

Toward a Homiletics of Reconciliation: How Karl Barth's Use of Enemy  
Language in *Church Dogmatics* Models a More Faithful Grammar for Preaching

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Note: For the sake of a fluid conversation with Barth using his own terms, I have applied Barth's masculine language in this essay, referring to humankind as "man," people as "men," a person as "a man," and capitalizing proper pronouns for God as "He," "Him," etc., though I am not at all working under the assumption that this is the most beneficial language for the church today.

*“I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* —Matthew 12:36-37

A woman once asked Karl Barth’s during a public discussion, “Herr Professor, can I be sure that I will see my loved ones in heaven?” He replied, “To be sure, you will see *not only* your ‘loved ones!’”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in an effort to avoid seeming abrasive, or because of a naturally playful and humorous disposition, Barth did not say, “You will also see your enemies.” It is more likely that Barth’s careful response carried much deeper theological undercurrents.

There are, throughout his *Church Dogmatics*, curiously diverse applications of the term “enemy” as a theological concept or category crucial for understanding God, his relationship to man, and man to his neighbor. There is a question as to how his magnum opus—very concerned with providing the church the proper grammar to say “God”—employs the kind of enemy language the Gospels use to inform the church of its participatory role in God’s reconciling mission to the world. Might there be a point of contention if Barth so meticulously constructs his doctrine of reconciliation with an anemic use of enemy language in a century soaked in blood violently spilled? Or might Barth’s theological language promote a renewed understanding of scripture, and provide a grammatical platform for preaching that encourages the healing of ecclesial divisions that contribute to the world’s violence? These questions call for an exploration of Karl Barth’s theology of reconciliation as it relates to his use of the term “enemy” as a theological concept in the context of Christian communities. This essay will first emphasize key

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<sup>1</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Barth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) 15.

elements of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation before engaging those particular passages in which Barth's use of enemy language is explicit. The paper will conclude with a discussion about what is at stake for the church, and more precisely for the practice of preaching in Baptist faith communities.

Beginning his foreword to Volume IV/1, Barth places the weight of his *Dogmatics* on the foundations of his Doctrine of Reconciliation. "To fail here is to fail everywhere. To be on the right track here makes it impossible to be completely mistaken in the whole."<sup>2</sup> Thus, several overarching themes of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation should provide a sturdy theological framework upon which fundamental questions about his use of enemy language may be addressed. A brief survey of these themes will serve to illuminate Barth's theology of reconciliation for the purposes of this investigation.

First and foremost, Barth believes the heart of the Christian message is primarily a statement, made by those assembled in the Christian community, that it is God who is with us as God. "God with us" is the core of the Christian message that moves from a narrower usage among those who already "know it but are always learning it afresh," to a wider usage incorporating "'us' other men who have always to learn it afresh because we do not yet know it, although we can know it."<sup>3</sup> "God with us" is not an object of investigation or speculation, but an event, an act, of which we may be witnesses. God simply *is*, and his being is what makes our existence possible. "The divine being and life and act takes place with ours, and it is only as the divine takes place that ours takes place."<sup>4</sup> Far more than being a statement about man's general existence as the will and work of God, "God with us" speaks of a single

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1*, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

and particular event that has significance for all time and space—the salvation of man.

“God with us” is God’s Yet and Nevertheless, His not merely coming alongside man, or to be before or behind him, but His becoming man for the sake of man.

God’s condescension to man to be with us results in man’s being exalted to God, not to be God or like God, but to be in fellowship with God. This new fellowship with God “does not mean the extinguishing of our humanity, but its establishment...our true and highest activation.”<sup>5</sup> God’s condescension to man also means there is included in the statement “God with us” a corresponding “We with God.” We are “summoned...lifted up...awakened to our own truest being as life and act...set in motion by the fact that in that one man God has made Himself our peacemaker and the giver and gift of our salvation.”<sup>6</sup> This summoning, lifting up, and awakening enables our participation in God’s being, our absorption into the history of the acts of God, our sharing in the grace of God’s condescension to man, and our freedom to exist and live responsibly as the Christian community. “This ‘We with God’ enclosed in the ‘God with us’ is Christian faith, Christian love, and Christian hope,” the heart of the Christian message.<sup>7</sup>

Barth is emphatic in his belief that we understand the meaning of “God with us” in the name and person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us, and God in the work of reconciliation.

The name of Jesus Christ covers the whole power of the Christian message because it indicates the whole of its content, because at its heart, which is normative for the whole, it is a message about Him, and therefore a message about the event of that ‘God with us’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 18.

