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Missing Persons:
Individual Eschatology in Twentieth Century
Protestant Theology


Donald Gordon MacEwan

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
at the University of Dublin, 2000

Missing Persons

Irish and Exoticism in Twentieth Century
Protestant Theology

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To Maya

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xi
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SUMMARY	xii
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ONE. INTRODUCTION: THE ECLIPSE OF INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY

1. Thesis	1
2. Eschatology: Individual and Cosmic	1
3. Heaven in the Twentieth Century	3
4. The Quest for the Eschatological Jesus	4
5. A Path Through Twentieth Century Eschatology	8
6. Recent Scholarship	13
7. Outline of Chapters	15

TWO. VARIETIES OF CLASSICAL PROTESTANT HOPE: LUTHER AND CALVIN

1. Introduction	22
2. Luther	23
<i>Approach to Eschatology and Anthropology</i>	23
<i>Death</i>	25
<i>The Resurrection of Christ</i>	27
<i>Shape of Eternal Life</i>	28

3. Calvin	31
<i>Introduction</i>	31
<i>Nature and Revelation</i>	33
<i>Anthropology</i>	34
<i>Death</i>	38
<i>Interim State</i>	40
<i>The Resurrection of Christ</i>	42
<i>Human Resurrection and Eternal Life</i>	42
4. The Patterns of Traditional Protestant Individual Eschatology	45
<i>Common Ground between Luther and Calvin</i>	46
<i>Points of Difference between Luther and Calvin</i>	47
<i>Twentieth Century Critique</i>	49
5. Conclusion	54

THREE. RUDOLF BULTMANN: DEMYTHOLOGIZED HOPE

1. Introduction	56
2. Sources of Theology	57
3. New Testament Development	64
4. Being a Christian	67
5. Death and Life	70
6. Bultmann and his Critics	74
7. Conclusion	82

**FOUR. KARL BARTH: ETERNAL LIFE AS THE ETERNALIZATION
OF LIMITED LIFE**

1. Introduction	85
2. Eschatology as the Otherness of God	86
<i>Romans</i>	86
<i>The Resurrection of the Dead</i>	90
<i>Pre-Dogmatic Eschatology</i>	93
3. Christological Eschatology	95
<i>The Meaning of God's Eternity</i>	95
<i>The Creature</i>	98
<i>The Creature in Time</i>	104
<i>Death and Beyond</i>	109
4. Analysis of Barth's individual eschatology	120
<i>Eternalization: Logic and Difficulties</i>	120
<i>Comparison with Luther and Calvin</i>	127

FIVE. JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN: THE NEW CREATION OF ALL THINGS

1. Introduction	130
2. Hope Seeking Understanding	131
<i>Hope and its Implications</i>	131
<i>Hope and its Alternatives</i>	137
3. Criticism: The Need for Life After Death	139
4. The Completed History of Human Lives	141

5. <i>The Coming of God: Answers and Questions</i>	149
<i>Resignation: a Fair Characterization?</i>	149
<i>Resignation and the New Creation of All Things</i>	151
<i>Theodicy</i>	156
6. Conclusion	158

SIX. EBERHARD JÜNGEL: HISTORY MADE ARTICULATE

1. Introduction	160
2. God's Self-Disclosure as the Origin of Theology	161
3. The Definition of Human Being	163
4. Death in the Bible	168
<i>Old Testament</i>	168
<i>New Testament: the Death of Jesus</i>	170
<i>New Testament: the Nature of Death</i>	172
<i>Is Death Natural?</i>	174
5. Judgment and Eternal life	176
<i>Judgment and Forgiveness</i>	176
<i>Eternal Life</i>	178
6. Critical Issues	180
<i>Epistemology</i>	181
<i>Resurrection</i>	182
<i>Passivity in Death</i>	184

7. Comparison with Bultmann, Barth and Moltmann	187
<i>Bultmann</i>	187
<i>Barth</i>	188
<i>Moltmann</i>	192
8. Conclusion	193

**SEVEN. TWENTIETH CENTURY PROTESTANT INDIVIDUAL
ESCHATOLOGY: CONTENT AND METHOD**

1. Introduction	194
2. The Shape of Individual Eschatology in Twentieth Century Protestant Theology	195
<i>Outline of a Common Approach</i>	196
<i>Evaluation: the Loss of the Subject</i>	203
3. The Rejection of Natural Theology	205
<i>Bultmann and Barth</i>	207
<i>Moltmann and Jünger</i>	216
4. Natural Theology and Immortality	222
<i>The Marginalization of Individual Eschatology</i>	222
<i>The Dispatch of Immortality</i>	227
<i>A Distorted Exegesis?</i>	231
5. Theology as Both Natural and Revealed	232
6. Conclusion	239

EIGHT. HUMAN PERSONS, IMMORTALITY AND HEAVEN

1. Introduction	241
2. Anthropology	242
3. Time and Eternity	250
4. Individual Eschatology and the Bible	260
<i>Creator, Creation and the Human Person</i>	260
<i>Death in the Old Testament</i>	263
<i>An Overview of the New Testament Understanding of Death</i>	263
<i>Jesus' Life and Death</i>	264
<i>Jesus' Resurrection</i>	265
<i>Resurrection and Immortality</i>	268
<i>Judgment</i>	270
<i>The Return of Christ</i>	273
5. Conclusion	274

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	277
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SUMMARY

This thesis comprises a survey and critique of individual eschatology according to the major Protestant theologians of the twentieth century: Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, and the post-Barthians Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel. Through a close reading of their writings on individual eschatology and other topics which have a strong bearing on the subject, aided by a comprehensive survey of secondary criticism, common features in their positions regarding the destiny of the individual human being in and beyond death are established. First, death is a natural phenomenon of human beings, and not the consequence of sin. Its appearance in human lives as a curse is a secondary aspect of death, which follows from human sinfulness. Second, the idea that the human being has an immortal soul is rejected. Third, there is a reserve towards the very project of thinking about the doctrine of heaven. Fourth, the possibility of temporality beyond death is denied. Fifth, eternal life, where it is envisaged, is conceived as the eternalizing of this mortal life. It will not involve the continuation of personal subjectivity in temporality. There is no attempt to develop an account of loving, knowing subjects beyond death – hence the “missing persons” of the title. This shows a significant change from the thought of Luther and Calvin, according to which human subjects exist beyond death, able to know and love God and others.

One particular (though by no means sufficient) cause of this change in Protestant eschatology is located: the characteristically twentieth century delineation of revealed from natural theology, and concentration on scripture, in particular the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, for systematic theology. Traditional eschatology is associated for these theologians with the findings of natural theology.

The remainder of the thesis formulates a response to the dominant tradition in twentieth century Protestant eschatology in two steps. First, the possibility of separating natural from revealed theology is disputed. An account is offered of

theology as an integrated whole, which does not dispense with any particular aspect of human experience.

Second, on this basis, certain central issues in individual eschatology which became impasses in dialectical theology and post-Barthianism are explored: namely the nature of the human being, and the relationship between time and eternity. In both areas, the crudity of the twentieth century Protestant positions is shown, resting as they do on simplistic distinctions and caricatures of traditional Christian theology. Drawing on the thought of Wolfhart Pannenberg amongst others, an account is developed of the human being's identity as a centre of subjectivity, and of eternity as the transformation rather than annihilation of time. A reading of certain eschatological texts in scripture concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:

THE ECLIPSE OF INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY

1. Thesis

This thesis argues that the main stream of twentieth century Protestant theology has developed an account of individual eschatology which does not envisage the continued existence of knowing, loving, human subjects. Further, it argues that in part this is a consequence of an emphasis on scriptural revelation in theology which coincides with the rejection of natural theology. Finally, it contends that an individual eschatology, based on a theology inclusive both of scriptural witness and reason, offers significant possibilities for developing an account of the continued life beyond death of knowing, loving subjects.

2. Eschatology: Individual and Cosmic

This thesis is about individual eschatology. The meaning of the term “eschatology” is not self-evident: indeed, its qualification by “individual” indicates that it is a complex area of theological endeavour with different parts. A dictionary definition of eschatology is death, judgment, heaven and hell – the so-called last things, the root of the word being the Greek *eschatos*, last. If eschatology is theology about the last things, *individual* eschatology is thought about the last things of a person’s life – the person’s death and destiny beyond it.

However, “eschatology” is often used with reference to the last things in a universal application, in which case it may be called cosmic eschatology. Various

terms, concepts and images are used in connection with cosmic eschatology, such as the parousia, the return of Christ, the Last Judgment, the coming of the kingdom, the new creation, and the Eschaton. All of these concepts are used in theology to refer to Christians' hope that God will bring the universe to its end, not merely in the sense of its finish but also its goal.¹ Cosmic eschatology refers to the last things in relation to the created universe as a whole.

Both individual and cosmic eschatology have been developed throughout the history of Christian theology. The relationship between them has not remained constant, but has changed as the expectations for the individual beyond death and the universe as a whole have changed. Neither aspect of eschatological doctrine can be fully explored without comprehending its relationship with the other part. So this thesis attempts to explore the prevalent understanding of individual eschatology in twentieth century Protestant theology in the context of its relationship with cosmic eschatology. Indeed, grasping the nature of individual eschatology amounts to a similar task to grasping the nature of its relationship with eschatology in its universal aspect. Nevertheless, the focus is on the last things as they refer to the individual human being, despite the undoubted artificiality of any separation between individual and cosmic aspects.

