doctrine of election is developed in close relation to Barth’s theological epistemology and the concept of revelation. God’s revelation is always a revelation in hiddenness and implies God’s universal judgment over sinful humankind. Hiddenness and judgment, however, are never an end in itself but serve the purpose of God’s gracious will. The doctrine of election is located in the doctrine of God. Barth now places himself explicitly in the Reformed tradition and its emphasis on the Deus solus, while his criticism of an anthropocentric and individualistic understanding of election remains in place. At the same time, the historical target of his critique changes: it is no longer the Augustinian tradition in general, including the Reformers’ view of election and predestination, but particularly the Protestant Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century and its claims about a foreordained division of human beings into two separate groups.

Finally, the Göttingen Dogmatics abandons the idea of an original unity between God and humankind as well as the understanding of election and reprobation as an event in God, not only from God. Instead, there is a stronger emphasis on the historical event of election and reprobation in the present. Accordingly, the role of the

76 Hence, it is a misunderstanding when H. de Knijff criticizes that, according to Barth, ‘the epistemological hiddenness . . . [is] equivalent to the negativity of reprobation’. Henri W. de Knijff, ‘Vom Korrektiv zum Ganzen der Dogmatik—“Unterricht in der christlichen Religion”’, Bd. II 1924/5, Verkündigung und Forschung 46 (2001), 53. De Knijff neglects the twofold meaning of hiddenness: it can be an obstacle to gain knowledge of God but it can also be the first step toward such knowledge, that is, toward faith. For Barth, true knowledge of God never occurs without an element of hiddenness. Hence, it is equivalent not only to the negative but also to the positive side of reprobation, to election.

77 See also Spieckermann, Gotteserkenntnis, 226–31.

78 In one of the few instances where Barth still works with the concept of Ursprung, he uses it as a concept for the inner-trinitarian divine relations and no longer for the original unity between God and humankind before the Fall. UcR 2, 209. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 473.
Holy Spirit in the event that leads to faith or unbelief is accentuated, and the understanding of revelation focuses more on the actual encounter between God and human beings than in the commentary on Romans, where it was tied to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The new emphasis is also visible in a lecture from April 1925, four months after the Göttingen lectures on election. Here, Barth says that God’s decision has been made from eternity by God’s irrevocable decree in Jesus Christ, while it is also made in the present ‘on the battle-field of the fight between faith and unbelief’ in history. But while he relates the divine decision to the ‘eternal double predestination’, he does not elaborate on the relation between the irrevocable decision in Jesus Christ and the decision about faith and unbelief.

In conclusion, Barth’s doctrine of election in the Göttingen Dogmatics becomes more actualistic and less speculative, while it is still not christocentric. He affirms that ‘the teleology of God’ and the certainty of salvation are visible and real in Christ, but the affirmation does not point toward a revision of the traditional relation between Christ and election. Barth stops short of affirming an eschatological universalism, and his consistent emphasis on God’s freedom as well as the assertion that ‘all are at every moment under the divine Either–Or’ should be taken seriously. Nevertheless, he is adamant about the certainty of election and redemption. The divine predestination can never be recognized ‘apart from the cross, the judgment and the damnation in which we stand’, but the way leads

80 Ibid. 544.
81 UcR 2, 207. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 471.
82 This confirms B. McCormack’s conclusion that ‘Barth’s understanding of election at this time was thus theocentric and actualistic… Certainly, Barth could and did affirm even now that the basis of the election of individuals was to be found “in Christ”. But such a thought had no constitutive significance for his doctrine as a whole.’ McCormack, Karl Barth’s Dialectical Theology, 373–4. In fact, the theocentric emphasis in the Göttingen Dogmatics is so strong that the doctrine of God comprehends not only the doctrine of election but also subsequently the doctrines of creation and providence, which deal with God’s relation to the world. Therein lies a difference from the later Church Dogmatics, where the doctrines of creation and providence (volume III) are distinguished from the doctrine of God (volume II) and where the doctrine of election explains not only the determination of humankind but also God’s self-determination.
83 UcR 2, 207. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 471.
‘through damnation, even through hell, to salvation and life’.\textsuperscript{84} If one looks at Barth’s claim about the turn from reprobation to election and the revelation of God’s righteousness as part of God’s mercy, there is certainly room for the possibility of universal reconciliation, even if he warns against any endorsement, since it is a \textit{divine possibility}. Nevertheless, it is a divine \textit{possibility}.

\textbf{4. SUMMARY: BARTH’S EARLIER DOCTRINE OF ELECTION}

The concept of predestination plays an important role in Barth’s earlier dialectical theology, and a few aspects of the revision in \textit{Church Dogmatics II/2} are prefigured in the \textit{Commentary on Romans} as well as in the \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, even though the christological centring is still missing. Three aspects stand at the centre of Barth’s Schleiermacherian reconstruction of the doctrine of election during this phase: the focus on the historical decision about faith and unbelief rather than the assumption of a pre-temporal divine decree for individual persons; the emphasis on God’s acting in this event rather than on the human acting; and the teleological interpretation of the relation between election and reprobation, where the way leads from reprobation to election and never vice versa. In the next chapter, we will see that the third aspect is also present in Barth’s later revision of the doctrine, while the other two aspects are modified as the result of a new, christological centring of the doctrine.

Barth insists that both judgment and grace are universal aspects of God’s being and acting. He offers a poignant criticism of traditional views of election as being too anthropocentric and individualistic, which corresponds to Schleiermacher’s criticism of a particularistic understanding of election and redemption.\textsuperscript{85} Furthermore, although

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid. (my emphasis). ET \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}, 471.

\textsuperscript{85} The criticism can be glanced in other writings during this period, too. In lectures on Calvin Barth recommends to speak ‘loudly and forcefully about God’s free electing and reprobating, but to maintain a forceful and significant silence about the elect and the reprobate’. Karl Barth, \textit{Die Theologie Calvins. Vorlesung Göttingen Sommersemester 1922}, ed. Hans Scholl (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), 372–3. ET \textit{The Theology of John Calvin}, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 276.
Schleiermacher holds a different view of the relation between God and the world, his concept of a single divine decree is consistent with Barth’s assertion that God is the sole agent of predestination and addresses every person in the same way, even if the responses to this address differ. In both cases the doctrine of election is fundamentally theocentric and universal, with a focus on the predestining God, not on individual predestined human beings.

In correspondence with Schleiermacher’s view of election, Barth regards election and reprobation as the two aspects of predestination, whereby election is the decisive aspect of God’s will. Previous interpreters of the doctrine of election held the same opinion, but what is new about Barth’s and Schleiermacher’s position is the teleological ordering of the relation between reprobation and election: the former serves the purpose of the latter. In this way, the tension between God’s salvific will and the ongoing historical existence of believers and unbelievers, which was the central problem in the debates over election and the starting-point for Schleiermacher’s revision, is resolved. Their stance is coherent with the supralapsarian claim that the decree of predestination is prior to the decree of creation, but they go one step further by asserting that God’s universal mercy is the decisive criterion of the divine decree. Furthermore, both theologians are eager to avoid the impression that the necessary outcome of their understanding of election is a universalistic idea of salvation. Whether one finds their explanations satisfactory or not, it is clear that Barth’s emphasis on the unity of the divine acting resembles Schleiermacher’s reconstruction of the doctrine by means of the concept of the single divine decree, despite his affirmation of the concept of double predestination (in a revised fashion) and the differences in their understanding of the relationship between God and human beings.

86 Although the last point is not made explicitly by Schleiermacher, it is consistent with his idea of a single and universal predestination to salvation. The teleological relation of reprobation and election is also mentioned in the first edition of Barth’s commentary on Romans, which does not yet criticize the idea of two predetermined groups of persons.

87 ‘The mystery of the one predestination “is veiled in the duality of Adam and Christ, in order to be unveiled in their unity”; in the eternally superseded balance of the old aeon that has always already passed away and the always already eschatological coming of the new aeon.’ Von Balthasar, Karl Barth, 77. The only necessary addition is that von Balthasar should have said ‘one double predestination’.
Barth’s Christological Revolution

The second, decisive revision of the doctrine of election in Barth’s theology took place between 1936 and 1942 and culminated in *Church Dogmatics* II/2.¹ It has received a substantial amount of scholarly attention since the time of its publication, and it is not my goal here to provide an extensive discussion of its content as a whole. I will rather focus on the points that are important for the changes over against his earlier, Schleiermacherian position. In one way or another, they all pertain to the relation between the

¹ Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. II/2, 1–563 (‘God’s Gracious Choice’). ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 1–506. In the second part, Barth offers the foundation of ethics, under the title ‘God’s Commandment’. Ibid. 564–875. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 507–781. The two parts of *Church Dogmatics* II/2 are the most comprehensive explanation of Barth’s reversal of the Lutheran sequence Law and Gospel to Gospel (‘God’s Gracious Choice’) and Law (‘God’s Commandment’). Any discussion of Barth’s ethics must keep in mind that for him ethics is an integral part of dogmatics. Thus, it is inaccurate to speak of a ‘move from dogmatics to ethics’, and even the description of dogmatics as ‘the root’ of ethics is problematic. Nigel Biggar, ‘Barth’s trinitarian ethic’, in John Webster (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 223. Instead, the ethics in vol. II are an integral part of the doctrine of God, as the corresponding ethical paragraphs in vols. III and IV are part of the doctrines of creation and reconciliation respectively. The ethics of the doctrine of God is an ‘attestation to the divine ethics’, or to the good that is the content of the commandment fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. II/2, 575. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 518. Hence, it is too schematic to say that ‘Barth’s ethical method is to proceed from the Bible through its notion of salvation history to incarnational Christology, out into a systematic trinitarian theology and then on to ethics’. Biggar, ‘Barth’s trinitarian ethic’, 224. The sections on the content and form of God’s commandment also show that it is not sufficient to speak merely of a ‘divine command ethic’ (ibid. 215). A more precise term would be an ‘ethics of faith in Jesus Christ’. Barth says that the main content of the divine claim and the answer to the question ‘What shall we do?’ is ‘that we should believe in Jesus Christ’. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. II/2, 647. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 583.
doctrine of election and christology. The first hint at the fundamental changes to come is found in a brief treatise from 1936 that ‘revolutionizes the traditional doctrine of predestination’, but its specific contours in comparison with the later elaboration in Church Dogmatics II/2 have never been outlined. One year later Barth presented a brief systematic–theological account of the revised position in his Gifford Lectures.

1. LECTURES ON THE ‘BIG THEME’ OF ELECTION IN 1936 AND 1937

Except for a few remarks in his lecture on ‘Fate and Idea in Theology’ from 1929, which resemble the position discussed in the previous two chapters, Barth did not address the doctrine of election again until the fall of 1936, when he offered a series of brief ‘studies on this big theme’ in several lectures at two Reformed theological

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4 Karl Barth, Gottes Gnadenwahl (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1936), 3. In June 1936, Barth heard a lecture on ‘Election and Faith’, delivered by the French pastor Pierre Maury (1890–1956) during the International Congress of Calvinist Theology in Geneva, published as ‘Élection et Foi’, Foi et Vie 37 (1936), 203–23. It must be noted that the current English edition of Maury’s discussion of election does not resemble the 1936 version, as some interpreters mistakenly presuppose, for example, F. Stuart Clarke, ‘Christocentric Developments in the Reformed Doctrine of Predestination’, Churchman 98 (1984), 238. It stems from Maury’s lectures in the United States delivered in 1954. To this day, no English edition of the 1936 essay exists. Barth commented in a foreword to the collection from 1954: ‘Pierre Maury and I had of course often spoken of this problem; nevertheless, his 1936 address immediately made a profound impression on me… In the present work, written eighteen years
seminaries in Hungary. They were published soon after his return to Switzerland, under the title ‘God’s Gracious Choice’.

Barth begins by stating the ‘general and basic meaning’ of the doctrine: ‘When one receives grace, it is really grace.’ He explains that the definition of election as ‘gracious choice’ adds nothing new to the word ‘grace’, to ‘the gift of the Holy Spirit, the assembly of the community of saints, the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, the promise of the resurrection of the body and of eternal life’.5 It simply emphasizes that God’s grace is free and includes a pre-destination or ‘pre-decision’, not in the sense of temporal or logical priority, as if it were a first and necessary cause, but as the divine priority of the creator of heaven and earth. Nor is this pre-decision an object of experience, as if the distinction between believers and unbelievers simply mirrored the distinction between election and reprobation. Instead, the gracious choice is ‘truth in Jesus Christ’ and the knowledge of it is a form of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, in whom God elects all human beings.6

The statement that God elects in Jesus Christ implies not only that God elects human beings in Christ but also that God elects Jesus Christ himself, who thus becomes not only the mediator but also the foundation of election. His election is God’s own choice to live the life of a human person; by choosing the human being Jesus of Nazareth God opts for the redemption of humankind: ‘God gave Himself for us… up to the complete darkening of the unity with Himself…God kept company with the sinful and mortal human being, took the sin and death of the latter upon Himself…and put it away.’7 Here, the central point of Barth’s christological revision of the doctrine of election appears for the first time: ‘That which happened on Calvary for us and upon us and became manifest on the Easter

after the Geneva lecture, we find a Pierre Maury no less lively, not to say overwhelming; but his thought has matured, and his exposition is richer and more ample in its scope. He, for his part, had assimilated the substance of the bulky volume which I published in 1942 on the subject. But it is obvious that he has borrowed nothing from me which he has not recreated and made his own, mining the Scriptures on his own account.’ Karl Barth, ‘Foreword’, in Pierre Maury, Predestination and Other Papers (London: SCM Press, 1960), 16.

5 Barth, Gottes Gnadenwahl, 6.
6 Ibid. 11–14.
7 Ibid. 16.
Day is our eternal election, although it happened in time.'

And ‘God’s decision, as it has been made once and for all in Jesus Christ, is our life’s predestination.’ The reconciliation and revelation that occurred in him are decisive for the meaning of election, which is therefore not to be found in a ‘decree before the reality of the cross and the resurrection’.

Correspondingly, the claim that divine righteousness and mercy both have universal significance is grounded christologically: ‘Is Jesus Christ only the bearer of the divine Yes to humankind, without being the bearer of the divine No at the same time? Is it not he—and only he—who is also the divine judge?’