Jesus Christ is very God and very man, the man in and through whom God both condescends to the man of sin and simultaneously exalts the man of sin. He is the first and eternal Word of God, the knowledge of whom is the subject-matter, origin and content of the doctrine of reconciliation. Jesus is the key to understanding the whole of the *Dogmatics*, and especially the doctrine of reconciliation. He is the Son of God who makes his way into the “far country,” the act whereby God, in His own power and will, humbles Himself to become the brother of man. In every aspect and part of this doctrine, Jesus Christ is “the beginning and the middle and the end.”<sup>9</sup> This does not mean God has given up being God in becoming a creature. “God gives Himself, but He does not give Himself away.”<sup>10</sup> God’s condescension to man in Jesus is precisely how God is revealed and reconciliation is achieved. In this Jesus, who is the Word of God, the Church finds the way to the realm of words in which it is made able to speak about God. Jesus creates the possibility of reconciling speech, and inaugurates for the faithful *the* way to utter the truth that once upon a time was unspeakable. In fact, “apart from and without Jesus Christ we can say *nothing at all* about God and man and their relationship one with another.”<sup>11</sup>

Barth defines reconciliation as “the fulfilment of the covenant between God and man.”<sup>12</sup> Reconciliation is the maintenance, restitution and resumption of a harmonious relationship and fellowship that used to exist between God and man, but that became threatened with annihilation. That original fellowship, which came under threat, but is now

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 45, emphasis mine.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 22.

restored and fulfilled in Jesus Christ through reconciliation, Barth describes as covenant.<sup>13</sup> “Jesus Christ is the Word and work of the eternal covenant.”<sup>14</sup> He is the content, subject, and basis—eternally and primarily—of this act of atonement. What God begins with Israel, Jesus brings into completion as the Mediator, the God-Man, God’s gift of grace to man made manifest by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ “*is* the atonement.”<sup>15</sup> He is “the eschatological realisation of the will of God for Israel and therefore for the whole race. And as such He is also the revelation of this divine will and therefore of the covenant.”<sup>16</sup> The “covenant as the presupposition of reconciliation” refers to the reconciliation made complete in the pre-existent *Deus pro nobis*, who is the first and eternal Word, of which Jesus Christ is the content and form. Reconciliation transpires in the refusal of this *Deus pro nobis* to abandon the world and man in the unlimited need of his situation, His will to bear this need as His own, His taking man’s need upon Himself, and crying with man in his need.<sup>17</sup>

Crucial to this investigation is Barth’s belief that the resurrection of Jesus did not occur merely spiritually or metaphysically. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was not, as Bultmann believed, a result of a spontaneous and simultaneous welling up of Easter faith among the disciples. The disciples did not induce the resurrection through warm recollections of their time together with Jesus. Rather, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was an event, following the scandal of the cross, that occurred within time and space. The resurrection,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 34, emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 215.

has necessarily to do with an event [as] something which cannot be disputed on any exegesis which is in any way sound or permissible. And we can widen the circumference of agreement which can be presupposed: the New Testament is speaking of an event in time and space.<sup>18</sup>

This resurrection from the dead is “the verdict of the Father,” the vindication of God’s saving purpose for man. “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great verdict of God, the fulfilment and proclamation of God’s decision concerning the event of the cross.”<sup>19</sup>

That the resurrection of Jesus as the verdict of the Father was an actual event in time and space is important for Barth’s theology of the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit is the awakening power in which Jesus Christ has formed and continually renews His body, i.e., His own earthly-historical form of existence, the one holy catholic and apostolic church.”<sup>20</sup> It is God the Holy Spirit who is about the business of reconciliation in Christ’s body as it exists in the earthly-historical Christian community, the gathering of justified humanity. We can know nothing at all about God and His relationship to man apart from this awakening power. Therefore, we cannot truly comprehend the nature and purpose of reconciliation apart from God’s reconciling activity as it occurs in and through the church. To be sure, it is not by man’s own power that he is able to participate in the divine act of reconciliation. If reconciliation is to take place “in the Christian community and Christian faith,

if man is to will what of himself he cannot will and do what of himself he cannot do, then it must be on the basis of a particular address and gift, in virtue of a particular awakening power of God, by which he is born again to this will and ability, to the freedom of this action, and under the lordship and impulse of which he is another man, in defiance of his being and status as a sinner. God in this particular address and gift, God in this awakening power, God as the Creator of this other man, is the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 643.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 645.

The above overview of key themes creates the necessary context for further exploration of Barth's use of enemy language. It provides the infrastructure for further discussion by defining the terms of the theological assertions Barth claims are the foundations of his *Dogmatics*: that God is God, that He is with us, and that we are with God. God is with us particularly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom God fulfills his original covenant with Israel, and in whose Spirit God continues to proclaim His love for the world through God's elect, the church. Most importantly, this overview confirms that henceforth every mention of enemy language within the *Dogmatics* falls within the purview of a theology that confesses a God who has *already* reconciled the world in Christ.

*Enemy* is in one sense a polyvalent word for Barth. He defines it in a number of ways, and applies the term in several different contexts. Yet, those contexts are always contained within the theological scope of his *Dogmatics*. One cannot comprehend Barth's enemy language apart from his doctrine of reconciliation, in particular. Barth is both careful and strategic when using the word *enemy*, whether in its singular or plural form. Discussions involving enemy language never define enemy in any generic sense. In each instance, the term has a distinct meaning for the Christian community, a meaning that would be unintelligible apart from the context of the church. For example, it becomes clear that Barth does not believe a man can presume to know who or what his true enemies are apart from his relationship with Jesus Christ. "On the little stool which he thinks is a throne, man does create facts."<sup>22</sup> These facts are not really facts but illusions.