A further distinction must be made. This thesis will study the doctrine of heaven, but not the doctrine of hell. Two broad questions have had to be left to one side. First, will there be a division between certain individuals who enter eternal life beyond death and certain individuals who do not, who are separated from God in some way, either in being annihilated or being in hell (however that is understood)? This question is often put as the question of universalism: will all be saved? The study of that question in twentieth century Protestant theology would require a second volume of similar size to this. Second, which is perhaps the same question as the first, if there is a hell, of what does it consist? Leaving these questions to one side is a necessity, but a brutal one at times, since the doctrine of heaven follows from the same sort of theological reflection as the attitude one takes to the question of hell. At times, of course, the questions will obtrude, but there will be no

¹ Vocabulary varies for these two aspects of eschatology. Here I follow the terminology of G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, trans. James Van Oosterom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 33.

systematic treatment of them when discussing the theologians chosen for the thesis. Purgatory, on the other hand, although not surprisingly a minor theme in twentieth century *Protestant* theology, cannot be laid so easily to one side, since it belongs more closely to a study of life beyond death than hell does. Indeed, as we shall see, Protestant versions of something akin to Purgatory do exist, and are relevant for this enquiry.

Certain terms that will be used frequently in subsequent chapters require preliminary definition now, although a fuller understanding will emerge in the final chapter. The common phrase "life after death" is avoided, because of the simplistic conception it offers of eternal life following a person's death on the same time-line. The relationship between life leading up to death and eternal life needs a more flexible conception, and so "life beyond death" is preferred. Although "beyond" does have the meaning in general usage of "after," it also has the sense of "surpassing, more than." "Life beyond death" thus indicates that while, from the perspective of life before death, it follows death, no presupposition is made in these chapters as to a simple continuity from ante- to post-mortem existence. Furthermore, "life beyond death" has the connotation that it surpasses life before death, in some sense more than life before death, an idea developed more fully in the final chapter. The biblical phrase "eternal life" will largely be used interchangeably with "life beyond death," as will "the life to come," and occasionally "the life of heaven."

3. Heaven in the Twentieth Century

Individual eschatology in twentieth century Protestant theology is only rarely the focus of scholarly attention. There is no one-volume work on the subject, and only a relative handful of chapters and journal articles. Why is this so? Like all parts of theology, scholarly interest in eschatological topics tends to follow the emphases and concerns of the most original and influential thinkers, and so the simple explanation for the lack of secondary literature on recent Protestant individual eschatology is the relative paucity of interest in the subject shown by the century's great minds working

within the Protestant traditions, a list of whom would certainly include Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Eberhard Jüngel amongst others. Why might this be the case? is one question which the thesis sets out to answer.

By contrast with individual eschatology, other eschatological topics have been subject to a great deal of interest in the past hundred years or so. Indeed, eschatology has been prominent in twentieth century theology, although that very prominence may be part of the reason for individual eschatology's eclipse. For the word "eschatology" has undergone a sea-change in meaning since it was first coined in the seventeenth century as merely a scholarly term for "the last things,"² an understanding still reflected, as we saw, in its dictionary definition today. As we shall see in the following chapters, eschatology has shifted in sense from being simply the account of death, judgment, heaven and hell (and Purgatory for Roman Catholics) awaiting all human beings, to something much broader, which includes the account of God's relationship with human beings (and, in some cases, all creation) in the present in relation to the promise of God's coming again to create the world anew. In this change of meaning, the "last things" as they relate to the individual have become marginalized. Why did eschatology thus shift in meaning, so that the future destiny of individual human beings was no longer considered central to the doctrine? A few paragraphs will set the scene for the chapters which follow.

4. The Quest for the Eschatological Jesus

The roots of the twentieth century's preoccupation with this new understanding of eschatology lie in the soil of historical criticism of the Bible. The eighteenth and nineteenth century quest for the historical Jesus, allied to increasingly sophisticated methods of historical-critical research, produced a variety of portraits of Jesus. These placed emphases on Jesus the moral teacher, Jesus the spiritual guide, and

² See Gerhard Sauter, "The Concept and Task of Eschatology – Theological and Philosophical Reflections," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988), 499, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-8), 3:531, who date the use of the word "eschatology" to Abraham Calov's *Systema locorum Theologicorum* from 1677.

Jesus the founder of an ethical commonwealth, as the kingdom of God was understood. As Martin Kähler and Albert Schweitzer pointed out, the long tradition of attempting to discover the true Jesus behind the ecclesiological “accretions” of the New Testament texts and subsequent theology and tradition, had produced nothing but a variety of images of Enlightenment heroes as the real Jesus.

However, as early as the 1860s, Franz Overbeck (1837-1905) argued that the texts of the New Testament portray a Gospel which is wholly eschatological and critical of the world as it is.³ For him, primitive Christianity was a religion characterized by the supernatural – miracles, apocalyptic, allegorical interpretation of scripture and the formation of a sacred canon. Chief among these characteristics was eschatology: Christianity was a movement which anticipated the end of human history as it is now, and the advent of the kingdom of God. Overbeck was acutely conscious of the difference between primitive Christianity’s approach and that of nineteenth century Christianity, writing that, “The contradiction between the original Christian eschatology and the contemporary hope for the future is fundamental.”⁴

Johannes Weiss (1863-1914) was a generation after Overbeck, but made a similar analysis of the discrepancy between the religion of the New Testament and the Christianity of the contemporary age. In *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (1892), Weiss takes issue with the nineteenth century’s understanding of the kingdom of God as follows: “Jesus’ idea of the Kingdom of God appears to be inextricably involved with a number of eschatological-apocalyptic views... The interpretation of the Kingdom of God as an innerworldly ethical ideal is a vestige of the Kantian idea and does not hold up before a more precise historical investigation.”⁵ According to Weiss, Jesus did not found a kingdom; rather he proclaimed its coming. The kingdom would come not as a result of any human action, ethical or political, but at the hand of God.

The name which is most closely associated with the eschatological approach to the New Testament is Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965). In *The Quest of the Historical*

³ A summary of Overbeck’s life and thought can be found in John C. O’Neill, *The Bible’s Authority* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 179-90.

⁴ Quoted by Karl Barth in *Theology and Church*, trans. L. P. Smith (London: SCM, 1962), 64.

⁵ Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. and ed. Richard Hyde Hiers and David Larrimore Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 131-3.

Jesus (1906) and other works, Schweitzer attacks the tradition of life-of-Jesus study from Reimarus to Wrede. This tradition subsumes the eschatological teaching and mission of Jesus under an ethical overlay. But according to Schweitzer it is the eschatological elements in the New Testament and in particular the Gospels which are the most authentically dominical. Schweitzer tells the story of Jesus as a man who preached that eschatological crisis was imminent. The kingdom of God meant the in-breaking of the Eschaton, the End-time, and the end of the world. First he thought that sending out the disciples would bring on the crisis, later he believed that he himself must hasten the advent of the kingdom by means of his own death at Jerusalem:

The Baptist appears, and cries: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.⁶

As Overbeck and Weiss had been, Schweitzer was conscious of the huge gulf between the religion of Jesus and the religion practised in his name some nineteen centuries later. But Schweitzer believed that Jesus was wrong: his suffering and death for others did not bring the kingdom he expected. Although Jesus believed passionately in a God who would intervene eschatologically in the world, Schweitzer did not share that belief. For Schweitzer, contemporary Christianity should neither repristinate Jesus' eschatological beliefs, nor remain content with a predominantly ethical understanding of the gospels – rather, the Christian life should follow Jesus' personality in his willingness to suffer for others, a life Schweitzer himself pursued as a medical missionary in French Equatorial Africa.⁷

⁶ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, 3rd ed., trans. W. Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1954), 368-9.

⁷ See O'Neill, *The Bible's Authority*, 248-65, for a biographical sketch of Schweitzer and summary of his thought.

So from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, analyses of historical-critical study of the scriptures, and in particular the gospels, had shown that the Jesus previously thought to inhabit these pages had been a caricature reflecting the social mores of the investigating society. The dominant liberal Christianity stressed the belief in progress, which maintained that increasing moral development of humanity would lead to ever better worldly life, a moral development which would come about in the following of Jesus' ethical teaching. By contrast, under the influence of Weiss and Schweitzer a new Jesus emerged, one alien to the cultured society of nineteenth century Christianity. This Jesus was a marginal figure, an apocalyptic Jew, who believed that the world was going to end soon, wound up by God who would provide a new kingdom for the righteous. Perhaps Jesus even died believing that his dying was the only way to ensure that the kingdom of God would come down from heaven. Furthermore, the hope of the New Testament as argued by these readers was a hope in the devastating power of God to destroy and remake, to create a new heavens and a new earth at the end of time. This kingdom would not be ethical, but eschatological.

This scholarship belonged to a period from the mid nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth, but its effect on theology was not felt strongly until after the Great War.⁸ The scholars who discovered an eschatological Jesus resisted the wholesale adoption of Jesus' own eschatological vision into contemporary Christianity. As we have seen, Schweitzer thought Jesus to be mistaken. Weiss put it like this:

That which is universally valid in Jesus' preaching, which should form the kernel of our systematic theology is not his idea of the kingdom of God, but that of the religious and ethical fellowship of the children of God. That is not to say that one ought no longer to use the concept "Kingdom of God" in the current manner. On the contrary, it seems to me, as a matter of fact, that it should be the proper watchword of modern theology. Only the admission must be demanded that we use it in a different sense from Jesus'.⁹

⁸ Cultural reasons why eschatology found fertile soil in the early years of the twentieth century and beyond are outside the scope of this thesis. But see Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 31-240, for a cultural-intellectual biography of Karl Barth in this period.