The concept of double predestination is modified again and now related to God’s own being. The divine reprobation, Barth says, is the reprobation of Jesus Christ, in whom humankind recognizes its own reprobation. In Jesus Christ, God bears the punishment of the condemned human being ‘in our place’, so that the reprobation of humankind is

8 Ibid. 17. The election ‘is the reality of the historical…life of Jesus Christ who lived, died and rose for us’. Maury, ‘Élection et Foi’, 209. In one question-and-answer session after the lectures in Hungary, Barth explains the ‘logical relation’ between the divinity of Jesus Christ and the election of Jesus to be the Son of God. He says that the eternal Son of God is the subject of this election and the human nature its object. ‘The eternal God and thus also the eternal Son of God is the electing God.’ Barth, Gottes Gnadenwahl, 46. In Church Dogmatics II/2, Barth will modify his position and say that the subject and object of election is the person of Jesus Christ. This is more coherent with the christological revision in the essay.

9 Barth, Gottes Gnadenwahl, 26.

10 Ibid. 17.

11 Ibid. 19.

12 Ibid. 21. Barth gives credit to Maury for the insight into the correlation of reprobation and Jesus’ crucifixion. Maury’s ‘bold proposition is simply correct: One can speak of a reprobation according to God’s decision only in regard to Calvary; but here one must speak of it’. (ibid. 20). Against the charge that God’s decision to reprobate humankind is unjust, Barth claims that it is a consequence of God’s wrath and that Jesus, the one who was elected by God, approved of it (ibid. 21–2). Maury himself holds on to the paradox and says that the ‘“negative” election…hits the one who has not deserved it…The cross is unjust, like the election; but this injustice is our righteousness.’ Maury, ‘Élection et Foi’, 212. Both Maury and Barth think that Jesus did not protest against the divine decision and carried God’s judgment voluntarily, despite the fact that he was innocent of the crime for which he was killed, namely, sedition. They do not address another question that arises at this point: are the historical particularities of his death relevant for a theology of the cross? What does it mean for dogmatic reflection that Jesus was ‘without guilt’ not only in a theological but also in a historical–political sense—he was not convicted by
abrogated. God truly elects and does not reprobate human beings in Christ. As in his earlier writings, Barth insists on the supremacy of election over reprobation and rejects the division of humankind into two groups, ‘as if there were elect who are not threatened by reprobation and reprobate to whom no election is promised’. At the same time, the teleological relation between reprobation and election is placed in a different context: although reprobation still occurs for the sake of election, it does so no longer in the actual encounter between God and human beings, but in the death and resurrection of the elected human being Jesus of Nazareth. The result is the revolutionary claim that all other human beings are no longer the objects of reprobation. At the same time, Barth thinks, while it is wrong to say that there exists a present division between those who are elected and those who are reprobated, nevertheless ‘we can and must believe’ that there will be such a division in the future. Probably in order to avoid the impression of advocating a universal salvation, he puts his revision of the doctrine under an eschatological reservation that corresponds to his earlier, actualistic view.

the Roman law—and that his execution was an act of state-sponsored terror by the Roman Empire? A fascinating exploration of the issue and its relevance for Christian believers is offered by Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God. The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001).

13 Barth, *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, 27. Once more, Barth mentions Rom. 11:32 (‘God enclosed everyone in disobedience, in order to show mercy on everyone’) as a key text for the universality of divine judgment and mercy. He also continues to reject universalism, again incorrectly attributing it to Schleiermacher (ibid. 25).

14 Ibid. 28. ‘Election, when it is election in Christ, is eventually always positive . . . it was only for him, on Good Friday, negative.’ Maury, *Élection et Foi*, 212. The German translation takes liberty with the French original and says: ‘Election . . . is eventually always positive election, election for salvation . . . it was only for him, on Good Friday, election for damnation.’ Pierre Maury, *Erwägung und Glaube* (Zollikon-Zurich, 1940), 13 (my emphasis). Maury nowhere says that Jesus Christ was elected for damnation or reprobation or that he actively chose it for himself. He says that the election of humankind occurs in the reprobation of Christ but he does not resolve the paradox. The concept of an ‘election for reprobation’ and of Jesus Christ as the electing God who chooses reprobation for himself, is Barth’s own invention. It is implicit in the essay’s claim that Jesus did not protest his death, but it is explicitly stated only in *Church Dogmatics* II/2. As the insertion of the words ‘election for damnation’ into Maury’s essay shows, this aspect had occurred to Barth (and/or to Charlotte von Kirschbaum who translated the essay) already in 1940, when he projected it onto Maury’s text.

The christological revision of the doctrine of election is explored more systematically in Barth’s Gifford Lectures on the Scots Confession (1560) at the University of Aberdeen in March of 1937. Article 7 of the Confession links incarnation and predestination, while Article 8 links election and christology. Barth regards this combination as a confirmation of his own attempt to understand the doctrine of election strictly in christological terms. Taken together, the two Articles say for him that ‘Jesus Christ, true God and true human being... is the God who acts upon human beings.’

The ‘immutable decree’ (Art. 7) is God’s decision ‘for’ humankind and for fellowship with the latter, and the election of humankind is the election for fellowship with God. God’s decision and election is the ‘one righteous and merciful, eternal and temporal divine course of action upon human beings’, which is ‘identical with the existence of Jesus Christ’.

According to Barth, the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ is the knowledge of God’s concretely determined grace. The divine decision for humankind is the election of Jesus Christ, the new, elect human being, in whom God is faithful by becoming a human being and putting Himself in the place of the condemned. God chooses to bear the curse of the law upon humankind. ‘That—note well: that!—happens when God becomes a human being. That is Jesus Christ in the passive obedience of his living and dying, [and in this event] we are already God’s elect, as the ones in whose place Jesus Christ, who made our reprobation his own reprobation, stands.’ Barth concludes by sharpening the Scots Confession’s view of election christologically, according to Maury’s ‘bold proposition’ that he found so helpful in the 1936 essay: the divine predestination or determination of humankind is not made in an abstract eternity.
‘prior to and without Jesus Christ’, but precisely in the life of Jesus, ‘in the stable at Bethlehem and the cross on Calvary’.20

The christological centring of the doctrine in the essay on God’s gracious choice and the brief discussion of the relation between election and christology in the Gifford-Lectures present Barth’s revision of traditional views on election and predestination in a nutshell. In *Church Dogmatics* II/2, he offers a fully fledged reconstruction of the doctrine. The material of the volume was presented prior to its publication in regular lecture-courses at the University of Basle, where Barth had taught since 1935, between the autumn of 1939 and the summer of 1941.21

2. THE REVISION OF THE DOCTRINE IN *CHURCH DOGMATICS* II/2

2.i. The New Approach

The location of the doctrine of election in the *Church Dogmatics* is identical with its location in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. It appears at the end of the doctrine of God and before the doctrine of creation, that is, at the transition from the theme ‘God’ to the theme ‘God’s works’. It follows upon the discussion of the knowledge of God, with the claim that God is known through God, and of the reality of God, that is, the being and perfections of God, with the claim that God is the one who loves in freedom (*Church Dogmatics* II/1). As in the earlier phase, the doctrine of election expounds the claim that God is the concretely acting God who elects and reprobates, but the meaning of this phrase changes. First, whereas in the earlier version humanity is the object of God’s acting, the new version also speaks about the implications of election for God and God’s

20 Ibid. 102. ET *The Knowledge of God*, 78.
self-determination. In the summary at the head of the introductory paragraph about the direction, foundation and location of the doctrine Barth explains that the topic of election ‘belongs to the doctrine of God, because by choosing humankind God determines not only the latter but in a fundamental way also Himself’.22 ‘We understand election as… the self-determination of God’s self.’23 Second, the paragraph’s opening passages set forth a new understanding of the connection between the doctrines of God and of election. The doctrine of election in the Göttingen Dogmatics deals with the particular determination of God’s acting and spells out the meaning of the propositions about God’s essence and attributes. In Church Dogmatics II/2, however, the point of contact is the relation between God and Jesus Christ and its significance for the definition of the divine subject.

During the examination of the knowledge of God and the reality of God in Church Dogmatics II/1 the name of Jesus Christ appeared frequently, not only as the leading guide but also as the principal subject of the inquiry. Jesus Christ, Barth says, is the fullness of the love and freedom of God. Therefore, a Christian doctrine of God is not complete without a consideration of God’s decision to be God in relation to a non-divine other and of the behaviour that constitutes this relation, namely, the covenant between God and human beings, established by God’s turning toward humanity in and through Jesus Christ. For Barth, Jesus of Nazareth is the first object of God’s turning toward humankind and represents the whole people of God: ‘God without this human being and without this people would be another… God; according to Christian perception, He would not be God at all.’ It ‘would be a false abstraction if a doctrine of God… only spoke of God and did not want to acknowledge that we… immediately have to speak of this relation exactly when we speak of God’.24

God’s decision to establish and maintain a covenant with humankind is a show of mercy and righteousness as well as constancy and omnipotence.25 It is also an act of free love. The doctrine of

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22 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 1. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 3.
23 Ibid. 96. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 89.
24 Ibid. 6 and 4. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 7 and 6.
25 In Church Dogmatics II/1, mercy and righteousness belong to the perfections of divine loving, while constancy and omnipotence belong to the perfections of divine freedom.
election ‘is about grace and thus about the love of God. And it is about choice and thus about the freedom of God. . . . God chooses in His love an Other for fellowship with Himself.’

God’s gracious choice of humankind in and through Jesus Christ and the fundamental self-determination implied in this choice, that God wants to be God for the sake of this Other, is the sum of the gospel: ‘the gracious choice is the whole gospel . . . the essence of all good news, and as such it wants to be understood and evaluated in the Christian church.’

The term ‘gracious choice’ is not a reference to the act of choosing in general. It is derived from the quality of God’s choice as being not only free but also gracious. God is not only a free God but also the God who loves in freedom. God’s choice is not the best possible choosing in general but the particular choice of Jesus of Nazareth as the elected human being and of humankind as the people of God. With this choice God determines Himself once and for all as being God for the Other. It is made with the intention and for the sake of the sending of the Son of God, and it signifies God’s turning toward humankind and toward the whole world.

The doctrine of election explains that God determines Himself exclusively as the God of gracious election. It stands at the head of the propositions about the works of creation, reconciliation and redemption, because God is not simply the creator, reconciler and redeemer as such, but God’s gracious choice is an irreversible decision, a ‘primal and basic decision’, to be the creator, reconciler and redeemer in a covenant with humankind, that is, in a particular

26 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 8–9. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 9–10.
27 Ibid. 13. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 13–14. Here, Barth’s terminology is slightly inconsistent, because in other passages he says that the doctrine of election, not the gracious choice itself, is the sum of the gospel. Ibid. 1, 9, 35, etc. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 3, 10, 34, etc.
29 Ibid. 82. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 76. The term ‘primal decision’ replaces the term ‘pre-decision’ from the 1936 essay, in order to prevent an abstract misunderstanding. Barth himself noted: ‘The term praedestinatio: predestination, pre-decision is not unambiguous.’ Ibid. 46. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 44. In March 1964, during a round-table discussion with students from Tübingen, Barth comments: ‘I am not terribly fond of the expression “predestination”’. He then interpreted the ‘pre-’ as expressing ‘the unshakableness of that which God wills, does and says in time’. Karl Barth, Gespräche 1964–1968, ed. Eberhard Busch, (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1997), 79.
relation with an Other. It is the determination of God as well as of humankind to be partners in this covenant. Therefore, the doctrine of election precedes the discussion of God’s works in the doctrines of creation and reconciliation, while it remains intrinsically linked to them: creation is ‘the indispensable basis and presupposition’\textsuperscript{30} of the covenant, reconciliation is ‘the fulfillment of the covenant’\textsuperscript{31}.

While the above mentioned change over against the \textit{Göttingen Dogmatics}—election as God’s self-determination to be God in a covenant with humankind—occurs only in the \textit{Church Dogmatics}, a second change, related to the foundation of the doctrine, had already occurred a few years earlier. Barth abandons the traditional focus on the opposition between faith and unbelief and, in doing so, completes the revision envisioned by Schleiermacher’s rejection of a particularistic understanding of election and his own earlier criticism of an anthropocentric and individualistic view. Even in these cases, the actual occurrence of faith or unbelief only provided the starting-point for reflection but no longer the systematic foundation of the concepts of election and predestination. Their theocentric and universal perspective already prevented some of the mistakes made in previous expositions of the doctrine.

Barth rejects a grounding of the doctrine in the empirical contrast between those persons who hear and accept the proclamation of the gospel and those who do not hear it or do not accept it. He argues that it is wrong to ask for reasons for the contrast and then to look at

\textsuperscript{30} Karl Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. III/1 (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 2nd edn 1947), 46. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} III/1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), 44. It is ‘the purpose and thus the meaning of creation … to make possible the history of God’s covenant with humankind, which has its beginning, its center and its culmination in Jesus Christ: the history of this covenant is as much the goal of creation as creation itself is the beginning of this history.’ Ibid. 44. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} III/1, 42.

\textsuperscript{31} Karl Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. IV/1 (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), 22. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} IV/1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), 22. The covenant is ‘the presupposition of the reconciliation that occurred in Christ … [Its] … fulfillment is that God enforces His eternal will regarding humankind, that He makes true and real the covenant in the midst of human history’ (ibid. 71. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} IV/1, 67). The doctrine of reconciliation is the centre of the Christian faith, but the doctrine of election is the ‘central word’ of the doctrine of reconciliation, since it deals with the election that occurred in Jesus Christ. Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. II/2, 95–6. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 88–9.
biblical texts for an answer, since it is far from certain whether the empirical distinction between believers and unbelievers is the equivalent of the decision of God’s gracious choice that is mentioned in these texts. Such an ‘abstract’ focus on the elected human being assumes a division of humankind into two groups, those whom God elects and those whom He does not elect. The electing and the being elected, together with the reprobating and the being rejected, are then seen as an arrangement of private relations that exist between God and individual human beings as such. In opposition to such a view, Barth explains that election is not always already devised for individual persons as such. The determination of every human being through God’s election does not imply an individual determinedness in form of a permanent belonging to either the elect or the reprobate. So far, the line of reasoning stands in continuity with Schleiermacher’s and Barth’s own earlier position. The next point, however, goes beyond it. Barth criticizes the abstract focus on the electing God, which treats election as an aspect of divine omnipotence or providence, and explains that a misunderstanding of the term ‘predestination’ can lend support to such a construction, when election and predestination are seen as a partial moment within the overall world-order that determines the salvation of humankind.