And there begins the whole misery of the moral battle of everyone against everyone else, in which, whatever position we take up or line we adopt or banner

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<sup>22</sup> IV/I, 447.



we follow, we are always deceived about our friends as well as our enemies, wronging the former just as much by our affirmation as the latter by our negation, sowing and reaping discord as the children of discord.<sup>23</sup>

A man is able to discern his enemy only in his participation in the reconciling activity of God through the church, the body of Christ in its earthly-historical form. A non-Christian or unbeliever could not assume mutual understandings and shared definitions of enemy terminology with a confessing Christian. Barth's strict Christocentric grammar conscripts enemy language for the church.

When Barth speaks of the Church's and every Christian's mission being not to deny the mission of the state, but to include and transcend it, he models how to practice his claim in the way he speaks of the enemy. Though the state has tried to determine who the enemy is for everyone under its jurisdiction, the Christian includes the state's definition of enemy only to transcend that definition through the Christian practice of requiting like with unlike. "In this way it resists and overcomes the enemy, the man who refuses to accept the message of reconciliation. For it does not recognise him seriously as an enemy. It does not allow him to persist in his hostility to the extent of provoking retaliation."<sup>24</sup> The enemy is *the man who refuses to accept the message of reconciliation*. Though the state has told everyone—including the Christian—who the enemy is, the Christian transcends the state's definition, receiving the enemy while refusing to become his enemy. The word *enemy* appears to be a universally accepted term when the state defines it, yet despite the state's given framework, the Christian is not seduced. Even within this framework, "he does not refuse communion to the enemy, but to evil. And for this reason he seeks it even with the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>24</sup> II/2, 721.

enemy.”<sup>25</sup> Because the Christian has accepted God’s message of reconciliation in Jesus, he is able to recognize those who have not yet done so, and to respond to them as one who knows what those outside the Christian community do not yet know.

From this perspective of Barth’s, it would seem that a Christian could never truly have enemies, especially if he continually seeks communion with them. Is it a contradiction to identify as an enemy someone with whom communion is sought? Does this mean the Christian’s enemy is also simultaneously his neighbor? At times, Barth moves freely between these two seemingly contradictory terms—neighbor and enemy. The Christian has a neighbor in one to whom he shows mercy. “We see and have a neighbor when we are wholly the givers and he can only receive.”<sup>26</sup> But in the same line of thought, the neighbor can also be an enemy. “We see and have [a neighbor] when he cannot repay us and especially when he is an enemy, someone who hates us and injures us and persecutes us.”<sup>27</sup> The neighbor and the enemy of the Christian can be one and the same person. The neighbor and the enemy are the same person *especially* when the enemy hates, injures, and persecutes us (the “us” is in reference to Christians). The enemy’s injurious intentions heighten the necessity of the Christian to respond to his enemy as a neighbor, as this one in need of the unconditional mercy of the Christian. Barth extends a parallel idea from Jesus’ command in Matthew 5:44 that the disciples should love their enemies. “This destroys the whole friend-foe relationship, for when we love our enemy he ceases to be our enemy.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> I/2, 419.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> IV/2, 550.

Barth believes the act of what the New Testament calls love can only take place between Christians. This does not mean the Christian community is an end in itself, but that it exists for the sake of the world, so that the love between Christians serves as a “representative manifestation of the action for which all are determined.”<sup>29</sup> This love is, therefore, *not* a universal love of humanity. It is not *agape* for everyone. The love of God and of Jesus can neither be practiced by all, nor addressed to all, with the following exception:

It is in respect of the love demanded in Mt. 5:43-48—not also but specifically—for the enemy, for the persecutor of the community, to be addressed to him in the form of intercession...As the most interesting and relevant form of the non-Christian the enemy is proleptically received into the community when he is loved and not hated.<sup>30</sup>

The love exchanged between members of the body of Christ occurs within the Christian community, which, with the exception of the enemy’s piercing it, remains a closed circle of disciples. The Christian is ready to love everyone, but the love he is ready to give can only come from within the Christian community that knows how to love. The opportunity to love the enemy is that unique circumstance in which the Christian may display the extraordinary quality of the love of God and of Jesus formed in him by the fellowship of believers.