⁹ Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation*, 135.

The story of twentieth century theology is by no means the simple acceptance of Jesus' own eschatological views, as subsequent chapters will show. Nevertheless, the discovery that Jesus' and indeed the New Testament's dominant attitude towards the world is eschatological had a profound effect on twentieth century theology in two ways. First, the liberal hope for a world gradually improving towards the kingdom of God was found to be groundless in scripture. Second, and the positive side of the first implication, the doctrine of God began to be affected by eschatology. Jesus' and the New Testament writers' anticipation of a powerful God who would come again to creation in catastrophic events bringing about a decisive end to the world influenced the theological understanding of God. When twentieth century theologians claimed that God was eschatologically related to the world, the implication was of a God who freely *acted* upon the world, *breaking* in to creaturely structures of time and space, *bringing* to an end the finite sequence of creaturely events. This was often expressed as a restatement of the Reformation insistence on God's sovereignty.

5. A Path Through Twentieth Century Eschatology

Eschatology moved centre stage as it became fundamental for the development of other areas of doctrine, such as creation, Christology, and ethics. All these other facets of Christian doctrine began to be understood from the point of view of the end. With God understood as the in-breaking God, the God who has acted in order to bring creation to its final end, the account of God's relationship to the world becomes eschatological. Creation, providence, redemption and sanctification could not be understood without reference to the eschatological goal of God's creation. However, as eschatology moved into the articulation of other areas of doctrine, the traditional subjects covered by eschatology – the last things – became less and less prominent. Books with titles incorporating words such as eschatology, hope or future turned out on closer inspection to contain few or no entries in their index under "immortality," "heaven," "hell," "resurrection of the dead," or even "death." There are at least two possible reasons for this absence of attention. First, it could

simply be that in the rush to apply eschatological insight to the rest of dogmatic theology, say, creation and ethics, there was not the time or space to re-state traditional doctrines of the last things. Or, second, it could be that in the new application of eschatology to other branches of theology, the traditional conception of the last things themselves underwent a significant change. The hypothesis of this thesis is that the second reason is true.

How then shall this hypothesis be investigated? A number of representative twentieth century theologians have been chosen to establish its claim, the examination of whose thought in some depth will reveal the presence and nature of the change in individual eschatology in the twentieth century. A few words as to the choice of these theologians are called for.

First, the decision was made to concentrate on individual eschatology in theology rather than in biblical scholarship. Of course there is an overlap between the disciplines of theology and biblical criticism, often a broad overlap such as in the case of Rudolf Bultmann, and so certain findings of scriptural exegetes will be relevant to the enquiry, and will be mentioned. As we shall see, biblical scholarship regarding, for example, the nature of the human person, Paul's discussion of the resurrection of the body in 1 Corinthians 15 and the nature of eschatological hope throughout the New Testament is significant for the shape of individual eschatology in the century's theology. Nevertheless the focus is on how *theologians* have understood individual eschatology, and so study of twentieth century exegesis will generally be brought in only where it is useful for a clearer appreciation of the *theological* positions taken up throughout the century.

Second, the thesis only examines major *Protestant* theologians of the twentieth century. One reason for this is the simple pressure of space: to study Roman Catholic and other theologians alongside representatives from the Protestant traditions would give greater breadth, but at the cost of a considerable loss of depth. To some extent the Protestant focus is regrettable, since Roman Catholic theology has seen some of the more significant and imaginative twentieth century treatments of eschatology, particularly Karl Rahner's *On the Theology of Death*, Hans Küng's *Eternal Life?*, the fifth volume of Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* entitled *The Last Act*, and the most influential recent work of Catholic eschatology written in

English, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death* by Simon Tugwell.¹⁰ A further reason for concentrating on the Protestant tradition anticipates one finding of the thesis, which is that theological presuppositions are fundamental to the shape of individual eschatology. There is not the room here to establish conclusively the following proposition, but if the major Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century were to be compared with their Protestant counterparts regarding individual eschatology, that comparison would confirm the centrality of theological method for the doctrine of heaven. Concretely, certain Roman Catholic theologians, open to a much broader conception of the theological task involving revelation, reason and philosophical accounts of the human person, are able to form much more developed individual eschatologies than are the Protestant theologians of this study. In the same way, twentieth century Catholic thinkers who are more influenced by traditionally Protestant accounts of the nature of theology tend to develop more Protestant-looking individual eschatologies. That claim will not be investigated explicitly in this work, which has the more modest aim of establishing the shape of individual eschatology within one particular tradition and some of the reasons for that shape. Twentieth century Catholic eschatology will, therefore, rarely take centre stage in the thesis, but will be mentioned where appropriate in relation to the Protestant subjects of the chapters.

The choice of representative Protestant voices from roughly the first half of the century – Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth – is predictable. Both emerged as original and radical theologians in the nineteen-twenties; thereafter their thought has proved fundamental to subsequent development in Protestant theology, and often outside Protestantism too. Furthermore, for both Bultmann and Barth, eschatology is a central organizing principle for their thought, although as their approaches developed, they felt they had less and less in common with each other's published work. If a pattern is to emerge in Protestant accounts of the last things in the twentieth century, it would undoubtedly be found to some extent in Bultmann and Barth, given their immense influence.

¹⁰ Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (Edinburgh: Nelson, and Freiburg: Herder, 1961); Hans Küng, *Eternal Life?*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: SCM, 1984); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998); Simon Tugwell, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death* (London: DLT, 1990).

The choice of theologians from the next generation, as it were, is slightly more complicated. Two major theologians emerged in the nineteen-sixties as heirs, albeit critical, of the Barthian heritage – Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg – and more recently Eberhard Jüngel has gained prominence as an astute critic of Barth and theologian in his own right. These figures, for all their differences from each other, are working recognizably with Barth's conceptuality and dogmatic developments. Whether they accept or reject his approach, their writings bear the stamp which Barth's thought has marked on twentieth century theology, a sort of indelible watermark. For that reason, they can be termed post-Barthian theologians. Eschatology is central to their theology: Moltmann's book *Theology of Hope* was an attempt to recast the doctrine of God in terms of promise, and therefore the attempt to recast Christian doctrines from an eschatological point of view. Moltmann's burgeoning influence alone makes it essential that we grasp his understanding of the last things, topics to which he has increasingly turned in recent publications. Jüngel develops a great deal of his thought in relation to death, and in many ways draws out Barth's own remarks on the subject. There is no better exponent of a Barth-influenced approach to individual eschatology, and as such, he deserves the attention given to him.

Discussion of Wolfhart Pannenberg, however, does not take up a discrete chapter, but is spread more diffusely throughout the thesis, used in particular to critique the other theologians in chapter 7 and offer prospects for future thought in chapter 8. Why is this, when alongside Moltmann, he was known as a theologian of hope? The answer will emerge as the thesis progresses, but will be laid out in outline here. Pannenberg, alone of the major theologians writing in the post-Barthian tradition, has developed an account of the individual's eternal life. As chapters 3 to 6 will show, his forbears and peers within his theological tradition do not describe eternal life in terms of the continued existence of the individual human being (although Moltmann comes close in his later work). Indeed, it was the discovery that Pannenberg does not fit the pattern that led indirectly to the account in chapter 7 of a principal reason for the shape of Barthian and post-Barthian individual eschatology. Pannenberg not only is able to develop an account of the individual beyond death, but he does so using in part arguments drawn from anthropology –

the nature of human being from a theological point of view. This kind of argument belongs to a form of theology which the other major thinkers disavow – natural theology. It seems then that there is a link between the abandonment of natural theology, and the presuppositions which that abandonment relies upon, and the inability to develop the doctrine of heaven. Pannenberg thus serves as a point from which critique of the main stream of twentieth century theology may be made. He is, of course, not the only point from which such a critique might begin. The chief representatives of Roman Catholic theology of this century – Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar – might also have been chosen to exemplify a methodological approach to theology which supplies the resources for the development of individual eschatology. Nevertheless, the critique made in chapter 7 of the dialectical and post-Barthian polemical discrimination between revealed and natural theology has been developed partly using insights from Pannenberg, although his anthropologically oriented theology has not been applied in its entirety to the issue.

Taking this path through Protestant theology of the twentieth century is undoubtedly selective. A fuller account would find room for Oscar Cullmann, C. H. Dodd, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the insights of process theology and feminist theology amongst others approaches. Furthermore, the insights of biblical scholarship and philosophical accounts of the possibility of life beyond death deserve more extensive treatments than they gain here. Nevertheless, given the constraints necessary for a thesis, the course taken here is one which attempts to pass through the most significant and influential thought about individual eschatology in twentieth century Protestantism. In studying Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel, and applying criticism suggested by Pannenberg, the brightest stars in the century's Protestant constellation are observed, and the shape of the whole is unmistakable. If the thesis seems too focused on Barthian accounts of individual eschatology, it merely reflects the dominance of Karl Barth in twentieth century Protestant thought.