In contrast to an abstract focus on humankind or God, Barth proposes to focus on the concrete relation in which God is the true God and the human being is the true human being, a relation that contains the truth about both. Although the abstract approaches acknowledge that God is the subject and humankind the object of election, the correct understanding of the matter starts with a particular concept of both God and humankind, in accordance with God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The object of election is Jesus Christ. Strictly speaking, he is the only person who can be called the ‘elect’ and the ‘reprobate’. All other persons are elected in him ‘and precisely not in their own singularity’. Likewise, the subject of

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32 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 51. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 48.
33 Ibid. 39–44. The grounding of the doctrine in the contrast between believers and unbelievers also leads to a division of divine attributes. Ibid. 15–16. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 16.
34 Ibid. 46–52. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 44–9.
35 Ibid. 46. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 43.
election is not God in general but the God who is defined by the primal decision that determines God’s own being and God’s relation to the world in a specific manner and with a specific purpose.\textsuperscript{36} God is the concretely acting God who is free to elect or reprobate, as the \emph{Göttingen Dogmatics} already made clear, but God is also the God who determines Himself in the gracious choice to be the concretely acting God in a covenant with humankind. The new emphasis on God’s choice, which exploits the semantic proximity of the German words \emph{Erwählung} (election) and \emph{Wahl} (choice), leads to a richer concept of God.

On the whole, Barth’s approach in \emph{Church Dogmatics} II/2 at once preserves and christologically sharpens the teleological understanding of reprobation and election of his earlier position. The theocentric emphasis of Schleiermacher’s and his own earlier revision of the doctrine is replaced by a christocentric emphasis: Jesus Christ not only reveals but also constitutes God’s gracious choice as the self-determination to be God for His people and the determination of humankind to be the people of God. God’s gracious choice is ‘the divine decision made in Jesus Christ’.\textsuperscript{37} The thesis is explained further in the paragraph on the election of Jesus Christ, which is divided into two sections, ‘Jesus Christ, the Electing One and the Elected One’ (§ 33.1) and ‘The Eternal Will of God in the Election of Jesus Christ’ (§ 33.2). The first section offers a detailed description of the systematic change and the christological centring of the doctrine, the second considers the systematic–theological consequences of the revision.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 52–64. ET \emph{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 49–60. Probably in an attempt to guard himself against a quick dismissal of his new position, Barth claims that the founding of the doctrine on the election of Jesus Christ does not signal an ‘innovation’ (ibid. 64 and 81). ET \emph{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 60 and 76. He says that he wanted to remain true to Lutheran as well as Calvinist intentions. The Lutheran side, he says, rightly directed the attention to the ‘christological basis of election’ (ibid. 81. ET \emph{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 75), but they inferred the idea of salvation eventually from a general will of God and understood the election of human beings in terms of God’s eternal foreknowledge of a person’s faith. The Calvinists rightly emphasized that salvation and election are interrelated and based on God’s free choice, but they failed to define the idea of the divine decree in clear and unambiguous christological terms. Later on, Barth acknowledges that his understanding of the election of Jesus Christ is indeed an ‘innovation’ (ibid. 159, 170. ET \emph{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 147, 156).

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. 68. ET \emph{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 64.
2.ii. Jesus Christ, the Electing God and the Elected Human Being

The decisive systematic–theological change of Barth’s revision consists in the combination of the doctrine of election, and thus the doctrine of God, with the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. According to Barth, traditional versions of the doctrine failed in that they did not understand God’s eternal will and decree exclusively in the light of the history of Jesus Christ. Against this misunderstanding he asserts: ‘There is no choice, no beginning and decree, no Word of God, before and above, besides and outside of [Jesus Christ].’

In order to understand who God is, Barth says, it is crucial to focus on Jesus Christ, who is the true God, the true human being and the mediator between God and humankind, or the word, decree and choice of God’s free grace. The focus on Jesus Christ assumes the unity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Son of God and culminates in the statement that Jesus was ‘in the beginning with God’ (John 1:2), which Barth infers from the function of the word *logos* in John 1:1 and 1:14, where it holds the place for another term, namely, the name of Jesus. The statement leads to a shift in the understanding of predestination as a divine decree: God’s gracious choice is not a *decretum absolutum* based on the good-pleasure of a divine being that is defined by its absolute freedom of choice. Instead, it is a concrete decree based on a particular choice by which God’s being is fundamentally determined. This determination, or predestination,

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38 Ibid. 102. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 95.
39 Ibid. 102–6. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 95–9. This point is not simply the result of the retrospective attempt to find exegetical backing for the christological revision of the doctrine. It can be found as early as in the fall of 1925, during Barth’s lecture-course on the Gospel of John at the University of Münster, which he repeated in the summer of 1933 at the University of Bonn. It was already ‘very clear’ to him by that time that the word *logos* is ‘unmistakably substituted for: Jesus Christ’. Karl Barth, *Erklärung des Johannes-Evangeliums*, ed. Walther Fürst (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2nd edn 1999), 27. ‘This one, Jesus, as the Logos who was theos…was in the beginning, because he legitimately belongs to God…. [And] the Logos was theos…for this one, Jesus, was he who was in the beginning, because he legitimately belongs to God’ (ibid. 35). The two interpretations of John 1:1–2 in 1925 and in 1942 are very similar.
is the election of Jesus Christ, who is both the subject and the content of God’s gracious choice, or, as Barth says, the electing God and the elected human being.40

First, Jesus Christ is the electing God. He is not merely the object of the divine good-pleasure, as previous interpreters of the doctrine thought but God’s good-pleasure himself, that is, the divine will ‘in action’, who defines the content of the divine decision ‘regarding all creation and its entire history’.41 ‘If Jesus Christ were only the elected one and not also, primarily, the electing one, what would we then know at all about a divine electing and what about our being elected?’42 Barth explains that Jesus Christ as the Son of God freely chose to be a human being who fulfills the will of God. Therefore, the particular subject of the gracious choice is not the Father but the Son, in communion with the Father and the Spirit, because it is revealed as God’s choice in the Son of God and because a human being believes in his or her election only by believing in Jesus Christ.

The election of Jesus Christ concerns neither his divinity nor his humanity as such but God’s particular decision to exist as a human being. Barth argues that the above mentioned idea of the unity of God and Jesus, or the being of Jesus ‘in the beginning with God’, brings into view a third aspect, besides the eternal divinity and the elected humanity of Jesus Christ, and he points to several passages from John’s Gospel in which Jesus speaks of his electing of the disciples in an ‘act of divine sovereignty, in which the primal and basic decision of God, which is also the decision of Jesus Christ, becomes particularly clear’.43 From there, three points regarding the thesis of Jesus Christ as the electing God come into view: (1) Jesus Christ is the Son of God (his non-elected divinity), (2) Jesus Christ is the human being who proclaims and fulfills God’s will in the world (his elected humanity) and (3) he is, in divine sovereignty, the active

40 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 107–10. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 99–103. Jesus Christ is also an electing human being, who, in faith, chooses for God, and the elected Son of God, who, in his unity with a human being, is responsible for the execution of God’s covenant with humankind. Barth admits this much but calls both aspects secondary (ibid. 110–11. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 103).
41 Ibid. 112. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 104.
42 Ibid. 113. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 105.
43 Ibid. 114. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 106.
subject of the decision to become a human being, in free obedience to the Father (Christ’s electing divinity). The claim that human beings are elected ‘in him’ and that their election is comprehended in the election of Jesus Christ is plausible only if he is the eternal choice and decision of God: ‘Jesus Christ is the electing God. We do not have to ask for any other than for him… There is no will of God that is different from the will of Jesus Christ… [It is] he who elects us.’

Critics of Barth have suggested that, according to the biblical witness, only the Father is the divine subject of election. Indeed, biblical texts do not only identify the God who elects with the Father but also say that God elects Jesus (Lk. 9:35, 23:35; 1 Pet. 1:20, 2:4). Even Barth himself can say that the human being Jesus of Nazareth is elected to be the ‘bearer of the divine name of the Father in the world.’ At the same time, other texts explicitly attribute the act of election to Jesus himself, especially in the Gospel of John (6:70, 13:18, 15:16, 15:19). Barth’s observation that the Gospel of John identifies the human being Jesus of Nazareth with the eternal, pre-existing Logos is to the point, and the same is true of his refusal to separate the Logos before the incarnation (logos asarkos) from the Logos during the incarnation (logos ensarkos). The claim that John’s statements about election refer to the Logos who has become flesh does not contradict Barth’s idea of the concrete decree or the correlation of election

45 Ibid. 123–4. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 115. Barth refers to Athanasius and J. Coccejus as the main predecessors for the idea of Jesus Christ as the electing God. Athanasius attributed to the Son of God an active role regarding the election of the human being Jesus and other human beings in him. Thus, he arrives at the idea of a ‘concrete decree of salvation made in the bosom of the triune divinity’ (ibid. 118. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 110). Coccejus realized that the decree of salvation is identical with the decree of election, that it is primarily oriented towards the sending and the people of the Son of God, and that the Son of God, like the Father and the Holy Spirit, participates in this decree as a divine subject; he is both electus and eligens. ‘With these three propositions, the Calvinist decreatum absolutum… is overcome’ (ibid. 123. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 115).
46 See Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 290, with further references.
47 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 114. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 107.
and crucifixion. His claim that ‘the electing of the Father and the Son are one and the same’ stands on solid ground.

Moreover, the objections against the idea of Jesus Christ as the electing God or the subject of election fail to recognize its specific soteriological context: Barth does not introduce it in the discussion of the election of individual persons but in the consideration of the decision of the Son of God to live the life of a human person, for the sake of all others. Still, the question arises whether he should not have emphasized more clearly that Jesus Christ is also the object of election in his divine nature and thereby achieved more consistency in his christological revision. In one passage, he suggests a difference between the being of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God, who does not need to be elected, and his being as the incarnate Son of God, who is elected to be sent into the world. In another passage he distinguishes between Jesus Christ as the beginning of God’s ways with humankind and the beginning of God ‘in Himself’. Are these claims coherent with his claim that ‘we will find in the depth of [God] no one but him’ or do they imply, against Barth’s own assertion, that there is a will of God different from Jesus Christ? The answer to this question, which we will address more fully in the next section, does not hinge merely on the question of whether one accepts the idea of Jesus Christ as the electing God but concerns the entire christological foundation of the revision of the doctrine.

Second, Jesus Christ is the elected human being. According to Barth, the content of the eternal divine decision is the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, as the realization of God’s covenant with humankind in time and history. ‘This human being and this function

50 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 70. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 65.
51 Gloege’s insistence that the Son of God is the object of election is not without merit (Gloege, ‘Zur Prädestinationslehre Barths’, 103), but he does not recognize its full impact and merely substitutes it for the idea of the Son of God as the subject of election. Besides that, Barth himself speaks of the Son of God, in ‘his determination to become the Son of Man’ as the object of election. Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 118. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 110.
52 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 114. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 107.
53 Ibid. 101. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 94.
54 Ibid. 123. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 115.
55 Ibid. 124. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 115. See above, n. 45.
is the object of the eternal divine election and predestination.\textsuperscript{56} Jesus is not one elected human being among others but the elected human being. Therefore, he is the (ontic) reason that everyone else is elected in him and the (noetic) reason that everyone can recognize his or her own election in his election. The election of humankind ‘in’ him does not simply mean their election ‘with’ him, or with his election, but especially ‘by’ him, on the basis of his own electing. ‘By willing (as God) himself (as a human being), he wills them too. In this way, they are elect “in him”, in and with his being elect.’\textsuperscript{57} How can anyone be elected in Jesus Christ, Barth asks, if Jesus Christ is merely an elected human being, one creature among other creatures, and not the electing God.

Barth’s understanding of the passive election of Jesus Christ based on his active election emphasizes three aspects that, in his view, were not fully recognized by previous theologians.

At the outset, it makes clear that the election of Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus Christ as the object of predestination, is really the beginning of God’s ways and works. In particular, it signifies a twofold choice that affects not only humankind but also God: first, the choice of a non-divine Other, which means that God always wanted to be in a ‘most intimate covenant’ and relation with humankind, not for His own sake, but for the sake of His creatures; second, the choice of making the being of His creature His own being, in that ‘the Son of Man is called and allowed to be His own Son’.\textsuperscript{58} Hence, the election of human beings always implies their participation in the creatureliness and sonship of the elected human being Jesus.

Moreover, Barth specifies that the election of Jesus is an election for suffering, and especially in this form it is the ‘foundational act’\textsuperscript{59} of the gracious choice. He points out that the suffering and death of Jesus are an integral part of his mission and of God’s free grace: ‘The elect human being Jesus is destined to suffer and to die.’\textsuperscript{60} The election of Jesus comprises judgment, punishment and reprobation. It means not simply the election of a good creation and

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. 125. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 116.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. (my emphasis). ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 117.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. 130. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 121.
\textsuperscript{59} Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 234.
\textsuperscript{60} Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 130. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 122.
humankind created after, or toward, the image of God but the reprobation of ‘Satan’ as the essence of the possibility not chosen by God and existing only as negation. The light of the election of Jesus has ‘necessarily’ a shadow at its side, a shadow that is cast by the object of reprobation.\textsuperscript{61} The power of ‘Satan’ reveals itself as human sin. Humankind is under its spell, unable to reject it and to claim its own true determination. Therefore, the human being as such is also the object of God’s wrath and reprobation and stands under the power of the divine negation, being condemned to death. The election of Jesus Christ includes exactly this human being as the object of God’s love, chosen to become God’s covenant-partner. God acknowledges not only the guilt of human beings but also their powerlessness, need and inability to bear God’s righteous response, which moves Him to compassion, and so God takes responsibility for humankind and makes their lost case His own case by putting Jesus at the head and in the place of everybody else. Their rejection becomes his rejection, their death his death. Jesus has and employs, by being faithful to God, the power to reject what God rejects, and in doing so he ‘defends’ the goodness of the divine creation and the determination of humankind. The price is his own death, since the righteousness of God must be allowed to run its full course, so that the victory over ‘Satan’ can be achieved. ‘For this reason, the crucified Jesus is the “image of the invisible God”’ \textsuperscript{62} [Col. 1:15].

Finally, Barth’s understanding of the passive election of Jesus Christ stresses the mutual faithfulness of God and Jesus as the reason for a successful outcome, or the divine perseverance of grace throughout judgment, election throughout reprobation and the human perseverance of obedience to and confidence in God’s righteous will. The content of God’s faithfulness is the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, while the content of Jesus’ faithfulness is the prayer in which he gives Himself over to God’s ‘holy wrath’.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. 131. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 122. A similar statement, yet without the christological elaboration, can be found in the second Commentary on Romans: ‘Reprobation exists only as the shadow of the light of election.’ Barth, \textit{Der Römerbrief} 1922, 386. It is not entirely clear, however, why the shadow itself rather than the object that casts it should be the object of reprobation, as Barth’s explanation suggests.