There is a similar dialectic in the *Dogmatics* in relation to whether God has enemies. Just as the Christian may have an enemy who is simultaneously a neighbor, so God has enemies whom he simultaneously loves and draws close to Himself as friends. It is an example of the Yet and Nevertheless of God’s reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ that man is both God’s enemy and friend.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 805.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

So far as God's revelation as such achieves, what only God can achieve, namely, the restoration of man's communion with God, destroyed, nay annihilated by us, so far as, in the fact of revelation, God's enemies are already His friends, revelation itself is reconciliation.<sup>31</sup>

On the one hand, yes, God has enemies. *We* are God's enemies. We are the enemies of God "because our disposition to Him is hostile."<sup>32</sup> We are "defiant sinners, the obstinately godless, the open enemies of God."<sup>33</sup> We are God's *bitterest* enemies.<sup>34</sup> To be God's enemy is the "guilty determination of our existence."<sup>35</sup> To be God's enemy is to be hopelessly lost, given to perdition without mercy or refuge, counsel or help. "All men have to look...and see themselves as they really are, and confess that their cloaks are only cloaks, and that in reality they too are manifestly enemies of God."<sup>36</sup>

There are no exceptions. There is no haven where the Christian, the man caught up in participation with God's activity on the world's behalf, is exempted from this enemy status. Even the likes of Enoch, Moses, and Elijah hold no special place in this sense, and they have no ability to choose to die "gladly" or "full of years." There is no such general privilege. That each of them did so amounts to "an extraordinary intervention of God...They themselves have no capacity to choose such an end. They are all God's debtors and enemies. Of themselves, they can only die an evil death."<sup>37</sup>

Man is God's enemy because of the negative act of his rebellion against God's grace. Man is particularly the enemy of God in that he is the enemy of the grace of God. Man in

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<sup>31</sup> I/I, 468 (409).

<sup>32</sup> IV/I, 515.

<sup>33</sup> IV/I, 282.

<sup>34</sup> I/2, 380.

<sup>35</sup> II/I, 398.

<sup>36</sup> III/3, 222.

<sup>37</sup> III/2, 637.

his hostility toward God rejects God's free gift of Himself to man. It is precisely to man as the rejector of God's grace that,

God's choice has given that which was inaccessible to him and undeserved by him—and more, that which he has positively rejected—the grace of God. This grace is for him, the enemy of God, in spite of his enmity and in spite of his negative act, rejecting his representation of himself as rejected, forgiving his sins, as the justification of the godless.<sup>38</sup>

God gives Himself to man but is rejected by man, in spite of the fact that God has given Himself fully to him on the cross. It is this man, man as hater of God, who in spite of God's grace continues to hate God and be hateful to God, that God recognizes as His enemy. "From eternity God knows every man to be *this* enemy."<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, though he is God's bitter enemy, there is hope for man established from eternity in Jesus Christ. "Those who come to Christ were already sons of God in his heart, though in themselves they were still his enemies. And since they had been predestined to life, they were given to Christ."<sup>40</sup> Apart from God's condescension to man in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we would be left to destruction, to God's anger and judgment. Left to our own devices, we would have incurred divine judgment and wrath. Thus, because of God's redeeming work in Jesus, man cannot remain God's enemy.

Indeed the first and essential thing that He has decreed for [man] in His Son is his election to covenant with Him. He loves His enemies, the godless: not because they are godless; not because they seek to be free of Him; but because He will not let them break away; because in consequence they cannot really break away from Him. What is laid up for man is eternal life in fellowship with God.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> II/2, 317.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>40</sup> II/2, 328 (Barth quoting Calvin; the above is translated from Latin).

<sup>41</sup> II/2, 319.

Man is God's enemy, but by God's grace that is not the end of the matter. "God loves man as this enemy."<sup>42</sup> In this love for man as His enemy we see the full disclosure of the sovereignty of God, who loves man despite man's being unworthy of His love. God "loves him notwithstanding his unworthiness and hostility. Indeed, He loves him just because of it."<sup>43</sup>

While "the falsehood of man is the great enemy which resists the divine promise declared in the prophetic work of Jesus Christ, but which is at once smitten and routed by the immanent power of this promise, the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"<sup>44</sup> man also manages to make God his enemy. Man seeks his own way. He believes he can be free without God, and make decisions on his own apart from God. Man in his stupidity, in his sloth and misery, becomes a man of disorder. "And as we become and are men of disorder, God necessarily becomes a stranger and enemy. For He is a God of order and peace. He is the Creator and Guarantor of the peace designed for man in his own nature as the soul of his body."<sup>45</sup> In the folly of his pride, man has not only become *God's* enemy, but has also made God *his* enemy. Such is the nature and cause of the utter hopelessness of man apart from God's determination to save him.

Man cannot save himself. "Man may think that he can and should be gracious to himself, but this is impossible. He thinks and acts as his own helper, but believing that he is his own best friend he is all the time his own worst enemy."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, man, as believer in himself as such, becomes a stranger to himself, an enemy of faith in God's "divine readiness"

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<sup>42</sup> IV/2, 767.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> IV/3, 434.

<sup>45</sup> IV/2, 460.