6. Recent Scholarship

Scholarship investigating eschatological thought of the individual subjects of the thesis will be discussed in the relevant chapters. In this section, then, mention will be made only of material which surveys eschatology more broadly than in studies of a single author. There is no book-length study of twentieth century Protestant eschatology. However, there are books which survey eschatology in the twentieth century more broadly, incorporating study of both Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians. Joseph Ratzinger's *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, Zachary Hayes' *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology* and Dermot Lane's *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology*, all written from Roman Catholic perspectives of varying sorts, describe the major trends in twentieth century eschatology. None focuses in any depth on Protestant development of doctrine.¹¹ One book-length study of twentieth century Protestant thought in a related area does exist: C. A. Price's doctoral dissertation, "The Resurrection: aspects of its changing role in 20th century theology." The subject of Price's work is the resurrection of Jesus in recent theology.¹²

Books on eschatology which are not principally concerned with twentieth century approaches are more common, and many of these include some material on the subjects of this thesis. Brian Hebblethwaite's *The Christian Hope* devotes chapters to Christian eschatology throughout the history of theology, including brief summaries of the approaches taken by Bultmann, Barth and Moltmann. In *Christian Hope*, John Macquarrie focuses on hope in the Bible and in the twentieth century, discussing Moltmann's and Pannenberg's approaches in particular. John Hick's *Death and Eternal Life* is a broad-ranging history of Christian eschatology and imaginative synthesis of Christian eschatology with doctrines associated with Eastern religion, and discusses Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg. James Barr's *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* combines exegesis of the first few chapters of Genesis with

¹¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1988); Zachary Hayes, *Visions of a Future: A Study of Christian Eschatology* (Collegeville, Minn: Michael Glazier, 1989); Dermot Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996).

¹² C. A. Price, "The Resurrection: aspects of its changing role in 20th century theology," (unpublished Ph.D. diss., St Andrews University, 1986).

a critique of Barth-influenced anthropology and individual eschatology.¹³ A few pages are devoted to Protestant eschatology in the twentieth century in Anton van der Walle's *From Darkness to the Dawn*, Anthony Hoekema's *The Bible and the Future*, Hans Schwartz's article on eschatology in *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Braaten and Jenson, McDannell and Lang's sociological *Heaven: A History* and Paul and Linda Badham's *Immortality and Extinction?*¹⁴ Two further books develop eschatological thought in response to the 1960s theology of hope. Russell Aldwinckle discusses Pannenberg and Moltmann in fairly critical terms in *Death in the Secular City*, while in *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context*, Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart draw generally positive conclusions.¹⁵ From the mass of literature on death, Josef Pieper's *Death and Immortality* and Ray Anderson's *Theology, Death and Dying* are exemplary accounts of the debate over the naturalness of death and its relation to immortality, Pieper's slightly older account largely informed by Thomism, Anderson's by Barth. The Rahner-influenced Ladislaus Boros' *The Moment of Truth: Mysterium Mortis* argues for the finality of the human decision made in the moment of death.¹⁶

A number of recent articles attempt to survey eschatology in the twentieth century. Prominent among these are articles by D. W. D. Shaw, Stephen Williams, David Fergusson and Klaas Runia. Still useful, however, is Nicholas Lash's older

¹³ Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1984); John Macquarrie, *Christian Hope* (London: Mowbrays, 1978); John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976); James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality: The Read-Tuckwell Lectures for 1990* (London: SCM, 1992).

¹⁴ Anton van der Walle, *From Darkness to the Dawn*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1984); Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978); Hans Schwartz, "Eschatology," in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2:471-587; Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Paul and Linda Badham, *Immortality or Extinction?* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

¹⁵ Russell Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City: A Study of the Notion of Life After Death in Contemporary Theology and Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972); Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999).

¹⁶ Josef Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Burns and Oates, 1969); Ray S. Anderson, *Theology, Death and Dying* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Ladislaus Boros, *The Moment of Truth: Mysterium Mortis*, trans. G. Bainbridge (London: Burns & Oates, 1965).

essay "Eternal Life: Life 'After' Death," which lays bare the individual eschatologies of Barth and Jüngel.¹⁷

There remains, therefore, the need for an in-depth study of twentieth century individual eschatology in Protestant theology.

7. Outline of Chapters

This section will outline the contents of the following seven chapters.

Chapter 2

This chapter will discuss the views of Martin Luther and John Calvin on the subjects of individual eschatology – particularly death, immortality, resurrection and the life of heaven. Although the focus of this dissertation is individual eschatology in *twentieth* century Protestant thought, it is necessary to devote a chapter to the sixteenth century in order to establish the tradition against which more recent theology reacts. A further reason to include material on the Reformers will become more and more apparent as the thesis progresses. It will be contended that Barthian and post-Barthian eschatology lacks certain elements which have been thought crucial to an adequate account of the life to come, typically in the area of hope for the individual. This chapter will demonstrate that Protestant theology was not always so reticent in articulating individual hopes for heaven. It will show that the Reformers, particularly Calvin, were able to combine philosophical reflection with their reading of scripture, and thereby develop an individual eschatology. Two features of classical Protestant eschatology will be found to be central to the development of doctrine about eternal life: the assertion of personal continuity by means of the immortality of the soul; and the expectation of some form of

¹⁷ D. W. D. Shaw, "The Undiscover'd Country': An Exploration – "The Life Everlasting,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1994), 149-68; Stephen Williams, "Thirty Years of Hope: A Generation of Writing on Eschatology," in *The Reader Must Understand': Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliot (Leicester: Apollos, 1977), 243-62; Klaas Runia, "Eschatology in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (1977), 105-35; David Fergusson, "Eschatology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge:

temporality experienced beyond death. A number of twentieth century criticisms of these emphases will be examined, leading into the following four chapters, which look closely at four examples of Protestant eschatology in the twentieth century, which both explicitly and implicitly diverge to greater and lesser extents from the approaches of Luther and Calvin.

Chapter 3

In this chapter, we shall see that the fundamental principle underlying much of Rudolf Bultmann's theology and biblical criticism is the sinfulness of objectifying God. Theology which uses mythological concepts, or which argues from "natural revelation" is guilty of failing to respect the transcendence of God. The only place where theology may legitimately locate God is in the analysis of human existence, as each human being encounters God's grace in faith in Jesus Christ. Scriptural eschatology must be understood as referring ultimately to this relationship with Christ; all references to the future, whether in terms of apocalypse or life after death must be understood to mean the present experience of grace. Theology may not and cannot with any confidence speculate about the possibility or character of the world to come. A number of difficulties with Bultmann's overall approach to theology will be raised, particularly as they impinge on questions of individual eschatology.

Chapter 4

Discussion moves on in this chapter to a figure who, at least for the first part of his career as a public theologian, shared a number of Bultmann's concerns. For the early Karl Barth, eschatology indicates the incomparable otherness of the eternal God to temporal creation. Eschatology is, then, absolutely central to dialectical theology. Eternity stands in judgment over creation; but it is a judgment which is not at all temporal, and so Barth rejects all apocalyptic expectation for an end in time. In Barth's later *Church Dogmatics*, understanding of eschatology emphasizes the christological basis of all hope – all eschatological content is contained in the

Cambridge University Press, 1997), 226-44; Nicholas Lash, "Eternal Life: Life 'After' Death?" in *Theology on Dover Beach* (London: DLT, 1979), 164-82.

revelation of the first Easter Day. It is in the presence of the risen Christ that we may hope in a gracious God. In the sense in which death is the sign of judgment upon sinful creation, that death is taken away by the death of Christ, such that we may be sure that God is our beyond. The resurrection will be the eternalization in God of human lives which have ended. All hopes for the individual are incorporated in the one representative human being who is elected to grace, Jesus Christ. The chapter will go on to suggest the ways in which Barth's grounding of anthropology in Christology to some extent unbalances his understanding of eternal life, failing to conceive of a form of temporality for human existence beyond death.

Chapter 5

We shall discover, in this chapter, that for Jürgen Moltmann, the key to past theology's failures is that it has not been eschatological enough. In particular, he criticizes Bultmann and Barth for failing to understand the centrality in scripture of God as the one who promises. The chapter will discuss Moltmann's vision of theology as eschatology in *Theology of Hope*, with particular reference to his treatment of individual eschatology. It will then compare *Theology of Hope* with his recent book on eschatology, *The Coming of God*. While *Theology of Hope* described why theology had to be futurist (by contrast with both Barth and Bultmann), *The Coming of God* describes what that future might be. As in his earlier work, Moltmann is adamant that eschatology refers to the doctrine of the God who is related to the world now. Nevertheless, unlike his earlier work, Moltmann does devote some attention to questions of the individual's death and resurrection. Despite his polemic against so-called Platonic accounts of the immortal soul, Moltmann's individual eschatology attempts to incorporate a fairly traditional doctrine of the interim state, at the possible risk of self-contradiction. Furthermore, Moltmann's account of eternal life itself in the new creation of all things betrays an ambivalence towards time: his concept of relative eternity failing to allow the possibility of novelty and creativity within the new creation. Moltmann's criticism of traditional eschatology will be questioned, and found to rely on inaccurate generalization; indeed, he may be vulnerable to the same difficulties he raises regarding older treatments of the last things. It will also be noted that, despite distancing himself from Barth, Moltmann's

eschatology depends on a similar anthropology to Barth's, and so follows in many of the same paths.