\textsuperscript{62} Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. II/2, 132. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 123.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid. 135. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 126.
interceding on behalf of those for whose sake he died. In and through the resurrection, God has revealed ‘the justification of His positive will as creator’ acting against a satanic contesting in ‘the offering (Opferung) of His elected human being’. The reprobation of humankind is taken away by and through the reprobation of Jesus. The election of humankind consists in the belief in Jesus as the reason that they have their own reprobation ‘behind and beneath them’.65

2.iii. Consequences and Criticism

For Barth, the twofold statement that Jesus Christ is the electing God and the elected human being contains ‘the whole dogma of predestination…In the beginning with God was this One, Jesus Christ. And the predestination is just that’.66 His new approach to the doctrine led to its christological revision. I will now outline the consequences in comparison with previous accounts, including Barth’s earlier, Schleiermacherian position. They are summarized by the thesis that ‘the eternal will of God is the election of Jesus Christ’67 and concern six aspects: (1) epistemological implications, (2) the concrete determination of predestination, (3) the issue of double predestination, (4) the actuality of predestination, (5) the question of universal election and universal salvation and (6) the relation between Israel and the Christian church.

(1) The first consequence is a clearer understanding of the electing God and the elected human being as the subject and the object of predestination. In the traditional accounts, Barth contends, both remained eventually indefinite and unknown, and the mystery of God and humankind was perceived as ‘incomprehensible darkness’ rather than as ‘incomprehensible light’.68 In contrast, Barth insists on

64 Ibid. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 125.
65 Ibid. 136. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 127.
66 Ibid. 157. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 145.
67 Ibid. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 146.
68 Ibid. 158. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 146. Barth continues that the contrast is not related to ‘the mystery of God’s freedom in His eternal will regarding humankind’. Taken in itself, the statement is correct, but a problem arises, as we will see shortly, when Barth regards the gracious choice in Jesus Christ as being somehow different from God’s eternal will, after describing it as the genuine expression of God’s will.
the need of a fundamental reconsideration of the relation between
the election and Christology, which acknowledges the christological
foundation not only of ‘the temporal work of God [but also of] the
eternal presupposition of this work in the divine election’.69
The understanding of predestination as the election of Jesus Christ
reveals the specific character of the twofold mystery, by linking the
eternal divine decree to the historical appearance of Jesus Christ.
Jesus Christ is the ‘substance of predestination…Without the
Gestalt of Jesus Christ the triune God also has no face or language
for us and remains for us the unknown God.’70
(2) The second consequence of the revision is a better understand-
ing of the author and content of the divine decree. On the one hand,
God’s eternal freedom and self-affirmation is known only through
God’s gracious choice. It is in ‘the act through which God’s relation
to the world and to ourselves is determined and ordered [that] we
know…God’s self in the sovereignty and glory that He has
in Himself prior to all worlds.’71 In other words, the idea of the
immanent trinity depends on the concept of predestination. On the
other hand, the gracious choice is the beginning of God’s history with
creation and humanity. The new understanding of the freedom of the
predestinating God, over against both the traditional supralapsarian
position and its modification by Schleiermacher and the earlier
Barth, consists in the insight that God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ
is the revelation of the electing God. The eternal will of God is not
some pre-temporal will hidden to the human mind but it is the
same will that is revealed in Jesus Christ: ‘in the person of His
eternal Son, [God] was Himself th[e] lost Son of Man’.72 The divine
predestination is a revelatory event, it is manifest and not hidden.
God’s decree is a concrete decree, implemented in Jesus Christ. Its

69 Ibid. 162. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 149.
70 Ibid. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 149–50. Barth again gives credit to Pierre
Maury’s ‘beautiful lecture’ for ‘having directed attention in our own time, in an
totally new way, to the christological meaning and basis of the gracious election and
for having…understood Jesus Christ particularly as the one original and decisive
object of divine election (and reprobation)’ (ibid. 168. ET Church Dogmatics II/2,
154). He also mentions again the correlation of christology and election in the Scots
Confession, which he had commented upon earlier in his Gifford Lectures.
71 Ibid. 169. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 155.
72 Ibid. 171. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 157.
purpose is the grace-covenant and it contains the whole truth about God’s relation to the non-divine reality, that is, the ‘eternal fellowship (Zusammensein) of God and humankind’.73

At this point, a comparison with the Göttingen Dogmatics is illuminating. In a passage from the earlier work dealing with the question of the certainty of salvation, Barth points out that all human beings should ‘look for the decision there, where it has been made from eternity for time (but precisely from God’s living eternity!), and is made in time, in this and that way, according to God’s will’.74 Barth does not elaborate on the ‘there’ and ends up with a duality of the divine decision: one eternal decision versus many actual decisions. Although he stresses that God’s eternity is a living eternity, the eternal decision is like an indeterminate transcendental principle that is the condition of the actualization of God’s revelation in the here and now. Through the christological revision, however, he is able to spell out more clearly the content of God’s eternal decision, the gracious choice, and to overcome an abstract duality between one eternal decision and many actual decisions. God’s decision in time is not different from God’s decision ‘from all eternity’ because it is determined once and for all by the election of Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, the question remains whether Barth developed the idea of the concrete decree consistently or whether he shied away from its implications. On the one hand, he insists there is no divinity ‘as such’, since it is always the concrete divinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which does not rest or move in itself but exists in a ‘specific relation and decision’.75 He rejects the idea that the electing God is ‘God the Father or the triune God in a decision preceding His being, willing and doing, a hidden God’.76 Yet, he also speaks of an eternal divine will ‘apart from’ and ‘preceding the predestination’,77 which squarely contradicts the previous claim as well as his own assertion that ‘the eternal will of God is the election of Jesus Christ’.78 It suggests that God’s will to define Himself as ‘the God of...
humankind” is, after all, secondary to God’s will to ‘affirm and confirm Himself in eternity’. This entails an odd distinction in God’s self-determination. Barth’s intention to safeguard God’s freedom clashes with the christological revision. The assumption of a divine will preceding the predestination puts into doubt whether the gracious choice really belongs to God’s ‘own eternal essence’. How can Barth reject the Reformed idea of an absolute decree and still deny that ‘God is bound to the world in Himself’? Does not the qualification ‘in Himself’ express precisely that God has bound Himself to the world ‘in freedom’, as Barth himself asserts in the next sentence? The idea of an absolute decree seems to have been abandoned, only to be replaced by the will of the immanent triunity, which stands ‘behind and above’ the covenant constituted in Jesus Christ. As a result, the will of God is different from the person of Jesus Christ, contrary to Barth’s idea of the gracious choice as a decision that determines, not only resembles, the divine will.

Systematically, the question is whether the will of Father and Son in the gracious choice, where one elects and the other one is elected, is different from the will of Father and Son in their eternal triune life, where the one is constituted with and through the other. Barth

79 Ibid. 194. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 177.
80 Ibid. 169. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 155.
81 Ibid. 53. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 50. The same problem is discussed from different angles by Hans Theodor Goebel, ‘Trinitätslehre und Erwählungslehre bei Karl Barth: Eine Problemannahme’, in Dietrich Korsch and Hartmut Ruddies (eds.), Wahrheit und Versöhnung: theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur Gotteslehre (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1989), 147–66, and 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, 93–104. McCormack contends: ‘The decision for the covenant of grace is the ground of God’s triunity’ (103) and if ‘election is an eternal decision, then it has never not taken place’ (101). P. Molnar charges that this means election has always taken place, wherefore it becomes a ‘necessity [and] the very opposite of what Barth intended with his doctrine of the immanent Trinity’. Paul D. Molnar, Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology (Edinburgh, New York: T. and T. Clark, 2002), 62. This is a curious objection, since it could apply equally to the Patristic idea of an ‘eternal generation’ of the Son by the Father and an ‘eternal procession’ of the Holy Spirit, which Molnar upholds. Would he deny that they have ‘never not taken place’? Is the triune being of God then also a ‘necessity’?
82 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 169. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 155.
83 Ibid. 115. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 107.
wanted to emphasize both the essential self-determination of God for the grace-covenant with humankind and the steadfastness of this decision as one moment of the immutable being of God. Yet in doing so, he posits ‘a mode of existence in God above and prior to God’s gracious election—the very thing he accused Calvin of having done [—and assumes] that God is triune in and for Himself, independent of His eternal will to be revealed.’ Barth never addressed the issue directly, but since he demands that every dogmatic proposition should reflect the doctrine of election as God’s gracious choice to be in relation with humankind, the question arises whether the doctrine of election should stand at the beginning of Christian dogmatics as a whole and not only at the beginning of the explanation of God’s works of creation, reconciliation and redemption.


85 McCormack, ‘Grace and Being’, 102. Molnar argues, against McCormack, that there was no need for Barth to address the issue, since there is no inconsistency. McCormack’s claim that ‘the works of God ad intra (the trinitarian processions) find their ground in the first of the works of God ad extra (viz. election)’ (ibid. 103) is a bold one, but is this not what Barth suggests when he says that there is no will of God different from Jesus Christ and the gracious choice is part of God’s eternal essence? For Molnar, ‘the order between election and triunity cannot be logically reversed without in fact making creation, reconciliation and redemption necessary to God’. Molnar, Divine Freedom, 63. The reason is this: ‘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.’ Is this convincing? Barth does not say that the gracious choice expresses ‘the free overflow of God’s eternal love’ between the three divine persons. Instead, he explains that the covenant of grace is a part of God’s self-determination, but Molnar does not refer to this context or to other key passages from Church Dogmatics II/2. He insists that ‘election is a decision of the living God, and thus, while it is irreversible, once made, it still was freely made’ (ibid. 64)—a claim that neither I nor McCormack would dispute—but he goes on to conclude that ‘God’s being is not the result of God’s will. Rather, his will to elect expresses his freedom to be God in a new way as God for us…. But none of this is required by his essence’ (ibid. 63). With the idea that God’s will to elect signals a ‘new way’ of God, he has gone to the other extreme and separated triunity from election, God’s being in Himself and God’s being for us, which is the very opposite of what Barth intended. Although the election of Jesus Christ is not ‘required’, it belongs to ‘God’s own eternal essence’, as Barth asserts (see above, n. 81).

86 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 82. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 76–7.
(3) The third consequence concerns Jesus’ election for reprobation and its significance for the concept of double predestination. Barth says that the content of predestination is God’s self-giving for the sake of created and fallen humankind, with a twofold object, God and humankind, as well as a twofold content, election and reprobation. This claim, which was already announced in the essay from 1936, constitutes a radical change in the understanding of double predestination. While the *Commentary on Romans* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, in the footsteps of Schleiermacher, already rejected the distribution of election and reprobation on two groups of persons and universalized both, they still regarded humankind as the sole object of double predestination. In Barth’s new view, however, the divine decision affects both God and humankind: God chooses for Himself fellowship with humankind and for humankind fellowship with Himself. In particular, God chose for Himself reprobation, perdition and death, but for humankind election, salvation and life. In short, God ‘chose our reprobation’.\(^87\) God’s choice is a ‘self-giving’\(^88\) that entails God’s self-determination and the determination of humankind. It is at once righteous, in that God judges and condemns the evildoer, and merciful, in that God takes upon Himself this condemnation, so that God’s reprobation does not have to concern human beings anymore. The Son of God bears the reprobation of humankind, while humankind is destined to become the bearer of the splendour of God’s glory.

The primal decision of the righteous and merciful God is the basis for the justification of the sinner effected in Jesus Christ through the ‘wonderful exchange’\(^89\) that took place, once and for all, on Calvary as the fulfilment of God’s eternal will. To believe in God’s predestination means by definition to believe in the non-reprobation of humankind. It is not the human being who is the reprobate but ‘God Himself, in God’s Son, is the reprobate, according to God’s eternal decree.’\(^90\) This statement is the climax of Barth’s christological

\(^{87}\) Ibid. 179. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 164.

\(^{88}\) The term appears many times in § 33, see ibid. 130–1, 133, 176–7, 182–4, 192–6, 206. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 121–2, 124, 161–2, 167–8, 175–9, 187.

\(^{89}\) Ibid. 189. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 173.

\(^{90}\) Ibid. 182. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 167.
revision, and it is even ‘more revolutionary…than the idea that in Jesus Christ election and reprobation are united’.\textsuperscript{91} In the discussion of the passive election of Jesus Christ, Barth referred to the human being Jesus of Nazareth as the object of divine wrath and reprobation.\textsuperscript{92} Yet, now he emphasizes that it is actually God Himself in the person of the Son of God, is the object of the divine judgment of wrath, bearing the ‘hardness’\textsuperscript{93} and the ‘most bitter consequences’\textsuperscript{94} of reprobation. The eternal Son of God ‘is as such the sacrifice for the sin of the world’\textsuperscript{95} and suffered ‘what the Son of Man should have suffered’.\textsuperscript{96} The suffering of the Son of Man in the unity with the Son of God is a fellow-suffering, but strictly speaking it is not the suffering of reprobation itself.