<sup>46</sup> IV/1, 465.

to help man in his dire need. “The enemy of this faith...is man’s faith in himself.”<sup>47</sup> This rejection of God’s graciousness constitutes a sickness in man manifested in his confession of sin both in the world and in himself. He confesses in a “friend-enemy relationship” to God when, in the instance of his presupposing God’s opposition to all things human, he forgets that God is the gracious God. He confesses as,

God’s detective, policeman and bailiff, against various things in the world and the Church, and, if he is sincere, supremely against himself. For the fact that a man is basically at war against himself can only lead him in his confessing to war against others, just as in confessing against others he will always be led back to the war against himself.<sup>48</sup>

Though at times such confessing seems a sincere act, it betrays a fundamental assumption that God is not for His creation. This amounts to a perversion that breeds “doubt and hatred against God in others and supremely in himself!”<sup>49</sup> Here is one significant exemplar of man’s rejection of God’s having already reconciled the world to himself in Jesus. This rejection of God’s grace is the root cause of man’s status as his own worst enemy. Man fails to comprehend not only that God has acted to save him despite his sin, but that *only* God can accomplish his salvation. Barth illumines the distinction in biblical Greek between *καταλλάσσειν* (reconciling), which is said only of God, and *καταλλαγήναι* (being reconciled) said only of man.<sup>50</sup> God does the reconciling. Man can only be the passive recipient of the gift only God can give.

To acquire character—which Barth calls “a work of the grace of God on man”<sup>51</sup>—man must realize he is in this particular struggle against himself. His acquisition of character

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<sup>47</sup> III/1, 40.

<sup>48</sup> III/4, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>50</sup> IV/1, 74.

<sup>51</sup> III/4, 388.

occurs through “a very different and more difficult struggle than the one against strange influences, external authorities etc. can ever be—a struggle in which he must take the field not only for but primarily *against himself* and press on to freedom.”<sup>52</sup> Man’s pride causes him to turn away from God toward himself, to become curved in upon his own self (Augustine). This is exactly what is wrong with man. The pride-fueled movement away from God alienates a man from God, makes God his enemy, and invites the wrath of God.<sup>53</sup> In the final analysis, man becomes an enemy both of God and of himself in this betrayal of God. We cannot realize or acknowledge and confess this on our own. We may know it “solely from the divine accusation levelled against us, and therefore solely from the Word of God.”<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, God and man also have several enemies in common. One of those enemies is, literally, *nothing*. Nothing, or “nothingness,” is that which aims to destroy man, that does not let man breathe and live, that harasses him with fear and pain, and as such is both the enemy of God and of man. “God Himself engages the nothingness...and opposes and contradicts its onslaught on His creation and triumph over His creature.”<sup>55</sup> Nothingness is the uncompromising adversary, the “negative which is more than the mere complement of an antithetical positive,” the antithesis to God Himself and to “the totality of the created world.”<sup>56</sup> It can only be active in creation as an absolute alien that opposes and contradicts all positive and negative elements of creation, though it has “no substantive

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> IV/1, 533.

<sup>54</sup> III/2, 30.

<sup>55</sup> IV/2, 225.

<sup>56</sup> III/3, 302.



existence within creation.”<sup>57</sup> Nothingness is “aberration, transgression, evil.”<sup>58</sup> It can only be perceived and discerned through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who became flesh, who revealed God to us in the flesh, and who therefore is the source of all Christian knowledge. In Jesus, God has already defeated this enemy of nothingness. He stands victorious over nothingness, having made it to be impotent by the incarnation through which He revealed its true nature and threat.<sup>59</sup> Because nothingness is God’s enemy, “because it is *He* who allows it to be this, because He has made the controversy with it *His* affair, it cannot be an eternal enemy or have perpetuity.”<sup>60</sup>

Another common enemy between God and man is sin, which relates directly to nothingness. God,

opposes and contradicts sin because it is sin which opens the door for the invasion of His creation by nothingness, because in sin the creature delivers itself up to it, itself becoming futile and chaotic. He is wrathful against His own true enemy, which is also the true enemy of man, when He is wrathful against sin.

Sin is a complex term, as Barth defines it both as an enemy of both God and man, but also as something that causes a man to become an enemy of God. When a man sins, he places himself against God as an enemy. Sin is a verb and a noun, an act and an entity. In both its forms, though, it remains a common enemy between God and man. Sin turns man and creation against the grain of God’s saving activity on behalf of His creatures and His creation, and against God’s intentions for man. Just as Adam’s sin opened the door to creation’s invasion by nothingness, every sin of every man opens the door to nothingness

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 362, original emphasis.

again and again. Apart from God's triumph over sin in Jesus Christ, nothingness would continue in its threat toward creation unabated.

Death is the primary obstacle for God in His victory over sin and nothingness, making death, itself, yet another enemy in Barth's *Dogmatics*. Death is the "condemnation and destruction of the creature...the offender against God and the last enemy."<sup>61</sup> But by Jesus' resurrection from the dead, God reveals that He has put an end to death, and to the onslaught of nothingness and its power to destroy man. In His incarnation, Jesus, who is God Himself, exposes Himself to annihilation by death, but confirms His victory over it in being raised from the dead.