Chapter 6

Eberhard Jüngel's approach to theology is firmly in the tradition of the early Bultmann and Barth: all approaches to God which begin from the work of human reason are mistaken, and God and human being can only be "thought" on the basis of God's self-disclosure, which happens uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ, the Crucified One. The event of Jesus' death alone truly reveals God. God defines Godself in Jesus' cross. Jüngel's understanding of individual eschatology follows from his insight that God revealed on the cross who God is: as love for human beings. His anthropology echoes certain themes of Bultmann's – the justified person is the one who does not seek to possess him or herself but accepts him or herself as a being dependent on God – and Barth's – human life is limited by God. Consequently, Jüngel believes the "Platonic" idea of immortality of the soul has no place in Christian discourse. Instead, the clue to understanding death is found in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which allows us to say that God has involved Godself with nothingness in the life and death of Jesus Christ and overcome it. God's overcoming nothingness and death enables the believer to die a natural death (not as a curse), in other words, to die a death which overcomes death. This means for Jüngel that it is not nothingness which limits the human being, but God. Eternal life he understands as the making eternal of the human being's finite life, through participation in the life of God. But he offers little development of these enigmatic remarks. The chapter will argue that the difficulties with Jüngel's account of individual eschatology centre on two issues: his understanding of resurrection, both Jesus' and our own; and the emphasis he places on human passivity. The latter area, in particular, leads to the inability to develop anything but the sketchiest doctrine of heaven.

Chapter 7

This chapter will first describe the shape of individual eschatology as found in Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel, in the form of the following common

features. (1) Death is a natural phenomenon of human beings, and not the consequence of sin. As part of God's creative will in creation, death must be seen as fundamentally good. Its appearance in human lives as a curse is a secondary aspect of death, which follows from human sinfulness. (2) The idea that the human being has an immortal soul is rejected. The whole person dies at death; the whole person is mortal. (3) There is a reserve towards the very project of thinking about the doctrine of heaven. (4) The possibility of temporality beyond death is denied. (5) Eternal life, where it is envisaged, is conceived as the eternalizing of this mortal life. It will not involve the continuation of personal subjectivity in temporality. There is no attempt to develop an account of loving, knowing subjects beyond death.

It will then be argued that this pattern in individual eschatology is the result in part of a common set of assumptions as to the nature of theology, namely the delineation of revealed and natural theology, and the abandonment of the latter. Each of the four theologians will be shown to engage in this polemic, and favour revelation. Furthermore, each associates traditional eschatology with natural theology, in turn associated with Greek conceptuality, Roman Catholic theology, rationalism and the Enlightenment, because these diverse intellectual approaches share a belief in the immortality of the soul. The Barthian and post-Barthian polemic against traditional eschatology finds explicit expression in opposition to immortality of the soul, but implicitly is part of the much broader objection to natural theology generally.

A final section of the chapter will prepare the way for fresh thinking in individual eschatology by rehabilitating the concept of natural theology. It will be argued that traditional natural theology can be seen as depending on revelation, and traditional revealed theology can be seen as depending on natural human activities including reasoning. In other words: the distinction between natural and revealed theology is mistaken.

Chapter 8

This final chapter builds on the suggestion made in chapter 7 that theology involves elements which have traditionally been considered as either revealed or natural, in order to reflect on the central areas where individual eschatology requires fresh

thinking. Of the many aspects of the doctrine of heaven, two are selected for tentative proposals as to directions that our thought might take. The thought of Wolfhart Pannenberg will prove a helpful guide in the formulation of these positive proposals.

First, in contradistinction to the Barthian and post-Barthian polemic against the immortality of the soul, an account of the human person will be put forward which allows the conception of personal continuity beyond death. There is a duality to human experience which need not find expression in a crude dualism, but which is nevertheless significant. This comprises a centre of subjectivity (the first aspect of this duality) in the human being as a whole (the second), which directs a person's thought and action. Human identity is maintained in this centre of subjectivity. While there is no disembodied experience in life between birth and death, all embodied experience belongs to this centre of subjectivity. This, of course, does not prove that human beings are immortal but does indicate that the person may be able to exist in the absence of the embodied existence he or she had hitherto invariably experienced. If that is so then it is possible that the human being may not cease to exist at death, but continue beyond death. God's creative activity, which has sustained the person's embodied existence until death, may sustain the person in some transformed state beyond death.

Second, the strict opposition between time and eternity in twentieth century Protestant theology will be questioned, and it will be suggested that eternity is better seen as the transformation of time. Consequences follow for understanding the nature of eternal life. It is clear that without conceiving of some sense of successiveness, it is very difficult to establish the possibility of subjectivity, involving love, knowledge or creativity. Of course, it would be naïve to assume that that experience of time would be identical to the perception of time experienced in life before death. However, it is possible that as God interacts creatively with the human person beyond death, something different from the temporal conditions of life in the world is involved, yet still analogous to temporality as it is known here and now. Some hint of this, which may be gained by considering human experience of time before death, will be offered.

Following from the suggestions made regarding the human person and temporality beyond death, a further section will offer a reading of certain texts of the Bible which are pivotal for individual eschatology. This reading will focus on the accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection, New Testament reflection on these and thought about human death and resurrection. A tentative account of human fulfilment will be suggested in which immortality and resurrection are seen as parallel expressions of the same hope. A brief conclusion will restate the thesis' central findings.

2. Introduction

This chapter will focus on the central texts of the Bible which will form the basis of the thesis. It will begin with a reading of the New Testament accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection, and then move on to the New Testament reflection on these and thought about human death and resurrection. A tentative account of human fulfilment will be suggested in which immortality and resurrection are seen as parallel expressions of the same hope. A brief conclusion will restate the thesis' central findings.

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CHAPTER TWO

VARIETIES OF CLASSICAL PROTESTANT HOPE: LUTHER AND CALVIN

1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the views of Martin Luther and John Calvin on individual eschatology, concentrating on their approaches to the nature of the human person, death, immortality, resurrection and the life of heaven. Although the subject of this dissertation is individual eschatology in twentieth century Protestant thought, it is necessary to devote a chapter to the sixteenth century because, as shall become clear, recent Protestant theologians interact with and frequently react against the eschatological views of their theological tradition. To understand the twentieth century, then, at least an outline of comparable thought of the sixteenth century is instructive. The resources for this task are principally the scriptural commentaries of Luther and Calvin, and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

A further reason to include material on the Reformers will become more and more apparent as the thesis progresses. It will be contended that much twentieth century eschatology lacks certain elements which are crucial to an adequate account of the life to come, typically in the area of hope for the individual. This chapter will demonstrate that Protestant theology was not always so reticent in articulating individual hopes for heaven, in terms of the continuance of the human subject. While a simple return to Luther's or Calvin's eschatology *tout court* is not advocated, and while much of the twentieth century criticism of their approaches is necessary, this chapter nonetheless offers Protestant models of individual eschatology which maintain individual hope. In addition, the chapter will show the close relation between theological methodology and the development of individual eschatology in Luther and Calvin, a theme which will be developed more fully in discussing twentieth century approaches.

2. Luther

Approach to Eschatology and Anthropology

Martin Luther (1483-1546) frames his discussion of the articles of faith concerning death and eternal life by means of the contrast between reason and the Word.¹ Reason, he contends, is at a loss when confronted with beliefs in resurrection and the reunification of body and soul after death; so instead we should have faith in the Word of God which proclaims these things. Faith “must have absolutely nothing but the Word on its side and must permit no subtle argumentation of human ideas in addition.”² Luther considers the doctrines of individual eschatology to have God’s Word as their only source, and faith as the only proper attitude towards them. They are not the conclusion of intellectual enquiry. He writes:

To believe that I will live eternally, endowed with a beautiful, glorious body, although I lie under the sod – that requires a divine and heavenly power and a wisdom which is not governed by any feeling or perceiving but which can look beyond that, convinced that this is not human prattle or phantasy but that it is the Word of God.³

It follows that his principal resource in the development of individual eschatology is the location of God’s Word – scripture. Eschatological articles of faith “must not be sought anywhere but in Scripture or explained otherwise than with Scripture.”⁴ The principles of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* apply to individual eschatology as much as to any other doctrine according to Luther. In fact it is in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 that the fullest exposition of Luther’s ideas on the future life are laid out.

This conviction regarding the lack of support from natural reason for eschatological beliefs, and the fruitlessness of philosophical methods in uncovering the truth of human being and destiny is evident in Luther’s view of the nature of the human person. In *The Disputation Concerning Man*, Luther compares a particular

¹ For introductions to Luther’s individual eschatology, see T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), chap. II, and “The Eschatology of the Reformation,” in *Eschatology: Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers*, No. 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953), especially 40-52; Ulrich Asendorf, *Eschatologie Bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 280-93; and Erhard Kunz, *Protestantische Eschatologie Von der Reformation bis zur Aufklärung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 3-22.

² Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, American edition, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955-86) 28:69.

³ *Luther’s Works*, 28:72.