Since Barth does not elaborate further on the issue or spell out more fully his claims, a subtle ambiguity remains regarding the relation between the human being Jesus and the Son of God.\textsuperscript{97} It reflects two perspectives on the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ, one that relates sin, defined as opposition to God’s will, to the act of creation and one that relates it to the act of reconciliation. They can be related to two aspects of Jesus’ role as the atoning substitute: on the one hand, Jesus acts in the place of all other human beings, on the other hand, the Son of God acts, or rather suffers, in the place

\textsuperscript{91} Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 280. ‘God rejects Himself in radical substitution’ (ibid.).
\textsuperscript{92} See above, section 2.ii.
\textsuperscript{93} Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 213. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 194.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. 179. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 164.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid. 189 (my emphasis). ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 173.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid. 182. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 167. God does not simply pardon the sinner but shows solidarity with him or her by suffering the consequences of sin. Barth also says that the Son of God gives Himself for or is united with ‘the lost Son of Man’ (ibid. 172). ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 158. Gloege rightly remarks that in the biblical texts the title ‘Son of Man’ is itself an expression of exaltation and not of humiliation. Gloege, ‘Zur Prädestinationlehre Barths’, 103 n. 35. The risen Jesus Christ is ‘the exalted Messiah, who is installed as the Son of Man’. Hartmut Gese, ‘Die Weisheit, der Menschensohn und die Ursprünge der Christologie als konsequente Entfaltung der biblischen Theologie’, in Alttestamentliche Studien (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 238. Hence, it seems contradictory to speak of the ‘lost Son of Man’. Interestingly, Barth does not use the phrase any longer in the discussion of the exaltation of the Son of Man in his doctrine of reconciliation (Church Dogmatics IV/2, § 64).
\textsuperscript{97} This is also noted by Georg Pfleiderer, Karl Barths Praktische Theologie, 434.
of the Son of Man. The question is whether the second form of substitution annuls the first one or whether the two forms can be combined coherently. Does the claim that the Son of God instead of the Son of Man suffered God’s wrath contrast with the earlier claim that the elected human being Jesus is the target or ‘offering’\textsuperscript{98} of God’s wrath? What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is the Son of Man and also elect reprobate? The two attributions seem to conflict with each other. Barth might have discussed this question if he had reflected upon the further claim, which is implied in his revision, that Jesus Christ is not only the electing God and the elected human being but also ‘the reprobate God’.\textsuperscript{99} A passage from \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/1 shows that this idea is not foreign to him: ‘Only God Himself could bear God’s wrath. Only God’s mercy was capable of bearing the kind of suffering to which the creature existing in opposition to God is subject. Only God’s mercy could be touched by this suffering in such a way that it knew how to make it its own suffering. And only God’s mercy was strong enough not to perish in this suffering.’\textsuperscript{100}

In the end, Barth adheres to a retributive view, in which revenge is even for God a ‘necessary’ part of righteousness,\textsuperscript{101} while he also insists that the God of the eternal grace-covenant does not demand the human sacrifice that the violation of the creator’s will entailed. It is crucial that the revenge is not directed at the perpetrators of the violation but at God’s self. God ‘wanted and chose the human being in the primal decision of the divine decree with the destination to salvation’,\textsuperscript{102} a claim that comes close to Schleiermacher’s thesis of a single predestination to salvation. God’s grace is so ‘radical’\textsuperscript{103} that predestination is ‘without doubt also a binding and commitment

\textsuperscript{98} Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. II/2, 135. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 125. See above, n. 64.


\textsuperscript{100} Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. II/1, 450. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957), 400.

\textsuperscript{101} Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. II/2, 182. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 167.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. 185. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 169.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. 133. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 124.
that God has taken upon Himself’,\textsuperscript{104} a ‘self-binding’\textsuperscript{105} or even ‘self-limitation’.\textsuperscript{106}

(4) The fourth consequence of Barth’s revision concerns the actuality of predestination. The traditional understanding of predestination assumed the predetermination of events in time and history: God chose and determined things once but does so no longer. For Barth, this view neglects that in the election of Jesus Christ God chose the history and encounter with human beings in time. The emphasis on the eternal aspect of predestination points to the steadfastness of God’s decision and to the ‘finality of the free love, in which God chose and determined [Himself and humankind] at the beginning of all things’.\textsuperscript{107} The fact that the encounter between God and human beings is grounded in the divine initiative does not exclude a spontaneous human response. The gracious choice is the beginning, not the end of human history. It opens up the space and the time for an acceptance of God’s self-giving as the basis of one’s own life, when a person elects the electing God, as it is realized in unique fashion by Jesus’ choice of God’s will. God’s predestination is a ‘living act’.\textsuperscript{108} The primal decision comprises past, present and future. It happened once and for all, but it also continues to happen as an ‘event’,\textsuperscript{109} through the proclamation and reception of the Word, the foundation and guiding of Israel and the church, the vocation, justification, sanctification and glorification of human beings and the awakening of individual human beings to faith, love and hope.\textsuperscript{110} Once again, Barth stresses that this acting is neither the implementation of an absolute divine will and decree nor an emergency

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. 200. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 183.
\textsuperscript{105} Thies Gundlach, Selbstbegrenzung Gottes und die Autonomie des Menschen. Karl Barth’s Kirchliche Dogmatik als Modernisierungsschritt evangelischer Theologie (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 167. The term is also used by Eberhard Jüngel, Gottes Sein ist im Werden. Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 4th edn 1986), 134.
\textsuperscript{106} Gundlach, Selbstbegrenzung Gottes und die Autonomie des Menschen, 234. The term does not mean God’s ‘abdication of power, sovereignty and universality, but a more precise definition of this power, sovereignty and universality through the name and the person Jesus Christ.’
\textsuperscript{107} Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 200. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 182.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. 198. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 180.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid. 202. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 184.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid. 204. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 186.
response to the evil workings of God’s opponent but determined particularly and exclusively by the election of Jesus Christ. The history, encounter and decision, which occur in this election, have a specific content and an irreversible direction. They tell us that God’s will is ‘completely unambiguous’.111

Still, the question arises whether it is useful to speak of predestination as an event in the present. One may regard the proclamation of the gospel, the foundation of Israel and the church and the calling of individuals as the content or goal of predestination, but are they identical with the election of Jesus Christ? The claim that the ‘eternally preceding’112 divine decision is the mystery of all historical events does not have to imply that the decision itself continues to take place in history, given that predestination was defined strictly as the election of Jesus Christ. Such an assumption rather resembles Barth’s earlier view, in which God can elect or reprobate in every moment anew. A less actualistic view of predestination could emphasize the significance of the historical appearance of Jesus Christ and thus dispel the impression that Barth tears apart the ‘eternal content’ and the ‘temporal form’ of election.113 It could also help to answer the charge that the idea of Jesus Christ’s being ‘in the beginning with God’ stands in contrast to the historicity of his appearance in history. As Brunner put it: ‘If one teaches the eternal preexistence of the God-man, the incarnation ceases to be an event.’114 He says that, according to the New Testament, the Son of God became human, so that humankind received ‘a share in divine glory’, but in Barth’s revision these events are allegedly ‘anticipated, torn out of history and set within a “pre-temporality”, in the preexistence of the Logos’.115 Barth indeed uses the idea of

111 Ibid. 211. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 192.
112 Ibid. 203. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 185.
113 See Kreck, Grundentscheidungen in Barths Dogmatik, 235. Barth says that election is an eternal event ‘in the form of time’ and a temporal event ‘with the content of eternity’. Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 105. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 97. In doing so, the emphasis lies not on the contrast but on the proximity of time and eternity. In any case, Barth rarely uses the distinction.
115 Ibid. ET The Christian Doctrine of God, 347. He does not mention that Eph. 1:4 speaks about the election of the believers in Jesus Christ in ‘pre-temporal’ terms without distinguishing between a logos asarkos and a logos ensarkos. The idea of Jesus
anticipation to explain the pre-existence of Jesus Christ—in order to highlight the significance of his historical appearance. The charge that God’s acting through Jesus Christ is ‘torn out of history’ is an overstatement. The historical appearance of Jesus Christ is central, but Barth does not regard it as a brute fact. The main question for him is how this event is related to God’s self and to the constitution of the gracious choice.

(5) The fifth consequence has to do with the relation between the election of Jesus Christ and the election of the congregation of God as well as of individual human beings. According to Barth, the life and function of the congregation, in the two forms of the people of Israel and the church of Jews and Gentiles, is the ‘primary object of the “other” election included in the election of Jesus Christ. Only…in this regard can one then also speak correctly of the election of the Christ’s being ‘in the beginning with God’ is at least implied here. See Kreck, Grundentscheidungen in Karl Barths Dogmatik, 223–4.

116 See Kreck, Grundentscheidungen in Barths Dogmatik, 228 and 234. This also questions the thesis of Kraus, who thinks that for Barth ‘the incarnation does not signal a historical turning-point [but] merely looks like a revelatory repetition of a decree already realized in eternity’. Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 320. For Barth, the historical appearance of Christ is not only the revelation but also the constitution of the eternal decree.

117 Brunner says he agrees with the ‘main tendency’ (Brunner, Die christliche Lehre von Gott, 375. ET The Christian Doctrine of God, 346) of Barth’s revision. Like Barth, he rejects the idea of double predestination and of a particular decree of reprobation, but he also rejects the idea of Jesus Christ as the subject of election and appeals, against Barth, to the freedom of God ‘to elect in Jesus Christ and to reprobate outside of Jesus Christ’ (ibid. 337). ET The Christian Doctrine of God, 314. This is the position shared by Schleiermacher and, to some extent, by Barth until 1936. When Brunner emphasizes the human decision for God and almost identifies it with God’s gracious choice, he is close to Barth’s earlier view. ‘The elect are identical with those who truly believe’ (ibid. 345). ET The Christian Doctrine of God, 319. In the end, his position is similar to the traditional Lutheran position, and he seems to favour an Augustinian–Lutheran infralapsarianism over a Calvinist supralapsarianism. It should be noted that Brunner already struggled with Barth’s earlier view of election. In 1925 he wondered aloud whether one should not accept the ‘scandal of the psychological doctrine of predestination’ and the individual’s responsibility for his or her election, ‘because otherwise the paradox is slurred’. Emil Brunner to Karl Barth, 10 March 1925, in Barth—Brunner: Briefwechsel, 108. At the same time, he agreed with Barth’s rejection of the idea of two predetermined groups of persons. Emil Brunner to Karl Barth, 7 (?) July 1926, ibid. 144. The paradox shines through in his antithesis between ‘the production of a logically satisfactory theory’ and ‘the true decision’ of faith. Brunner, Die christliche Lehre von Gott, 381. ET The Christian Doctrine of God, 353.
individual believers’, which is the ‘telos of the election of the congregation’. The object of God’s gracious choice is neither humankind nor the whole world but individual persons, a view that is close to Schleiermacher. The specific task of the congregation consists in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, the only elect and reprobate, by proclaiming the election of the individual especially in his or her being isolated from God. The elect individuals become believers in the context of the congregation: ‘In the congregation, through the congregation (and then at once for it as well!), they are then also elected in and with the election of Jesus Christ.’

The divine decree, which is identical with the election of Jesus Christ, implies the election of every human being. The assertion that the reprobation of humankind is a ‘rejected’ reprobation, overcome once and for all, entails a universal grace and election, of a ‘predestination that corresponds to the perfect essence of God: the predestination to His kingdom, to salvation and to life’. To believe in God’s predestination means by definition to believe in the non-reprobation of humankind, since it was God’s Son who has suffered reprobation. The result is a principal solidarity of all human beings. The division between believers and unbelievers is never absolute, Barth says, because the reprobate exists only with, not without or besides the elect. The distinction of the elect from other human beings consists in their calling, when the election of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in the context of the congregation as their

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118 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 216. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 196.
119 Ibid. 341. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 311.
120 Ibid. 344. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 313.
121 Ibid. 344–9. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 314–18. In § 34, Barth calls the congregation the ‘mediating object’ of election (ibid. 222. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 201). The adjective does not imply that for Barth a person’s membership in the congregation is the ontic ground of his or her being elect, but the terminology remains difficult, all the more since he also says that individual human beings themselves are the ‘object’ of election (ibid. 344. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 313).
122 Ibid. 217. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 197.
123 Ibid. 499. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 450.
124 Ibid. 189. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 172–3. God’s self-determination and self-giving in Jesus Christ implies that God has ‘destined the elect human being to salvation’ and ‘the creature’ shall have a share in God’s glory (ibid. 455. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 412).
125 Ibid. 383 and 500. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 348 and 451.
own election and they become certain of it in their faith in him. Still, thanks to the election and reprobation of Jesus Christ the life of a reprobate is made for all other human beings objectively impossible. Although it is possible to act like a reprobate and represent what is rejected by God, it is impossible to be one, because God anticipated the being of the reprobate and negated it. Therefore, Barth drops his categorical rejection of the idea of universal salvation and joins Schleiermacher in leaving open the possibility of a ‘final opening up and expansion of the circle of election and calling’, which may include everyone. In doing so, he revises his statement from the 1936 essay that there will be an eschatological division between the elect and the reprobate, for it is Jesus Christ himself, the one who bore God’s judgment, who will return as judge. In this light, the believers shall hope for a future salvation even ‘on the brink of the lost case of the reprobate’. They can be certain that ‘the power of Satan . . . finds its limits in the power of the Lord’. The ‘cleansing from sin’ as a central feature of the Last Judgment will occur for the sake of everyone and not against certain persons.

The idea of Jesus Christ as the single reprobate implies a strictly christological understanding of the eschatological Last Judgment, but it does not simply contradict the latter. Still, the implications of Barth’s ‘christological relativization of reprobation’ need to be considered carefully. Brunner has a point when he remarks that the revision goes ‘much further’ than previous theologians with universalistic tendencies, but he overstates his case by saying that it implies an ‘objectivism’ that ‘tears apart revelation and faith’. The reason for Brunner’s objection is not so much the subordination of faith to revelation, which he would, in principle, not deny, but the similar subordination of unbelief to revelation, so that the opposition

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126 Ibid. 348. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 317.
127 Ibid. 462. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 418.
129 Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. II/2, 552. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 497.
130 Ibid. 540. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 487.
131 Ibid. 552. ET *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 496.
132 As Kraus, *Vorherbestimmung*, 292–3, thinks.
133 Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, vol. 3, 491.
between believers and unbelievers is a relative one, and ‘not identical with the opposition of “elect” and “reprobate”’. This is consistent with Barth’s revision of the doctrine, and it would be rather simplistic to conclude that he has overcome the danger of a ‘dualistic particularism’, only to arrive at a ‘monistic universalism’. Still, it seems that his affirmation of universal election implies some form of universal salvation, despite his own explicit unwillingness to go that far. In the last chapter, we will return to the issue and discuss how such a universalism could look like today.

Another critique of the christological centring of the doctrine is related to Barth’s claim that in God’s covenant with Himself the eternal Son is elected and sent by the Father to execute God’s covenant with Himself and with humankind. Jesus Christ is not only the revelation but also the constitution and realization of the covenant, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The question is whether this reconstruction, in which the place of the non-divine other is at least partially taken by God too, establishes God’s freedom at the expense of human freedom. F. Wagner has charged that it blurs the difference between a ‘strong’ and a ‘weak’ other and leaves no room for the Other ‘as such’ (the ‘strong’ other) but only for the Other as defined by God’s own triune relationship in Himself (the ‘weak’ other). The conception of God’s ‘self-judgment’ would annul the sinner as the ‘strong other’ and take away the ‘ultimate right’ of the human being, that is, the right to be different (Anderssein).