In Him, i.e., in contradistinction to Him, nothingness is exposed in its entirety as the adversary which can destroy both body and soul in hell, as the evil one which is also the destructive factor of evil and death that stands in sinister conflict against the creature and its Creator, not merely as an idea which man may conceive and to which he can and does give allegiance but as the power which invades and subjugates and carries him away captive, so that he is wholly and utterly lost in fact of it.<sup>62</sup>

Thus far, this exploration has revealed the diversity of enemy language Barth uses to illustrate his claims about God, God's relationship to man, and man's relationship to others. It is clear that Barth believes God has enemies. Mainly, those enemies include man, nothingness, sin, and death.<sup>63</sup> Man has numerous enemies, as well, including God, nothingness, sin, death, and himself. On the other hand, the enemy relationship between God and man is not permanent or concretized. Man's hostility toward God has been overcome in Jesus Christ, who, as "God With Us," has stood in man's place and abolished

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<sup>61</sup> III/3, 312.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> It may be helpful to note a peculiar instance in which Barth refers to the *Gospel* as having enemies, which he calls nominal Christians: "And to-day, it is not the righteousness of works which is the enemy of the Gospel, but the indifference and the secularism of the masses who are only nominally Christian" (I/2, 655).

the hostility between us and God. God is not inimical toward man, though a man in his sin may choose to remain hostile to God. Even then, God lovingly seeks to expose his foolishness and hostility, and to lead him into the truth that God has already achieved reconciliation between Himself and man in Jesus Christ.

Though Barth speaks of God having enemies in the present tense, it seems he only does so to clarify what he believes is actually true theologically. Barth even bypasses any use of enemy language that is resigned to the permanency of inimical relationships. The trajectory of his language and his entire Doctrine of Reconciliation suggests what is theologically true about God is that, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God has abolished man's status as an enemy. Quoting Romans 5:16, Barth says, "Christians were reconciled to God when they were still enemies."<sup>64</sup> Since Jesus has taken on man's flesh and identified Himself with the enemies of God, man can no longer be God's enemy, for then Jesus would be implicated. This is impossible, since then Jesus, who is very God, would be set against God. God would be divided against Himself.

It is also clear that Barth sees Christians' enemies as those who approach the community from the outside with inimical, harmful, and injurious purposes. The enemy of the Christian is the one who rejects the love the Christian offers, who continues to do violence, mock, persecute, and denigrate the Church in spite of the love extended to him. This is part of Barth's interpretation of Jesus' admonition in the Sermon on the Mount to "love your enemies." Because it is an address to his disciples—those in his immediate circle, seated before him as those eager to listen, those who have accepted his call to come and follow—there is no reference to animosity other than the particular kind that is directed

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<sup>64</sup> II/2, 720.

from the world to the Church. After all, the Sermon is not merely an address to the general public, though anyone within earshot of Jesus' witness is welcome to join the disciples and follow him.

What remains to be seen is whether the case can be made that Barth could conceive of Christians being enemies *with each other*. Barth assumes a kind of impenetrable unity among Christians; they remain united in a cohesive unit in terms of their turning to embrace their enemies. They can do so in complete confidence that God has already arranged their success in this endeavor.

Christians do not need to form a party in the struggle against the wicked, but can and must continue undismayed to tread the way of fellowship with the latter, because God has long ago taken sides against their violence, has long since barred their way so that although they may rattle the bolt they cannot open the door.<sup>65</sup>

For Barth, God is united with Himself in His abolishing the hostility between Himself and man, and man is approached by God in this act of redemption as one entity. As well, Christians, as the members of one Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church, are united not in opposition to but on behalf of their enemies. The wicked compose another entity, as is seen in the way Barth depicts them as one distinct side in this meeting, which is "objectively controlled by the order which God, the Father of Jesus Christ, has established and confirmed even in the world outside the Church, His Son being the King and Ruler over all powers, and ruling as such in might."<sup>66</sup> The point is that Barth leans away from any gray area in which a Christian could define another Christian as an enemy. Christians have enemies, yes, but Barth never sets a conversation in the context of Christians considering other Christians as enemies. His interpretation is that, from cover to cover, the Bible does

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 721.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

not refer either to Israel's or the Church's enemies as coming from within their respective faith communities. Barth sees a specific kind of enmity as constitutive of a Christian's true enemy, an enmity born out of the rejection of the Church's testimony and visible witness of God's reconciling activity in Jesus Christ. Therefore, a Christian is by definition incapable of *this* kind of enmity toward another Christian, since in order to have such enmity one must stand outside the saving knowledge of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Has Barth carefully appropriated enemy language in his varied uses and multiple applications? Has he given enough thought to how beneficial this aspect of his theological-grammatical model might be for the Church as it is drawn into participation in God's reconciliation of the world? Would it be fair to ask how the Church catholic is supposed to navigate through the world as Barth sees it if, when Christians kill other Christians, such hostility stands outside the range of Jesus' emphatic imperative, "Love your enemies"?

This exploration reveals that it cannot be the case that as important a thinker for the Church as Barth has sidestepped such a crucial question. For Barth, the reality that Christians have already killed and continue to kill other Christians cannot override the truth about God that Barth exhaustively asserts on biblical grounds, that in Jesus Christ "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."<sup>67</sup> The reconciliation has already taken place. Sin and death have already been defeated. God has reconciled man to Himself in Jesus Christ. There are those who acknowledge that this has been done, but then there are those who do not, who have already acknowledged this truth and live as though they have not. The divisions in the

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<sup>67</sup> Colossians 1:19-20.