⁴ *Luther’s Works*, 28:80.

philosophical understanding of the origins of human being with that of theology. According to Luther, philosophy considers the human being to be “an animal having reason, sensation and body,” whose final cause or end is “the peace of this life” and whose formal cause is “soul.” For Luther, this understanding of human being fails to understand its true nature, for it does not acknowledge that human beings are created. Theology, by contrast with philosophy, proceeds as follows:

20. Theology to be sure from the fulness of its wisdom defines man as whole and perfect:
21. Namely, that man is a creature of God consisting of body and a living soul, made in the beginning after the image of God, without sin, so that he should procreate and rule over the created things, and never die,
22. But after the fall of Adam, certainly, he was subject to the power of the devil, sin and death, a twofold evil for his powers, unconquerable and eternal.
23. He can be freed and given eternal life only through the Son of God, Jesus Christ (if he believes in him).⁵

For Luther, then, the human being is a unity of body and soul, created by God and so dependent on God for existence. The view he rejects decisively is one he ascribes to philosophy, and to Aristotle in particular, that the soul is the form of the body, and hence that human being is dependent on his or her own soul for existence. For Luther, the human soul is created by God just as much as the body is. The clinching argument for Luther is that Aristotle “knows nothing of theological man.”⁶

But what is the soul for Luther? *The Disputation Concerning Man* does not describe what he means by the human soul. Indeed, there seems to be no extended account of the soul's nature in Luther's works. His view is perhaps clearest in his commentary on Genesis, in which he distinguishes the hope for eternal life and resurrection from a view he attributes to outstanding philosophers, “that through death the soul was released and freed from the body, but that after it was released from the dwelling of the body, it mingled with the assembly of the gods and was free from all physical inconveniences.”⁷ The human soul for Luther appears to be much more closely related to the human being's bodiliness than it is to these philosophers.

⁵ *Luther's Works*, 34:137-38.

⁶ *Luther's Works*, 34:139. It is not clear whether Luther believed this argument against Aristotle also applied against the prevailing understanding in theology of his time, influenced by Aquinas, that the soul is the form of the body. Although Aquinas borrows this way of describing the soul's relation to the body from Aristotle, he nowhere maintains the soul's (or the person's) independence from God. Even though the rational soul has the function of animating the human person for Aquinas, this occurs only by the grace of God's creative will. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 61 vols (London: Blackfriars, 1961-80), 1, 75, 6; 1, 76, 1.

⁷ *Luther's Works*, 1:333.

Further discussion of Luther's anthropology will emerge in developing his understanding of death and resurrection.

Death

Given this understanding of human beings as created body and soul by God, how does Luther conceive of death within his eschatological thought? He follows traditional Christian teaching in considering death to be the consequence of sin. Human beings were not created for death, unlike the other animals which die because for some reason it seemed good to God that they should. The death of human beings alone "was ordained as a punishment for sin."⁸ Recognizing that this doctrine is somewhat counter-intuitive, Luther reminds his congregation that "Scripture teaches that our death and dying does not come in a natural way but that this is a fruit of and penalty for our father Adam's sin."⁹ For Luther, the word of Scripture on this matter must be final. Indeed, had Adam not sinned, Luther believes he would have entered into eternal life without dying first.¹⁰ Death, as the consequence of sin, is thereby a particularly awful fate for human beings, with the prospect of wrath to come. However, Luther believes that this aspect of death is overcome, as can be seen from his sermons on Psalm 90. Moses tells us (Luther evidently believed Moses to be the psalm's author) "that God indeed rejected man because of sin, but that he did not reject him so completely that he is not minded to have pity on him and to help him."¹¹

How does this help come in death? First, Luther distinguishes between temporal and eternal death. *Temporal* death seems to be the process which happens at the cessation of earthly life: according to Luther, using the traditional Christian definition of death, it is "the separation of the body and the soul."¹² In a crucial sense, however, he claims that Christians are free from temporal death, with the result that "all the debts and obligations involved in temporal death, such as sin are wiped out."¹³ Of course, the Christian still dies a temporal death, but it seems that he or she is not subject to any harmful consequences from this sin-caused phenomenon.

⁸ *Luther's Works*, 13:94.

⁹ *Luther's Works*, 28:116. See also *Luther's Works*, 42:150: "death, which for man was the punishment for sin."

¹⁰ *Luther's Works*, 1:86, 13:94.

¹¹ *Luther's Works*, 13:98.

¹² *Luther's Works*, 25:310.

¹³ *Luther's Works*, 23:106.

Temporal death does not become an *eternal* death for the Christian, *because Christ has made a crucial difference in the nature of death*: “What was a true and eternal death prior to this and without Christ is now, since Christ has passed from death to life and has arisen, no longer death; now it has become merely a sleep.”¹⁴ Indeed, Luther consistently refers to death as sleep.¹⁵ Death need no longer be fatal for the Christian because God, in a memorable image, has poisoned death and the devil in the victory of Christ.¹⁶

What is this eternal death from which the Christian escapes? It is “the death of the damned, where sin and the sinner are not the ones to die, while man is saved, but man dies, while sin lives on and continues forever.”¹⁷ But eternal death can have a second meaning, as the death Christians die. This “is the death of sin and the death of death, by which the soul is released and separated from sin and the body is separated from corruption and through grace and glory is joined to the living God.”¹⁸ This death, Luther believes, can be called eternal life. In short, because of sin, death has terrible consequences for the human being, but these consequences are escaped by the Christian, because of Christ’s death and resurrection. Indeed, Luther describes death as a double blessing for the Christian – as the end of this world’s ills (by which he means suffering), and the end of sins and vices.¹⁹ At death, the Christian sleeps before awakening to eternal life.

There are clear implications here for the proper attitude the Christian ought to display towards his or her death, which Luther develops in *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*. People tend to fear death, he argues, because they fix their gaze on it constantly, encouraged by the devil who pushes human beings into looking ever more closely at death, leading them to anguished speculation as to their destiny beyond the grave. Consequently, they concentrate on this-worldly life, fleeing from thoughts of death and forgetting God. Luther advocates a different course. People should look at death during their lifetime, “inviting death into [their] presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move,”²⁰ so that at the time of dying they may be free to put the thought of death out of their minds. And they should meditate on death in the

¹⁴ *Luther's Works*, 28:109-10.

¹⁵ See for example *Luther's Works*, 25:310, 28:200, 29:10, 48, 361, 42:150.

¹⁶ *Luther's Works*, 28:205.

¹⁷ *Luther's Works*, 25:311.

¹⁸ *Luther's Works*, 25:310.

¹⁹ *Luther's Works*, 42:148-50.

²⁰ *Luther's Works*, 42:101-2.

light of Christ and his saints, who have overcome death, enabling them to see sin in the light of grace, and hell in the light of heaven, and hence not be fearful at the prospect of their own death. Christ's resurrection shows him to be the vanquisher of death; Christ is therefore "the living and immortal image against death, which he suffered."²¹ Luther's central advice to his congregation is that they should not fear death and what may come in its train, because Jesus died but rose from the dead, thus conquering it.

The Resurrection of Christ

It is evident that Jesus' resurrection is at the heart of Luther's understanding of individual eschatology. For Luther, Christ died and rose again for the benefit of human beings. Christ died as they must; as he rose, so they shall rise, by reason of their union with him: "For by His death He has devoured our death, so that we all will also rise and live as He arose and lives."²² Christ is the first-fruits, which means for Luther that those who believe in Christ "live in Him by more than one half until He draws forth also the small remnant completely, namely, our flesh and blood."²³ This more than half a person is the soul, not yet separated from the body at death. The "heart or conscience and soul" of the believer "have already passed through death and grave and are in heaven with Christ."²⁴ The believer's soul, it seems, already partakes of eternal life in the here and now, while still attached to the body, thanks to Christ's death and resurrection. The believer's

sin is already remitted and expunged, God's wrath and hell are extinguished, and he already lives fully in and with Christ with regard to his best part, which is the soul, as he partakes of eternal life. Therefore death can no longer hold him or harm him. Only the remnant, the old skin, flesh and blood, must decay before it, too, can be renewed and follow the soul. As for the rest, we have already penetrated all the way into life, since Christ and my soul are no longer in death.²⁵

Eternal life is the believer's "as soon as you believe in Him."²⁶ For Luther, the soul which believes in Christ takes hold of eternity at the moment of trust, and has no further need of progression towards union with God (although its bodily frame

²¹ *Luther's Works*, 42:106-7. See also *Luther's Works*, 23:75 and 29:136-8 for further examples of the theme of confidence in eternal life casting out the fear of sin and death.

²² *Luther's Works*, 28:109. See also *Luther's Works*, 29:136.

²³ *Luther's Works*, 28:123.

²⁴ *Luther's Works*, 28:110.

²⁵ *Luther's Works*, 28:133.

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²⁵ *Luther's Works*, 28:133.

makes the process of right living a struggle). Hence Luther is convinced that after death the soul sleeps, made entirely righteous in Christ and requiring no purgation, waiting only for the resurrection of the body.

Before death, however, this participation in eternal life is limited by the presence of the corrupt body, and the continuation of the old, sinful person. Luther's commentary on John 6:47 develops this theme: "While we sojourn here on earth and the old Adam still endures, our flesh is unable to lay hold of and grasp this treasure properly." At death, this old flesh is cast off, and with it the temptation and means to sin. Yonder, therefore, eternal life will be entirely present: "The treasure will shine in body and soul for there we will have perfect assurance and the insight of experience telling us that He is eternal life."²⁷

Shape of Eternal Life

The believer's soul, then, already participates in eternal life, all sin forgiven, living in union with Christ, but while the body continues to decay, the treasure is not grasped in its entirety. At death, however, the soul is released from the body;²⁸ indeed, according to *A Sermon on Preparing to Die*, angels and saints receive the soul at the point of death when it leaves the body.²⁹ The body is not raised immediately at death: there is an interim stage in which the soul sleeps, and the body moulders. Of this state Luther writes little: "Who knows how God deals with the departed souls?"³⁰ Clearly, there will be no conscious life in this sleep: "Man dies. His body is interred and decays. It lies in the ground and knows nothing. But when the first man arises on the Last Day, he will think that he has been lying there barely an hour."³¹ The soul's sleep is not a period which can be measured in time, since for Luther there is no sense that the soul progresses in time beyond death: it already participates in eternity.