Any reply to this charge should recognize the evident contrast in the definition of freedom and otherness vis-à-vis God. The background of Wagner’s view of otherness and sin is found in the

135 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 360. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 327. Brunner’s charge can best be understood on the basis of his actualism, which implies a sharp distinction between the ‘subjective’ decision of faith and the ‘objective’ decision of God’s revelation—the very thing he criticized in Barth’s view!
138 Ibid. 30.
139 Ibid. 29. Similarly, N. Biggar charges that Barth envisions ‘the graciousness of a grace that does not concede to the beloved the freedom to turn away permanently’. See Nigel Biggar, The Hastening that Waits. Karl Barth’s Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.
philosophy of German Idealism, especially its conception of the Fall as the primal event of intellectual emancipation and the foundation of freedom.\textsuperscript{140} Indeed, God, according to Barth, excludes and rejects the ‘strong other’, the human being as sinner, and leaves room only for a ‘weak other’, the human being defined by the election and reprobation of Jesus Christ. Yet, he does not simply blur the difference between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ but understands it in a different frame, namely, as otherness without or against God and otherness with or for God, on the basis of God’s gracious choice. God’s theonomy \textit{as such} wills the autonomy of the human being, through which a person shall ‘choose, affirm and busy himself or herself’.\textsuperscript{141} The problem is that the distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ other and the qualification of an otherness without or against God as a ‘last’ human right is introduced from an external point of view.

One can also ask with D. Korsch whether the distinction between ‘weak’ and a ‘strong’ other is sufficiently complex to explain the differences between the world and God or the human being and God or sin and God.\textsuperscript{142} Wagner might reply that the distinction between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ other is implied in Barth’s distinction between the human being, over against God, as sinner (the human being ‘as such’) and as new creature (the human being ‘in Christ’). Korsch argues, however, that Wagner’s interpretation presupposes a problematic separation of two related aspects: the principal character of revelation, which can be described in terms of the structure of self-determination, and the particular character of the actual appearance of Jesus Christ, as it is witnessed in Scripture and proclamation. Wagner takes into account only the first aspect, whereas it is already clear in \textit{Church Dogmatics} I/1 that Barth’s doctrine of God is not merely a theory of absolute subjectivity, since the portrayal of God as creator, reconciler and redeemer is the presupposition for his portrayal of God as Father, Son and Spirit.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{141} Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. II/2, 180. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 198.
\textsuperscript{142} Dietrich Korsch, \textit{Dialektische Theologie nach Karl Barth} (Tübingen: Mohr 1996), 153.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid. 168–70. An analysis of the relevance of God’s covenant for human creativity and freedom but without a discussion of the criticism levelled at Barth is
This does not deny that interpretations of Barth’s thinking can be developed within various philosophical frameworks, but they will be fruitful only when they are able to account for the historical appearance of Jesus Christ, which plays a central role in Barth’s thinking.

(6) Finally, Barth’s new understanding of election enabled him to incorporate a unique and unprecedented consideration of the relation between Israel and the Christian church. The issue is related to several aspects of Barth’s christological revision that deserve further reflection, especially since recent studies on the conversation between Christianity and Judaism have touched on the topic of election and mentioned Barth as an important but somewhat outdated conversation partner.

According to Scott Bader-Saye, Barth’s ‘reformulation of the object of election can be read as a response to the modern rise of national supersessionism, especially in Germany [and] to the failings of traditional Calvinist theology’ with its individualized view of election. Still, he contends, ‘Barth held these aims together only very tentatively and with questionable success, for by avoiding the communal claims of the one he tended to fall back into the individualistic claims of the other.’ As proof for this thesis, he points out that ‘Barth left no room for a nation or a people to choose themselves or to claim election or exception based on their communal identity. He did this in part at least by locating election, in its most determinative form, at the level of the individual.’

While the first observation is accurate, the statement about the location of the doctrine would require some qualification, since it is inconsistent with Bader-Saye’s appraisal that Barth ‘resisted making election a purely individual matter’. Hence, ‘there can be no talk about individual election without first talking about the election of the community, which includes both Israel and the church. . . . Christ, community, and individual together form the threefold object of found in Wolf Krötke, ‘Gott und Mensch als “Partner”. Zur Bedeutung einer zentralen Metapher in Karl Barths Kirchlicher Dogmatik’, in Zur Theologie Karl Barths. Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, Beiheft 6 (1986), 158–75.

144 Scott Bader-Saye, Church and Israel after Christendom: The Politics of Election (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 74. The term ‘national supersessionism’ is not clear. A better term would be ‘national exceptionalism’ or ‘national supremacism’.

145 Ibid.
election.’ For Barth, ‘Christ remains the principal object, for in him humankind is chosen before creation, and in him God chooses to be for humanity.’\textsuperscript{146} These comments do not square with Bader-Saye’s other claim that for Barth the ‘most determinative’ feature of election is the election of the individual. Hence, the contours of his criticism remain unclear and at times even contradictory.

The matter is made more complex by the charge that ‘Barth’s theology remains latently supersessionistic’,\textsuperscript{147} despite its positive achievements. The alleged shortcoming is related to Barth’s understanding of the two forms of the one elected congregation as witnesses to the Yes and the No of God. In this perspective, Israel functions as the witness to God’s judgment, whereas the Christian church becomes the witness to God’s mercy.\textsuperscript{148} While this does not imply a denial of the election of Israel, as Bader-Saye recognizes, the problem is that ‘as the elect ones who resist their election in Christ, the Jews witness as those who are passing away, those who could live on only in affirmation of their election in Christ and thus in their joining with the church’. In short, ‘Barth saw in Israel only an example of what not to be as God’s people.’\textsuperscript{149}

The critique misses an important aspect. On the one hand, Israel is seen as the congregation of God that represents the ‘unwillingness, incapacity and unworthiness of the human being with respect to the love of God directed to him or her’, the human being who remains a hearer of the promise without becoming a believer. Israel ‘can only make visible the passing of the old human being who confronts God in this way’,\textsuperscript{150} and its acting is a witness to the righteousness of God’s judgment over the old human being. Yet on the other hand, the witness of the passing form of the one congregation does not refer

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid. 75.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} See the summary at the beginning of § 34, Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 215. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 195.
\textsuperscript{149} Bader-Saye, Church and Israel after Christendom, 76. Bader-Saye says that for Barth Israel ‘represents the human rejection of God and thus bears God’s rejection of that rejection’ (ibid.). The first part of this statement is, by and large, correct, but the second part puts Barth’s view on its head, since the point is precisely that Jesus Christ alone bears God’s rejection, in that God has ‘snatched [it] away from humankind and wants to suffer it Himself in the one person Jesus of Nazareth’. Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 227. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 206.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid. 219. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 198.
only to the Israel who resists its election in Christ but also to the Israel that accepts the gospel and thus becomes ‘obedient to its election’,\textsuperscript{151} as exemplified by Jews who became Christians. ‘If Israel were obedient to its election, its particular witness to the passing of the old human being... incorporated into the confession by the whole congregation of God’s coming kingdom, would supplement and harmonize with the church’s testimony of hope founded on the resurrection of Jesus.’\textsuperscript{152} For Barth, precisely those Jews who are obedient to the election of Israel are witnesses to the passing of the old human being and thus to God’s mercy not only for themselves but also for the Gentiles. Here, it is central to recognize that Barth sees the Christian church not simply as the church of the Gentiles but as the church of Jews and Gentiles.\textsuperscript{153} Yet, Bader-Saye thinks that ‘by setting up the dialectic in this way, Barth is unable to affirm any ongoing positive witness of Israel, even in the midst of its sin’.\textsuperscript{154} Barth believes that the role of Israel as a witness to God’s judgment and mercy is very positive, but it is suggested that he overlooked other aspects: ‘his ear was deaf to the ongoing constructive and faithful witness of the Jewish people’.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid. 286. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 260.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid. 288. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 262.

\textsuperscript{153} See ibid. 220. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 199. For an attempt to decipher the difficult and sometimes harsh sounding passages about the difference between Jews outside and inside the church, see Eberhard Busch, \textit{Unter dem Bogen des einen Bundes: Karl Barth und die Juden 1933–1945} (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 482–7. Notice also that for Barth the Jews outside the church are never outside the elected community through which ‘the whole world shall be called to faith in Jesus Christ’. Barth, \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, vol. II/2, 215. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 195. The congregation of God ‘is, as Israel and as church, indissolubly one’ and as one congregation ‘irrevocably both: Israel and church’ (ibid. 218–19, my emphasis. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 198). Jews inside and outside the church belong to the ‘body’ of Christ (ibid. 220. ET \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 199–200).

\textsuperscript{154} Bader-Saye, \textit{Church and Israel after Christendom}, 76. Bader-Saye notices that Barth ‘at times resort[s] to the classical division between Jews as a carnal people and Christians as spiritual people’ (ibid.). Here, it is important that the distinction between children according to the ‘flesh’ and according to the ‘spirit’ is not a Christian invention but can be found already in the Old Testament and in inter-testamental texts (Isa. 54:1–3, Ps. 87:5, Sir. 4:1–10, see also Deut. 30:6). Paul’s reference to Israelites ‘after the flesh’ and ‘after the promise’ (Rom. 9:6–9) stands in the same tradition.

\textsuperscript{155} Bader-Saye, \textit{Church and Israel after Christendom}, 76. It needs to be spelled out more clearly wherein exactly such a witness consists, since the term ‘Israel’ can have diverse meanings. S. Haynes contends that precisely in those ecclesiastical documents
It is important to realize that both Barth and Bader-Saye subscribe to a one-covenant-theory: Israel and the church exist together ‘within the one covenant God’. Both insist that the Christian church can be true to its foundation in Jesus Christ only together with and alongside Israel. Barth might even accept the idea that ‘by the Holy Spirit the Gentiles are called and grafted into Israel’s covenant’, as Bader-Saye says in an allusion to the metaphor of the olive tree in Rom. 11:16–24, but he could also point out that the branches which have been cut off from the olive tree will be grafted back on ‘if they do not persist in unbelief’ (v. 23). Notwithstanding the eschatological vision that ‘all Israel will be saved’ (v. 26), he may ask further whether there is any distinction between those Jews who believe in Christ and those who do not. For Bader-Saye, there seems to be none. But what difference does Christ then make? Did he come only ‘to restore the Jews, to embody the promises of God to Abraham and David?’ In order for the Gentiles to receive a ‘share in Israel’s covenant blessing’, neither a unique redeemer nor a new fellowship of believers is needed, since for Jewish restorationist movements in the first century the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s covenant with Israel as Gentiles was not an atypical feature. Bader-Saye himself that seek to bid farewell to Christian anti-Judaism ‘the theological grid through which Christian theologians view the Jewish people has not been shattered by the Holocaust and the birth of the State of Israel… These documents are distinguished by ubiquitous references to “Israel” in terms of salvation history, covenant, election, uniqueness, and divine calling; and they repeatedly affirm the mystery of Jewish existence, Jewish suffering, Jewish survival and Jewish restoration.’ Haynes, Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 174.

156 Bader-Saye, Church and Israel after Christendom, 3.

157 We can speculate whether Barth would have agreed with Bader-Saye’s claims that ‘there is only one covenant people, Israel’ (ibid. 112) and ‘that the one way to God is through Israel’, the ‘exclusivity of [which] makes most moderns uncomfortable, even (sometimes especially) modern Jews’ (ibid. 97). Barth thinks that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ presupposes and includes Israel, but he might not have accepted the formula of ‘the one way to God through Israel’, and his idea of the one congregation in two forms entails a different concept of the ‘one covenant people’.

158 Ibid. 116.

159 Ibid. 97.

160 Ibid.

161 Such a view made it easier for early Christianity to admit Gentiles without the requirement of conversion to Judaism and Torah observance. See Paula Fredriksen, From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus (New Haven:
warns against an ‘adoptionist Christology’ that leaves ‘unclear what might make us worship Christ’ and whether Christ ‘adds anything new to Israel’s story’. ‘If Jesus does not inaugurate Israel’s redemption but only confirms it, then how is Jesus different from other faithful Jewish witnesses?’ The question would gain additional weight, if Bader-Saye had acknowledged that, for Barth, Jews and Christians are not united merely by the bond they share ‘through the Jew Jesus’, but through the Jew Jesus Christ, who is the crucified and risen Son of God and as such ‘the revealed Messiah of Israel’.

3. THE CHANGES IN BARTH’S DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

As in his earlier view, Barth’s christologically revised doctrine on election deals with God’s concrete acting upon human beings, yet the acting is no longer defined actualistically as a decision about faith and unbelief but as a primal decision about the identity of human beings and of God’s self. This decision is God’s self-determination for the grace-covenant with every human being as well as the determination of human beings to be the people of God in this covenant. It implies a double determination and a double content, which is

Yale Nota Bene, 2nd edn 2000), 150, 166. Her account locates the earliest Christian movement after Jesus’ death and resurrection squarely within Jewish religiosity, without denying its particularities and the extent to which Paul already ‘denationalizes Jewish restoration theology’ (ibid. 172), several decades before the four Gospels were written. Michael Wyschogrod, a prominent voice in the Christian–Jewish dialogue, holds a view similar to ancient Jewish restorationism. For him, God’s relation with Israel mediates God’s relation with all other human beings: the ‘mystery of Israel’s election [is] the guarantee of the fatherhood of God towards all peoples, elect and nonelect, Jew and gentile’. Michael Wyschogrod, The Body of Faith: God in the People of Israel (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 2nd edn 1996), 65.

162 Bader-Saye, Church and Israel after Christendom, 83.
163 Ibid. 82.
164 Ibid. 83. He addresses this question to R. Kendall Soulen, The God of Israel and Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
165 Haynes, Reluctant Witnesses, 78.
166 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 218. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 198.
revealed and constituted in the history of Jesus Christ, particularly his death and resurrection. While previous views also assumed a double content of predestination, the idea of God’s self-determination introduces a new feature into the doctrine and is the basis for the claim that the divine decree is a concrete decree. Predestination is the active and passive election of Jesus Christ, who is not only the object and mediator of election but also the subject and foundation of election. Human beings are elected not only ‘in him’ (Eph. 1:4) but also by him, since he was ‘in the beginning with God’ (John 1:2). Jesus Christ is the electing God. The idea of a concrete decree was already envisioned by Barth’s earlier criticism of an anthropocentric and individualistic view of election, but the historical appearance of Jesus Christ did not yet play a defining role. Barth’s emphasis on the constitution of the divine decree in the history of Jesus Christ should give pause to the charge that ‘everything was accomplished already in eternity’ \(^{167}\) or that the historical appearance in Jesus Christ seems to be a ‘timeless’ \(^ {168}\) event.