Church caused by those in the latter category Barth calls “a dark mystery, a *scandal*,” for “the disunity of the Church is a scandal.”<sup>68</sup>

If a man can acquiesce in divisions, if he can even take pleasure in them, if he can be complacent in relation to the obvious faults and errors of others and therefore his own responsibility for them, then that man may be a good and loyal confessor in the sense of his own particular denomination, he may be a good Roman Catholic or Reformed or Orthodox or Baptist, but he must not imagine that he is a good Christian. He has not honestly and seriously believed and known and confessed the *una ecclesia*. For the *una ecclesia* cannot exist if there is a second or third side by side with or opposed to it. It cannot exist in opposition to another Church. It cannot be one among many.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, Barth believed “the co-existence and opposition of the Churches in place of the one Church has...been a very potent factor for evil,”<sup>70</sup> meaning, in part, that division in the Church has been both a cause and a catalyst for the world’s violence. In these statements we detect Barth’s pain resulting from a shortage of words to explain even Christians’ hatred of one another. It is as though Barth comes to the end of words—in the literal sense—when categorizing these utter failures as “mystery” and “scandal.” He provides a way for the church to speak about its own who are in opposition to one another, who harbor murderous enmity toward one another. Yet, it is hard to bear the heavy weight of Barth’s argument that some Christians are simply not good Christians (he does not say they are not Christian, but that they are not *good* Christians). If Barth is right, even these bad Christians must be included as members of Christ’s body, a body that bleeds most profusely from its self-inflicted wounds.

What this exploration reveals, though, is that Barth is mercurial in the way he uses enemy language. For example, an inconsistency emerges in his speaking of man being his

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<sup>68</sup> IV/1, 676-677.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 676.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 677.

own worst enemy, while at the same time not allowing for a Christian to be the enemy of another Christian. If a man, whether Christian or not, can be his own worst enemy, why can a Christian not consider another Christian an enemy? If a man, even a Christian, considers himself his own worst enemy, what is to prevent him from considering another member of the Church—a member of the same body, of which his own body is a part—as an enemy? Furthermore, it is doubtful that Barth's theological agenda, and his own refusal to acknowledge Christians' being enemies of one another, would prevent a Christian in the sight of another Christian's rifle, or at the mercy of another Christian's machete, from considering his combatant as an enemy.

But this is not, and should not be, unthinkable. Ironically, Barth's theology of reconciliation fills these grammatical gaps. Whether Barth himself provides the Church with a grammar that permits a Christian to consider another Christian an enemy or not, his conviction that God has already reconciled the world to Himself in Christ guides his intentional avoidance of naming Christians as enemies of one another. Here is where Barth's theology of reconciliation is so important for how and why the Church should use enemy language. Even though Barth wrote in the midst of a century of World Wars and genocides in which millions of Christians slaughtered one another, he refuses to depart from the New Testament's own refusal to establish a language whereby Christians may categorize one another as enemies. Because God is God, we can only be whoever God says we are. If the God who is fully revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ says He has reconciled all people to Himself, and Christians are witnesses of this truth, then confessing Christians who regard other Christians as enemies have simply forgotten who God says they are. If their language toward one another is unintelligible as Christian speech, then it is a

fallen language they speak. It is sinful speech. For if it is through hearing that we are saved, it is through speech that the world of God's kingdom is revealed to us. Even if a Christian were to hold his sword to another Christian's throat and call him an enemy, he tells a lie. It may be a "factual lie," in the sense that the one speaking it may believe he is telling the truth, but it is still a lie. In God's eyes, they are neighbors who either lack the capacity to name one another as such, or refuse to do so.

Such a refusal would be tantamount to committing the unforgivable sin. For Barth, it is not suicide that constitutes the unforgivable sin, but works righteousness—acting on the belief that we earn grace apart from God's merciful acts.<sup>71</sup> Works righteousness is rooted in the belief that God is not the merciful God He says He is. In all three synoptic Gospels in which Jesus refers to the unforgivable sin, He does so following a Pharisaic challenge to his divine authority to cast out demons. The common link throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke on this matter is blasphemy—irreverent speech, or impious speech against God. It is an unforgivable sin to speak as though God has not done in Jesus what Jesus says God has done through Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. The unforgivable sin is a sin of speech, a trespassing utterance. After mentioning the unforgivable sin in Matthew, Jesus says, "I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

For a Christian to call another Christian an enemy, even as his opponent's hands are tightening around his throat, is an unforgivable sin. It is unforgivable because it denies not only that the Christian's brother-oppressor is forgiven, but that the Christian-victim is also

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<sup>71</sup> For Barth's discussion on suicide and the unforgivable sin, see III/4, 404ff.