Luther is more confident in his assertions about the End. When the time is right, there will be a general resurrection in which Christ shall deliver his spiritual kingdom to the Father. This will take place on the Last Day, which will break suddenly: "in one moment there will be nothing but fire. Everything in heaven and on earth will

²⁶ *Luther's Works*, 23:105.

²⁷ *Luther's Works*, 23:107-8.

²⁸ *Luther's Works*, 28:135.

²⁹ *Luther's Works*, 42:112.

³⁰ *Luther's Works*, 48:361.

³¹ *Luther's Works*, 30:196.

be reduced to powder and ashes.”³² Indeed, as is well known, Luther firmly believed that the world would end sooner rather than later. He writes: “It is not to be expected that mankind will still see two or three thousand years after the birth of Christ.”³³ Here Luther invokes his famous development of the traditional Christian distinction between two kingdoms – secular and spiritual – which are interdependent realms for the service of God. Although God is the Lord in both realms, and so there is a certain overlap, they are distinct. The secular kingdom – human governments and the temporal order generally – will be abolished by Christ when he returns. The secular kingdom “was instituted solely for the sake of the temporal life and has nothing to do with heaven, nor does it promote towards heaven.”³⁴ Nothing of the temporal life will remain in heaven. But alongside the secular kingdom, there is a spiritual kingdom in which the believer’s soul participates even before death. This kingdom is not destroyed but rather is perfected in the judgment of Christ: “the spiritual life will be transformed into a better and perfect existence, in which everything we now looked forward to by faith will be eternal and present.”³⁵ This spiritual kingdom will be of a different kind from temporal life: indeed, the Last Day will transform temporality: “everything will be one day, one hour, one moment.”³⁶

At the resurrection, Christ will draw forth people’s bodies from the grave. What sort of bodies will people have in the resurrection? According to Luther, they will have been created anew, given “a new clarity,”³⁷ which seems to involve the divesting of normal bodily functions: no longer eating, drinking, digesting, festering and stinking,³⁸ and none of the ordinary physical relationships of life – no marriage or government.³⁹ Despite this, Luther insists that the body will have physical life and flesh and blood. This is what Luther understands by the Pauline phrase “spiritual body” – a physical body which needs nothing else for life than God’s Spirit. (Luther warns his congregation against the false interpretation of “spiritual body” as “spiritual resurrection.” The resurrection, for Luther, is of the whole person, and not merely

³² *Luther’s Works*, 30:195.

³³ *Luther’s Works*, 30:112.

³⁴ *Luther’s Works*, 28:127.

³⁵ *Luther’s Works*, 28:127.

³⁶ *Luther’s Works*, 30:196. See Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to his Thought*, trans. R. A. Wilson (London: Collins, 1970), 175-91, for a clear discussion of the two kingdoms according to Luther.

³⁷ *Luther’s Works*, 28:123.

³⁸ *Luther’s Works*, 28:181.

³⁹ *Luther’s Works*, 28:124.

of the spirit, whatever that might mean.⁴⁰) The spiritual body will be nourished spiritually by God and have its life entirely in God: “the preservation of body and soul will be accomplished solely by God.”⁴¹ At times Luther prefers not to distinguish between body and soul in the world to come: rather he says that the body will live *spiritually*, in the perfect spiritual kingdom.⁴² Despite his conviction that the resurrection will involve the abolition of the temporal kingdom, this does not mean that human beings alone will enjoy the presence of God. Other things will be created anew, including water, trees and grass: Luther believes there will be “a new earth... which will be a delight to behold.”⁴³ Similarly, “The time is coming when heaven and earth will be transformed by fire, and God will create a new heaven.”⁴⁴ The new heaven and earth will be characterized by righteousness, love, joy, pleasure and the kingdom of God.⁴⁵ This can be no mere transformation of the material world as existing now, for the temporal world will be destroyed: rather, it will be a new spiritual creation.

Luther describes the activity of the spiritual body in some delightful language:

When the body thus lives spiritually in God, it will sally forth into heaven and earth, play with sun and moon and all the other creatures, and also be delighted by this... It will be as clear and light as the air; it will see and hear sharply to the ends of the world...

There will be no dissatisfaction, no annoyances, no hardships to bear, such as we have in this lazy, lame image, where we must bear and drag this heavy, indolent paunch about with us, lift it, and have it led. No, there it will swish through the heavens as swiftly and lightly as lightning and soar over the clouds among the dear angels.⁴⁶

Luther depicts the heavenly life of the person as absolute satisfaction in God. All earthly human needs will pass away; and people will be completely righteous, joyful and innocent:

everybody will find all wants that are now satisfied by all things satisfied in God Himself. When He will reveal Himself, we will be satisfied in body and soul and will no longer stand in need of so many things as we now do here on earth... We will have sufficient of everything in Him. Similarly, we will have all spiritual gifts,

⁴⁰ *Luther's Works*, 28:193.

⁴¹ *Luther's Works*, 28:143.

⁴² *Luther's Works*, 28:189-90.

⁴³ *Luther's Works*, 28:143.

⁴⁴ *Luther's Works*, 22:501.

⁴⁵ *Luther's Works*, 30:197.

⁴⁶ *Luther's Works*, 28:189-90, 196.

eternal righteousness, comfort and joy of conscience, that no one will be able to terrify us or confuse us or disquiet us any longer.⁴⁷

Commenting on 1 John 3:2, Luther writes: "We shall be like Him. God is life. Therefore we, too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore we, too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore we, too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss, not as it is in God but the bliss that is suitable for us."⁴⁸ Luther characterizes this revelation of God as the sight of God, which "will afford more life, joy, and delight than all creatures are able to accord."⁴⁹ That the resurrected will enjoy this eternal life, a bliss appropriate for human beings, implies that eternity involves some form of temporality for the redeemed – some form of duration and successiveness to their enjoyment.

All who enjoy this resurrection of the body will share the vision of God, so all will share an identical bliss. Nevertheless, Luther draws a distinction between the bliss of the righteous, and the glory with which their works shine. For it is the same person who is raised by Christ, and that person comes with his or her works. Luther believes that there will be distinctions made in heaven depending on a person's works: "before God all will be alike in faith and grace and heavenly essence; but there will be a difference in works and their glory."⁵⁰ He seems to believe that people will shine more or less brightly in proportion to their works.⁵¹

Analysis of Luther's individual eschatology will follow in section 4, where it will be compared to that of Calvin.

3. Calvin

Introduction

For John Calvin (1509-64), the destiny of the individual human being after death was of the utmost importance.⁵² He saw individual eschatology as being at the heart of

⁴⁷ *Luther's Works*, 28:141-42.

⁴⁸ *Luther's Works*, 30:268.

⁴⁹ *Luther's Works*, 28:143. Asendorf paraphrases Luther's ultimate eschatological hope as follows: "Our bodies will shine brightly like the sun and stars. The bliss will alone consist of the fact that we shall see. This vision is eternal life." *Eschatologie Bei Luther*, 293.

⁵⁰ *Luther's Works*, 28:173.

⁵¹ *Luther's Works*, 28:184.

⁵² For introductions to Calvin's individual eschatology, see Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, trans H. Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1955); Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, chap. IV, and "The Eschatology of the Reformation," especially 52-62; David E. Holwerda, "Eschatology and

the theological enterprise, and at the heart of the Christian life, writing in a commentary that the resurrection of the dead and eternal life are “the goal of all our religion, to which we ought to strive all through our lives.”⁵³ In the *Institutes*, he frames the same thought in the following terms: that “the chief activity of the soul” is to aspire to heavenly life; indeed, the human being “was made for meditation upon the heavenly life.”⁵⁴ A whole chapter of the *Institutes* is devoted to Meditation on the Future Life, beginning thus: “Whatever kind of tribulation presses upon us, we must ever look to this end: to accustom ourselves to contempt for the present life and to be aroused thereby to meditate upon the future life.”⁵⁵ This, according to Calvin, is part of God’s gracious will towards human beings: the miseries of this life are permitted by God in order that people may recognize the folly of trusting in it for ultimate happiness, which only heaven can afford. If human beings did not then have contempt for this world, they would not raise their eyes to heaven. Meditation on the future life is their duty, to prevent them from trusting in earthly riches, and a consolation, to prevent them from being too despondent at the apparent victory of the devil, flesh, sin and the wicked in this life. “He alone has fully profited in the gospel who has accustomed himself to continual meditation upon the blessed resurrection.”⁵⁶ It should be noted, however, that Calvin does not, in the exhortation to contempt for this present life, imply that this life is not good in itself. It is – for it is the gift of God. He writes: “let believers accustom themselves to a contempt of the present life that engenders no hatred of it or ingratitude against God. Indeed, this life, however crammed with infinite miseries it may be, is still rightly to be counted among those blessings of God which are not to be spurned.”⁵⁷ Life is a pilgrimage, whose destination is the resurrection. The human being has a highest good, according to Calvin, which is union with God. It is longing for this union which inspires the believers to raise their minds to the resurrection. Indeed, this present lifting of the mind kindles their hearts more and more, although the perfect satisfaction of their longing for union will be obtained only in the resurrection itself.⁵⁸

History,” *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 110-39; Kunz, *Protestantische Eschatologie*, 31-41; and Andrew Martin Davis, “A New Assessment of John Calvin’s Eschatology” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998).