Jesus Christ is not merely the elect human being but he is elected to bear the divine reprobation. The teleological view of the relation between reprobation and election, which the earlier Barth shared with Schleiermacher, is affirmed but set in a different context: although reprobation still occurs for the sake of election, it occurs no longer as the result of God’s actual address to individual human beings but has occurred once and for all in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. No human being is any longer the object of divine condemnation and reprobation. While Barth’s lectures on the doctrine in 1936 and 1937 first proposed a relation between reprobation and crucifixion, the climax of his christological revision is reached only in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, when he draws the consequences for the concept of God: Jesus Christ is the electing God and as such the elect reprobate, in whom God chose for Himself reprobation and damnation but for humankind election and salvation. Barth retracts the highly actualistic thesis from the *Göttingen Dogmatics* that ‘all are at every moment under the divine Either–Or, all can be elected or reprobated at every moment’ \(^ {169}\).}

\(^ {167}\) Kraus, *Vorherbestimmung*, 319, with further references.
\(^ {168}\) Ibid. 320.
\(^ {169}\) UcR 2, 207. ET *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 471.
decision about a person’s faith or unbelief is still made in time, the withholding of faith no longer signifies an event of reprobation. The ‘possibility of another case’ is no longer equated with the possibility of reprobation. Similarly, the proposition that ‘[w]hoever is addressed by God in Christ through the Spirit, is thereby not reprobated but elected’170 is revised. Barth now describes the gift of faith as a calling that distinguishes a person from other persons, but this does not alter the truth that in Jesus Christ every human being is elected, whether he or she is addressed ‘in Christ through the Spirit’ or not. Hence, it is wrong to claim that Barth ‘does not fundamentally change his approach’171 between Romans and Church Dogmatics II/2. While the doctrine of election occupies the same systematic place in the Göttingen Dogmatics and the Church Dogmatics, and while the writings from both periods put an emphasis on ‘the hopelessness of man’s own moral and religious striving, the free choice of God’s grace, the personal and living divine–human relationship, [and] the universal significance of Christ’s death and resurrection’,172 the changes from 1936 are indeed fundamental and lead to a new approach.

Finally, Barth’s christological revision entails a reconsideration of the corporate and individual aspects of election, which until then he had not discussed in detail and which reveal similarities with Schleiermacher that were not present before, specifically in the acknowledgement of the congregation as an active witness to God’s gracious choice and in a clearer affirmation of universal election, without the endorsement of universal salvation.

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170 Ibid. 192. ET Göttingen Dogmatics, 460.
171 Woyke, The Doctrine of Predestination, 59.
172 Ibid.
Conclusion

Barth and Schleiermacher on Election: A Challenge for Twenty-First-Century Theology

Karl Barth revised the doctrine of election not once but twice. The understanding of the doctrine in his early dialectical theology shows a remarkable resemblance to the reconstruction by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Thus, the famous christological revision of the doctrine in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 is not only a revision of traditional views but also a modification of his earlier position that already included a critical stance vis-à-vis the tradition. The reading of Barth through a lens provided by Schleiermacher shows that his christological revision of the doctrine did not simply repudiate everything that went before but took up an older position and improved on it.

In this regard, two achievements of Schleiermacher are significant. He overcame the traditional particularism and rediscovered the universal dimension of election. Moreover, he established a connection between election and the redemptive work of Christ, even if he did not fully develop the point, due to his presuppositions. In his essay on election, he praises Augustine and Calvin for their insistence that the determining ground of election and reprobation is not found in individual human beings but in God.¹ He moves beyond them,

¹ Most commentators on Schleiermacher’s doctrine of election have mentioned the critique of the traditional Augustinian view but not the positive comments. See Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, vol. 3: *Die positive Entwicklung der Lehre* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 3rd edn 1888), 120, 122–3; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, vol. 3, 477–88.
however, when he describes election and reprobation as contrasting yet united parts of the one divine decree by which humanity shall be regenerated. He now regards the realization of the decree as a historical process consisting of diverse individual responses to the proclamation of the gospel. Those who are captured by the power of God’s Word and regenerated are called the elect, those who are not captured by it, because they were not receptive to it or died before it could reach them, are called the overlooked or the reprobate. The claim that a human being is reprobate does not entail an eternal damnation; nobody ever loses the possibility to be revived and to become a believer through the work of the Holy Spirit. A person’s absence from the community of believers is an expression of the historical development of God’s kingdom, not the result of a special divine foreordination. Schleiermacher rejects not only the idea of a positive divine decree of reprobation, as some Lutheran theologians did in their quarrel with the Calvinist side, but he refutes altogether the idea of a particular divine decree in regard to individual persons or groups. Election and reprobation are not rooted in two decrees for two different groups but in a single decree that is an expression of the good order of the world by the almighty creator.

Schleiermacher’s doctrine of election in *The Christian Faith* deals with the traditional problem whether the simultaneous existence of believers and non-believers contradicts the benevolent divine will toward all human beings, which is revealed in Christ’s redemptive work. It has soteriological as well as ecclesiological ramifications. As in the essay on election, any explanation of the inequality between believers and non-believers that presupposes particular relations between God and individual human beings is rejected. The redemptive work of Christ is realized not in one instant but occurs gradually and without miraculous leaps. Christ’s appearance in history represents a new creation, including the perfection of human nature and the beginning of the regeneration of humankind. The actual existence of believers and unbelievers results from the single divine decree that determines the historical development of God’s kingdom as a whole, not from a preordained divine division of the human race.

Pannenberg, among other contemporary theologians, holds the same view: ‘temporary hardening is not to be confused with eternal reprobation’ (ibid. 501).
into two groups. Divine mercy and righteousness pertain equally to every human being. Hence, Schleiermacher rejects the idea of double predestination. The doctrine culminates in the thesis of a single and universal predestination to salvation in Christ. The belief in the eternal exclusion of a group of persons from the effects of Christ’s work betrays the general character of redemption and the universal mission of the Christian church. It also contradicts the species-consciousness that is an integral part of the believers’ pious self-consciousness, causing a feeling of misery in the believers that diminishes their salvation, if others were forever excluded from it. God sees all human beings in Christ, and the predestination to salvation in Christ includes both believers and unbelievers. The Christian church is the revelation of Christ’s dignity, and the possibility exists that eventually every person will be included in the fellowship with Christ. Yet, although the christological impulse is worked out more fully in *The Christian Faith*, the position remains basically theocentric. Predestination is defined in terms of the divine attributes of omniscience and omnipotence, not in terms of redemption. Moreover, the election of Christ is the divine decision of Christ’s appearance in history for the sake of redemption. Christ is the universal redeemer and mediator of salvation, but his appearance in history does not contribute to the determination of the divine will and decree.

From early on, Karl Barth shared the critique of a particularistic understanding of election, although he did not refer to Schleiermacher as a source for wisdom on the matter. His studies on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans convinced him that the anthropocentric and individualistic assumptions inherent in traditional views, particularly the idea of a certain number of human beings chosen for salvation, were flawed. He argues that the effects of Christ’s reconciling death relate to every person because everyone is equally affected by God’s judgment: ‘God enclosed everyone in disobedience, in order to show mercy on everyone’ (Rom. 11:32). Barth and Schleiermacher agree that predestination is not a pre-temporal decision by which God has determined once and for all who will believe and who will not believe. Instead, the outcome of the divine decision is determined when a human being is addressed by God’s Word in the proclamation of the gospel (Schleiermacher) or by the revelation of God’s merciful righteousness (Barth). Schleiermacher’s concept of
the single divine decree is consistent with Barth’s assertion that God addresses every person in the same way and that the responses to the address are diverse and even contradictory. The doctrine of election is theocentric and universal, with a focus on the electing God, not on the elected human beings. Election and reprobation are the two unequal sides of God’s one predestination, whereby election is the decisive aspect of God’s will. Previous theologians also pointed out that election is more significant in God’s will than reprobation, but Schleiermacher and Barth envision a teleological, non-dualistic ordering of the relation between reprobation and election, in which the former serves the purpose of the latter. Their view is closer to the biblical view of election than the traditional individualistic view. Moreover, the tension between God’s salvific will and the ongoing historical existence of believers and unbelievers, which was the main obstacle for many commentators on the doctrine, is resolved. Basically, their stance is coherent with the supralapsarian claim that the decree of predestination is prior to the decree of creation and Fall, although they go one step further by asserting that God’s mercy is the decisive criterion not only of redemption but also of predestination.

According to the Göttingen Dogmatics, the main theme of the doctrine of election is the twofold possibility of faith and unbelief. It is not a human but a divine possibility and a constitutive part of God’s address to humanity. It does not imply two equally probable options. The likelihood of unbelief is always higher than the likelihood of faith, because God’s revelation is never directly visible as such but ‘veiled’ in history, in human words or in the life and death of Jesus. God’s ‘unveiling’ is the purpose of His ‘veiling’, but the decision when and how the ‘unveiling’ occurs is made by God alone. The focus of the doctrine is the ‘concretely acting God’ who elects and reprobates in every moment anew. Barth rejects the traditional assumption of two foreordained groups of persons, since it conflicts with God’s freedom to elect and reprobate in history. While he agrees with the traditional view that reprobation is the event in which God withholds the gift of faith, it is not an end in itself but always oriented toward election and salvation, which is the steadfast goal of God’s acting. No human being is ever once and for all elect or reprobate. Hence, Barth changes the concept of an eternal double predestination from a concept that refers to a pre-temporal divine
decision about certain persons into a concept that refers to the principal freedom of God’s acting toward human beings in history. The modification underscores both the theocentric and the teleological character of the doctrine and buttresses his criticism of an anthropocentric and individualistic understanding.

Notwithstanding the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the revelation of God’s righteousness, Barth’s position at this stage is not significantly shaped by christological statements. He agrees with Schleiermacher that God sees every person, including the unbelievers, in Christ. This means that in Christ reprobation has been overcome and absorbed by election, but it comes closer to the idea of Christ as the ‘mirror’ of divine election than to the thesis that Christ’s reconciling death is the result of God’s self-determination to be God in a covenant with humankind, as Barth would say later. Despite an emphasis on the universality of God’s righteousness and mercy, his earlier doctrine of election does not point toward a revision of the relation between Christ and election, as some interpreters have claimed. The emphasis on God’s revelation in the divine address to human beings in history in the Göttingen Dogmatics strengthens an actualistic understanding, over against the christological emphasis on God’s revelation in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in Romans. Like Schleiermacher, Barth rejects the idea of eternal damnation, while he shies away from the affirmation of an eschatological universalism, although his teleological understanding of election has universal features. It would have been consistent if he had argued like Schleiermacher for a single predestination to salvation in Christ, since the construction of the doctrine along the lines of the concept of a single divine decree is close to Barth’s position. On the whole, Schleiermacher’s thesis of a universal predestination to salvation in Christ is more consistent with the emphasis on the unity of God’s will and decree that Barth’s earlier, actualistic view of double predestination.

Barth’s second revision of the doctrine is coherent with his earlier criticism of an anthropocentric and individualistic view, but it puts the doctrine on a new, christological foundation. The correlation of election and reprobation with the crucifixion of Jesus, which he owed to his good friend Pierre Maury, appears mentioned for the first time in the essay God’s Gracious Choice (1936), and the thesis that God actively chose to take on Himself reprobation and condemnation is
mentioned initially in Barth’s first series of Gifford Lectures (1937). A comprehensive revision was carried out between 1939 and 1941, in a lecture-course that became the seventh chapter of the *Church Dogmatics*. Systematically, predestination now is identical with election or, more precisely, the election of Jesus Christ. It is a *primal decision*, by which God determines not only humankind but also Himself, and a *gracious choice*, by which God chose reprobation for Himself and election for human beings. In his earlier work, Barth had already rejected the distribution of election and reprobation amongst two groups and affirmed their relevance for everyone but still presupposed that human beings are the sole object of predestination.

The idea of God’s self-determination for reprobation represents the climax of Barth’s christological revolution. The idea of Jesus Christ as the subject and object of election (in traditional language: the identity of the Logos with Jesus of Nazareth) overcomes the problematic distinction between God’s will in Jesus Christ and God’s eternal will.

Although Barth’s earlier position already included a critique of an abstract view of God’s eternal choice, only his second revision succeeds in defining election concretely, by equating the gracious choice with the election (and reprobation) of Jesus Christ. The teleological view of reprobation and election is preserved but with a new focus on Jesus Christ, the unique ‘atoning substitute’, to use Schleiermacher’s term. The christological revision also leads to a fuller consideration of the election of the congregation and of the individual, two topics that were neglected in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*.

My study has offered the first detailed comparison between Schleiermacher and the early Barth. The resemblance in Schleiermacher’s and Barth’s earlier understanding of election shows that the assumption of such a resemblance only in the later parts of the *Church Dogmatics* is unwarranted. Equally, the assumption of an irreconcilable opposition between Schleiermacher and the earlier Barth, which was promoted by Barth himself, should be given up as being at best too broad and at worst misleading. Comparisons of their thinking on other topics are potentially also rewarding.³ They

³ For example, Schleiermacher’s and Barth’s ecclesiology show remarkable similarities that are due to three shared fundamental convictions: a christological foundation, an absence of confessionalist bias and an egalitarian view of the ministry based on the idea of the priesthood of all believers.
should take into account the development of Barth’s thinking, if such an approach promises to be fruitful. In any event, they should focus on their respective constructive theological concerns and evaluate them independently from Barth’s own assessment of his relation to Schleiermacher.

Barth’s second, christological revision of the doctrine of election is consistent with his earlier refutation of particularistic concepts of election and redemption, which he shared with Schleiermacher. At the same time, it goes beyond Schleiermacher’s idea of a single decree and develops the idea of a concrete decree. Whereas Schleiermacher’s relation of predestination to the general world order and to the redemption through Jesus Christ leads to a subtle, unresolved ambiguity, Barth identifies predestination with the election of Jesus Christ and unambiguously claims that God’s will is truly constituted by the historical appearance of Jesus Christ, specifically the crucifixion and resurrection. It should be mentioned that Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, cannot be understood adequately, when the fundamental importance of the christological revision of vol. II/2 is not recognized.