forgiven. Christians are those who forgive because they have been made participants in the saving knowledge that God has forgiven them. Though a Christian may be the victim of another Christian's violence, by calling him an enemy, he has rejected the truth that his murderer is also his neighbor, joined to him in baptism, forgiven, and, therefore, deserving of the unlimited forgiveness commanded by Jesus to be extended between church members.<sup>72</sup>

This will be of small consolation to the Christian who is about to have one of his appendages severed by another Christian. Nevertheless, God has done what God has done. This is the truth that the martyrs have told by their deaths, that no matter who threatens the body, the One to be feared is Him who has authority to cast into Hell. If the Church has long been so massively unfaithful that its members have neglected to cultivate the kind of language already given to them as a gift in the Scriptures (and to which Barth points us), and have thus wounded, maimed, and killed so many of their own as a result, then preachers must stand among those worthy of blame. Those to whom the message of reconciliation has been entrusted have been too slow to proclaim the truth Barth has challenged us to remember, which is that God has already made His decision about us:

“The man who is isolated over against God is as such rejected by God. But to be this man can only be by the godless man's own choice. The witness of the community of God to every individual man consists in this: that this choice of the godless man is void; that he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and therefore is not rejected, but elected by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> i.e. Matthew 18:21-22.

<sup>73</sup> II/2, 306.

Preachers have been given the task of cultivating the Church's speech as redeemed, either in response to, or in denial of, this unwavering truth. Those called to preach must be the first to teach the Church to live in response to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. The challenge is for congregations to narrate their life together by the speech God has revealed in Christ, where no matter who a Christian labels as his enemy, room at the table is made for them at all costs. If Christians would have this extraordinary grammar written on their hearts, it would only be because their journey began in hearing the correct grammar first. To be on the right track here will make it impossible to be completely mistaken in the whole.

It will inevitably be said that such a conclusion is not "realistic." We cannot realistically expect Baptists, in particular, to experience a renaissance of theological grammar that begins with faithful preaching and results in complete, harmonious reconciliation between fundamentalists and moderate Baptists, for example. Nor could we ever realistically expect a revolution in Baptist preaching constituted by Barthian assertions that would lead to Cooperative, American, National and Southern Baptists's coalescing around an identical mission and vision. It would be impossible to apply Barth's reconciling rhetoric to preaching in the hopes of vindicating even the last 30 years of Baptists politics in the United States. What could a Baptist preacher say to expel the endemic racism, reverse the political maneuvers, or prohibit office locks from being changed?

We should not be cowed by the latter questions. The purpose of a kind of preaching that refuses to categorize Christians in terms that Barth has exposed as unfaithful would not be to change Baptist polity from the top down. One could confidently say the most constructive contributions Baptists have made to the church catholic in their 400 year

history have rarely resulted in strategies that were theologically practical from the top down. But this is precisely why Baptists are uniquely positioned to promote a homiletical model of reconciliation that takes Barth's theology seriously. The centrality of preaching and its importance for weekly worship in Baptist churches enables Baptists of any persuasion to cultivate spaces via redemptive speech, in which "the strange new world of the Bible" may be performed, and in which the assumed categories of neighbor and enemy may re-imagined.

The primary intention of a homiletical performance of Barth's theology of reconciliation by Baptists would be to cultivate a radical imagination, catalyzed by this renewed understanding of scripture offered as a gift through preaching, that has a diminishing effect on the perceived permanency of our current divisions. If the aim of the reconciling sermon is not to force Christians to reign in their careless enemy language, but to expose the truth about the way the world is from God's perspective, then a reconciling sermon preached from a platform with Barthian pillars would enable a particular Baptist community to see itself as inextricably attached to the same Body as another Baptist community with whom it has seemingly insurmountable disagreements. The goal would not be to remake both communities into a unified institution, but to nurture the renewed language that would enable those with reconciling intentions to serve as witnesses of the reconciliation God has enacted in Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Indeed, what Barth calls "the strange new world of the Bible" is not an imaginary world. The reconciling sermon is not an exercise in imagining how Christians can make the world a better place, but an act that enables us to understand God and one another in light of what God has already done and continues to do in our midst. A reconciling sermon

reveals, on the Bible's own terms, the ways in which God's will is being done in our midst that have thus far remained invisible to us. Such reconciling speech makes a new world visible, which does not merely manifest *what* Christians should *do*, but first *who* we already *are*—people called to convert our enemies to neighbors through the love of Christ. Since the practice of preaching has been a remarkable force for the growth of the Baptist faith, and thus for the upbuilding of the Church catholic, would not the implementation of such reconciling language in Baptist pulpits serve as a witness to the rest of the Body of Christ of the grammatical faithfulness required to rekindle the church's ongoing participation in God's reconciling mission. Hopefully, Barth's own careful use of enemy language will provoke Baptists to pursue a more faithful grammar for the church. By unleashing from their pulpits the torrential truth that Christians have no enemies that God has not already either defeated or called neighbors, they would call the church to live faithfully into the world its own language has already revealed. This is not too fantastic to envisage, but a real possibility that lies just on the other side of every reconciling sermon.