Finally, Barth’s second revision results in two similarities with Schleiermacher’s position, which were not present in his earlier view. The mediating role of the Christian congregation, as a result of its election by Jesus Christ, is reminiscent of Schleiermacher’s emphasis on the corporate aspect of election and redemption. Moreover, Barth’s affirmation of universal election is very similar to Schleiermacher’s thesis of a universal predestination to salvation. Both consistently neither reject nor endorse but leave open the idea of an eschatological restitution and universal salvation. It is also noteworthy that in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 Barth does not repeat his allegation that Schleiermacher was approving of the idea, an allegation that he still upheld as late as 1936. Still, in regard to the idea of double predestination there remains a key difference. While Schleiermacher rejects the concept altogether, Barth modifies it twice. In *Church Dogmatics* II/2 it refers no longer to the twofold possibility of faith and unbelief, as in traditional views, but to the double determination of individual human beings and God’s own being. It helps to explain that God sees not simply all human beings but also Himself only in Christ.
Barth’s christological revision has been criticized for alleged overstatements and, more broadly, for its alleged ‘unscriptural speculative character’, while its basic thrust has been hailed as a ‘principal change to the positive’, particularly in the rejection of a symmetry between election and reprobation and in the definition of predestination as the sum of the gospel. It is ironic, however, that most objections target exactly the three points that made the positive change possible: the revised concept of double predestination, the idea of Jesus Christ as the electing God and the idea of Jesus Christ as the single reprobate. The net effect of this line of criticism is that it falls back onto a position that Barth tried to overcome.

Moreover, a positive change can be found already in his earlier, Schleiermacherian reconstruction of the doctrine, which did not yet set forth the contentious claims from Church Dogmatics II/2. In fact, the problematic asymmetry between election and reprobation was always rejected, even before Barth, by the majority of Protestant theologians, except for those who adhered to a strict view of double predestination. In sum, it is not clear why one should praise Barth for a significant advance in the doctrine when one actually disagrees with him on the points that are central for his achievement.

Instead of retracting central elements of Barth’s christological revision, it is more fruitful to emphasize the points where it could have been developed more consistently. In addition, one can ask whether Schleiermacher’s reconstruction of the doctrine might lead to insights that correspond to Barth’s intention even better than his own elaboration. Both possibilities shall be briefly explored.

We have noted specific ambiguities in Barth’s christological revision. It seems that he shied away from certain far-ranging implications of his own intuition. On occasion, his understanding

4 Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 289.
5 Ibid. 286, with further references.
6 Of course, it is also possible to arrive at Barth’s earlier position without rejecting explicitly his later revision. For example, see Robert Jenson, Systematic Theology, vol. II: The Works of God (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 178: ‘A right doctrine of individual predestination is precisely a doctrine about what happens to and for individuals when they encounter Christ in his gospel: that the judgment they then hear is nothing less than God’s eternal act of election.’ Jenson thinks that ‘Barth has the required and pathbreaking insight’ (ibid. 175) but he ignores the central feature of Barth’s insight: the idea of Jesus Christ as the subject (and not only the object) of election.
remained tied to traditional Reformed convictions about divine sovereignty and freedom. If the statement that Jesus Christ is the electing God is taken seriously, these views need to be modified accordingly. Recent developments in the realm of trinitarian thinking have stressed the importance to view God’s freedom not simply in terms of an arbitrary choice. At the same time, God’s triune being cannot be understood apart from the gracious choice made in Jesus Christ. Hence, the doctrine of the immanent trinity needs to be complemented by the doctrine of election, since only the latter spells out what Barth previously had defined as the meaning of the former: that God is fundamentally God for us already ‘in advance’.8

Like Schleiermacher, Barth also emphasizes the historical character of election and insists that predestination is not a pre-temporal divine choice about this or that person. At the same time, the act in which human beings are called to recognize their own election and to believe in the one who elected them, Jesus Christ, is not itself an act of predestination, as Barth thought even in his later revision. Here, a clearer distinction between election and regeneration (or calling) might be helpful and does not have to imply a dualism between eternity and time. If eternity is not regarded merely as the opposition of time but as the Inbegriff and constitution of time, a less actualistic and more dynamic understanding comes into view, and the historical process of salvation does not occur merely as a ‘leap’. Regeneration would be the beginning of a person’s individual ‘fellowship with Christ’, usually preceded by his or her participation in the outer circle of those who have been called to become attentive to the gospel. It implies a specific confession of faith and is acknowledged publically in the act of baptism.11

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9 See Pannenberg, Systematische Theologie, vol. 3, 487. In order to agree with his definition of time and eternity, it is not necessary to accept his further claim that only the whole of history is the temporal realization of the divine decree.
10 Schleiermacher, Der christliche Glaube, 2, 207 (§ 113.1).
11 Despite some unresolved problems, Barth was on the right track in Church Dogmatics IV/4, where he revised another one of his earlier views and stressed that baptism is the human response to God’s free grace.
Moreover, Barth’s understanding of the election of the congregation could be clarified in accordance with some ideas of his predecessor. His description of the function of the congregation is compatible with Schleiermacher’s view of election in the context of the generation of the Christian church. To be sure, the revision of the traditional particularism enables both theologians to take seriously the corporate aspect of election. Barth says that the election of individuals is the goal of the election of the congregation, but it is not necessary to regard the congregation itself as an object of election. Its task is to bear witness to Jesus Christ by proclaiming the election of the individual, as Barth says. Schleiermacher’s emphasis on the mutual influence among and the cooperation between the regenerate, together with his distinction between an outer and an inner community, can be helpful to illustrate the contours of this process and to make clear that the congregation is the mediating context but not itself an ‘object’ of election. The clarification helps to prevent the identification of any historical group of persons with the elect and all the violent consequences that could follow from such an identification. A principal caution regarding the idea of corporate election is clearly in line with Barth’s rejection of natural theology.

These are two possible examples how one could modify or clarify Barth’s position with the help of specific insights from Schleiermacher. A third option is to ask what Barth and Schleiermacher contribute to our reflections about a specific theological topic. As an example, the issue of universal salvation has come up repeatedly in the previous chapters.

From early on, critics charged that Barth’s new understanding of election bears ‘the danger or the unavoidable tendency toward an Apokatastasis’. Barth’s refusal to espouse such a conclusion was regarded as ‘materially incompatible with the whole thrust of

12 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 222. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 201. Similarly, Eph. 1:4, a verse that is often cited as proof-text for the idea of corporate election, does not refer to a fixed entity. The same is true for those passages from the Gospel of John, where Jesus speaks about the believers as the ones who are called or elected by God.

his doctrine of the gracious choice ... above all, with the basic principle ... that Jesus Christ is the only one who is really reprobate'. The affirmation of universal salvation, a charge that Barth himself brought against Schleiermacher, is, 'at first sight, the seemingly logical conclusion'. Barth’s caution on the issue can be explained in part by the fact that any affirmation of universalism would have meant the endorsement of an ecumenical heresy, which could have cost him dearly. The same might be true of Schleiermacher’s careful stance. Even a sympathetic interpreter introduced his criticism of Barth’s revision of double predestination with the sharp question: ‘Is this tenable in Christian theology?’

One should ask, however, whether a consistent theory of an Apokatastasis, far from presenting a danger or even a threat, might not be a more satisfying option than the claim that the New Testament leaves us with a paradoxical constellation of the ‘universalism of the divine salvific will’ versus the ‘particularism of judgment’. If one decides to end on such a note, an odd discrepancy remains. On the one hand, the possibility of an Apokatastasis is affirmed and the hope for it encouraged, since ‘all things are possible for God’ (Mt. 19:26), while on the other hand, any theological explanation is forbidden, since it would threaten God’s freedom. Barth himself left matters at that point, which did not prevent his critics from turning such indecision against him. Those who defend Barth’s position do not find the refusal to affirm the idea of universal salvation inconsistent with his christological revolution, since it is based on an understanding of election in ‘dynamic rather than static terms;

14 Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 348. Barth stresses the basic solidarity between believers and unbelievers, a point that was always fundamental for his theology and had important political implications. See Kreck, Grundentscheidungen in Barths Dogmatik, 268.

15 Berkouwer, Der Triumph der Gnade, 99. The term Apokatastasis was not clearly defined until the mid-sixth century. While it always implied the restoration of an original state of perfection, it did not always have to include the idea of universal salvation. See Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 38–44.


17 Von Balthasar, Karl Barth, 199.

18 Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 363.
[God] is unchangeable but not static, immutable but not immobile, constant but not to be presumed upon, faithful but never unfree. Typically, the result of such an approach is the admonition ‘to take this divine freedom seriously’. Other interpreters lament that there is ‘no entirely transparent rational solution for the problem of predestination’. But why should the doctrine of election be singled out to stress the limitations of reason? Few, if any, Christian doctrines offer such a clear-cut rational solution for the issues they tackle. In the essay on election, Schleiermacher points out that the doctrine of creation also leads to problems that are impossible to solve. Moreover, the steadfastness and goodness of God’s grace, to which the doctrine of election testifies, has been always described as a mystery that cannot be fully grasped by human reason. Barth himself was clearly aware of the principal limits of any doctrine of election, when he described his revision as the attempt to explain that the mystery of God’s election means ‘incomprehensible light’ rather than ‘incomprehensible darkness’. Hence, the lack of an ‘entirely transparent rational solution’ is no convincing argument against the affirmation of universal salvation.

Recent investigations have emphasized the various problems with previous responses to the question of universalism, including those that affirm the idea as a legitimate subject of Christian hope but deny it any assertive status in teaching. Both Schleiermacher and Barth are important conversation partners in the endeavour to achieve a more satisfying solution. They rejected the idea of a predestination to

20 Ibid. 160.
21 Kraus, Vorherbestimmung, 366.
22 Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. II/2, 158. ET Church Dogmatics II/2, 146.
23 See also Hartmut Rosenau, Allversöhnung: ein transzendentaler Grundlegungsversuch (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1993), 151–90 (on Schleiermacher) and 191–222 (on Barth). For a recent study on Paul’s view of the matter, see Richard H. Bell, ‘Rom. 5.18–19 and Universal Salvation’, New Testament Studies 48 (2002), 417–32. Bell concludes that Rom. 5 affirms the universality of participation in sin through Adam and of participation in grace through Christ: ‘acquittal which leads to life comes to all’ (ibid. 432).
damnation but did not take an explicit stand on the issue of the *Apokatastasis*. They affirm a universal election and their positions tend towards a soteriological universalism based on the general power of Christ’s redemptive work. In his essay on election, Schleiermacher comes closest to an affirmation, while in *The Christian Faith* he is more cautious and merely admits that it is as plausible as the assumption of an eternal damnation for some persons. While he accepts the idea of eternal salvation as a material topic in his eschatology, he relegates the idea of eternal damnation to an appendix. He acknowledges the legitimacy of the idea of ‘a general restoration of all human souls’ and attributes a higher probability to an outcome where everyone is saved, although it remains unclear whether this will occur as a gradual process or in a sudden moment at the return of Christ. Nevertheless, his ideas of a general redemption and a universal predestination to salvation in Christ support the rejection of a strict eschatological dualism.

In contrast, Barth’s affirmation of universal election in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 still includes an appeal to God’s freedom as a criterion that guards him (and God) against the affirmation of universal salvation. One can ask if such a stance is satisfactory, given Barth’s own insistence that the gracious choice is God’s eternal self-determination. Although Barth did not waiver in his affirmation of universal election, the question is whether the mere reference to God’s freedom contradicts the centre of his christological revision. It has a rather assertive status and seems to ‘tear open again, though in a modified way, the abyss of the *decretum absolutum et horribile’.* At this point,

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24 As a vivid example of the protest against the idea of eternal damnation for pastoral reasons, let us listen to words from a sermon preached at Westminster Abbey on 11 November 1877: ‘Thus then, finding nothing in Scripture or anywhere to prove that the fate of every man is, at death, irrevocably determined, I shake off the hideous incubus of atrocious conceptions—I mean those conceptions of unimaginable horror and physical excruciation endlessly prolonged—attached by popular ignorance and false theology to the doctrine of future retribution.’ Frederic W. Farrar, ‘“Hell”—What It Is Not’, in *Eternal Hope* (New York: E. P. Dutten and Co., 1877), 82–4. The sermon continues with a disclaimer: ‘But neither can I dogmatise on the other side . . . I cannot preach the certainty of Universalism’ (ibid. 84). Farrar concludes that ‘God has given us no clear and decisive revelation on the final condition of those who have died in sin’ (ibid. 86).

25 Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 2, 439 (§ 163, app.).

it is interesting to listen to Barth’s later conversation with a group of students in 1966, where he explains that God is faithful and steadfast but does not owe this faithfulness and steadfastness to anyone but Himself: ‘it is, if you will, the necessity of God’s free goodness [that] He acts with us in this way’.27

It might be possible to address the question of universal salvation anew along these lines, so that it will not be a mere paradox or contradiction if one speaks of the necessity of God’s acting. If one posits contingency, not freedom, as the antonym to necessity, Barth’s expression begins to make sense. God is bound not by a necessity external to His being and act but by the ‘internal necessity of his self-consistent grace’.28 At the same time, one should not ‘cheapen God’s grace’29 by positing a universal salvation that is indifferent over against historical conflicts and could lead again to a dualism between heaven and earth.30 The task will be to speak about God’s gracious choice and universal election in a way that remains sensitive to the fact that the Christian faith still waits for the full revelation of God’s glory for the sake of the whole creation. At the same time, we have to remember that Barth himself emphatically states at the beginning of his doctrine of election that God’s free and gracious election signifies unambiguously good news for all human beings:

The truth exactly of the doctrine of predestination is first and last . . . under all circumstances the sum of the gospel. It is gospel: good news, a joyful, uplifting, comforting and helpful message. . . . In particular, it is originally and finally not dialectical but undialectical. . . . Its final word, even in regard to [the other side of sin and evil], is in no case the threat, the condemnation, the punishment, the erecting of a barrier, or the tearing open of a ditch.31

For Schleiermacher, eschatological propositions did not possess the same status as other dogmatic propositions, but he and Barth might have agreed that the truth of the doctrine of predestination can hardly be different from the truth of eschatology. Shall there be a difference for us today?

29 Ibid. 140. For Colwell, the cheapening of grace consists in the assumption of a human ‘right’ to universal salvation, as opposed to the allowance that it is ‘at least a possibility for God’. Here, the qualification ‘at least’ needs to be clarified, and this is the central problem.
30 See Janowski, Allerlösung (vol. 2), 620–1.


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