⁵³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, trans. W. B. Johnston et al, ed. D. W. and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959-), 12:72.

⁵⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, vols 20 and 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), Book I, Chapter 15, Section 6.

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 9, 1.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 1. This same theme is found in Calvin’s reply to Cardinal Sadolet’s letter to the Senate and people of Geneva, in John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), 1:33-4.

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 9, 3.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 2.

Nature and Revelation

How does Calvin go about developing the doctrine of individual eschatology? To answer this question, it is necessary to outline first his understanding of revelation in nature. Calvin is convinced that the universe in its workmanship, variety, detail and skilful ordering contains unmistakable marks of God's glory. People "cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him."⁵⁹ Furthermore, affairs of human society similarly reveal God's powers, this time in terms of providence.⁶⁰ The evidence of the senses, particularly sight, and the experience of human society both enable people to contemplate God "in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself."⁶¹ There are consequences for eschatology:

Knowledge of this sort, then, ought not only to arouse us to the worship of God but also to awaken and encourage us to the hope of the future life. For since we notice that the examples that the Lord shows us both of his clemency and of his severity are inchoate and incomplete, doubtless we must consider this to presage even greater things, the manifestation and full exhibition of which are deferred to another life. On the other hand – since we see the pious laden with afflictions by the impious, stricken with unjust acts, overwhelmed with slanders, wounded with abuses and reproaches; while the wicked on the contrary flourish, are prosperous, obtain repose with dignity and without punishment – we must straightway conclude that there will be another life in which iniquity is to have its punishment, and righteousness is to be given its reward.⁶²

It appears as if Calvin is basing hope for eternal life on the experience and observation of the created world, from what people are taught by nature and by the use of their reason.

However, Calvin points out a flaw in this approach. The evidence of God in creation does not always profit the enquirer, because of human stupidity and vanity. Philosophers, who base their speculation on this sort of experience and observation, show their ignorance in failing to praise God for creation, and even in descending into atheism. Calvin concludes that "if men were taught only by nature, they would hold to nothing certain or solid or clear-cut, but would be so tied to confused principles as to worship an unknown God."⁶³ He describes the marks of God's power in nature as burning lamps which of themselves cannot lead human beings in the right path.⁶⁴ Contemplation of the universe gives a slight taste of the divine, but

⁵⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 1.

⁶⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 7.

⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 9.

⁶² Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 10.

⁶³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 12.

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 14.

still God is neglected.⁶⁵ Indeed, Calvin draws attention to Rom. 1:19, in which Paul points to knowledge of God in creation, not to show what human beings can know from creation alone, but to show how inexcusable they are for not worshipping God rightly.⁶⁶

Some other source of revelation is required to enable people to come to a knowledge of God, and that for Calvin is scripture. Scripture is “another and better help” than nature, “a more direct and more certain mark.”⁶⁷ Scripture is necessary to correct the mistaken understanding gained of the Creator in observation of the universe, which is degenerate from true knowledge of God.⁶⁸ Furthermore, scripture reveals other knowledge – about God as the redeemer, in Christ the mediator – which could never be attained by natural knowledge of God.⁶⁹

It is clear then that knowledge of God gained through rational reflection on observation and experience is imperfect, and that this imperfect understanding of God is improved by attending to God’s revelation in scripture. Nevertheless, Calvin does not thereby declare the natural knowledge of God to be useless. Instead, *for the believer* who has been enlightened by the word of God in scripture, creation as a whole and human society in particular do make God known. It follows that for the believer, for example, arguments for the existence of God, the existence of immortal souls and the nature of human fulfilment, which are not found explicitly in scripture, may still be legitimate.⁷⁰

Anthropology

Calvin’s doctrine of the human person is a fundamental constituent of his eschatology, and as we shall see, he uses arguments from observation of and reasoning about the human person alongside the witness of scripture. In essence, Calvin understands the human being to be a unity of body and soul: “that man consists of a soul and a body ought to be beyond controversy.”⁷¹ The body of the fallen human being he considers to be entirely material, a fleshy substance which he

⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 15.

⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 5, 14.

⁶⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 6, 2.

⁶⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 4, 1.

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 2, 1.

⁷⁰ Here I follow the approach of Edward A. Dowey, Jr, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 72-86, and David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 23-39, rather than that of Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1956), 39-53, and T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), 45-71, in seeing a positive although limited role for the natural knowledge of God in Calvin. This debate will resurface in my discussion of Barth and Brunner in chapter 7 below.

⁷¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 2.

describes as a house of clay, following Job 4:19,⁷² and which is corruptible, so decays and dies. The body is not responsible for emotion, reason, will or even animation, which are the province of the soul. Not only is the body not responsible for these, it appears to hinder the soul's true occupation, so much so that in language reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedo*, Calvin describes the body as a prison.⁷³

Does this similarity in language indicate a similarity of doctrine? The Platonic text is as follows: "Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance."⁷⁴ Calvin's language of the soul as imprisoned by the body does bear a resemblance to Socrates'. However, for Calvin, while the body often provides the object and the means of temptation, the body itself is a victim of sin's corruption. The body, just like the soul, is subject to *flesh*, in the Pauline sense of a power warring with the Spirit in the human being. It is not physicality *per se* which prevents the soul from obtaining a saving knowledge of God, according to Calvin, but sin. Death frees the soul from the body and so enables it to enter bliss, not primarily because it is disembodied, but because it can no longer sin, being made entirely righteous in Christ.⁷⁵

Imprisoned within the body, however, is the part of the human being which, according to Calvin, is pre-eminent – the soul. Soul is "immortal yet created essence," the "nobler part" of the human being.⁷⁶ The immortality of the soul is of fundamental importance for Calvin. His early treatise on questions of the life to come, entitled *Psychopannychia*, is in essence a defence of the doctrine of the soul's immortality against two different views. One is that the soul sleeps between death and the resurrection, which as we saw above is associated with Luther; and the other is associated with "Enthusiasts" – Anabaptists – that the human soul perishes at death, only to be resurrected with the body. This latter view Calvin describes as holding that the soul is a mortal, animating spirit which dies along with the body.

⁷² Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 2.

⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 6, 5; III, 9, 4; John Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, in *Tracts and Treatises in Defence of the Reformed Faith*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), 3:443, 449.

⁷⁴ Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 135.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the relation between body, soul and flesh in Calvin, see Margaret R. Miles, "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*," *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981), 303-23.

⁷⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 2.

For Calvin, this is nearly inconceivable: he considers that one can only contemplate the death of the soul as meaning the absence of God: "Would you know what the death of the soul is? It is to be without God – to be abandoned by God, and left to itself: for if God is its life, it loses its life when it loses the presence of God."⁷⁷ The Lutheran view of the soul-sleep after death fares little better since Calvin considers it to amount to the same approach as the Anabaptist that the soul perishes at death. If a soul is asleep, he argues, that is akin to saying that the soul is dead, since it cannot enjoy its nature, which is "to move, to feel, to be vigorous, to understand."⁷⁸

By contrast with both these views, Calvin is adamant not only that the soul survives death, but that it maintains a conscious relationship to God after the person's death and before the resurrection: "The soul, after the death of the body, still survives, endued with sense and intellect."⁷⁹ The *Institutes* similarly stress the immortality of the soul, which Calvin believes to be taught in a number of scriptural passages, including Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus,⁸⁰ Jesus' words to the thief on the cross,⁸¹ and Paul's words in 2 Cor. 5:6, 8, "teaching us that we journey away from God so long as we dwell in the flesh, but that we enjoy his presence outside the flesh."⁸²

Calvin offers a number of arguments beyond the citation of scripture which support his assertion of the immortality of the soul. For example, he argues somewhat inconclusively that the presence of conscience in the human being indicates an immortal essence.⁸³ A further and more persuasive proof is from the nimbleness of the human mind:

With our intelligence we conceive the invisible God and the angels, something the body can by no means do. We grasp things that are right, just, and honorable, which are hidden to the bodily senses. Therefore the spirit must be the seat of this intelligence. Indeed, sleep itself, which benumbs man, seeming even to deprive him of life, is no obscure witness of immortality, since it suggests not only thoughts of things that have never happened, but also presentiments of the future.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 454.

⁷⁸ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 427.

⁷⁹ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 427.

⁸⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 2.

⁸¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 6.

⁸² Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 2.

⁸³ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 2.

⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 2. The same argument appears in outline in I, 5, 5.

The same argument had appeared in *Psychopannychia*: “Seeing, then, that the soul of man possesses reason, intellect, and will – qualities which are not annexed to the body – it is not wonderful that it subsists without the body, and does not perish like the brutes, which have nothing more than their bodily senses.”⁸⁵ And again, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, he writes that the human soul has “something peculiar and proper to it, namely, what is essentially immortal, for instance, the light of understanding, and reason.”⁸⁶ This argument is based on the existence of mental properties not dependent on the human body, namely reason, intellect and will. Since these mental properties do not rely on the body, the body’s death will have no direct effect on the mind. The soul, which is the subject of these mental properties, may then be considered to be immortal. Calvin is conscious of antecedents of his view: he praises Plato for being the only philosopher who rightly understands that the soul contains the image of God and hence possesses immortality.⁸⁷

At this point it should be recognized that the immortality of the soul which Calvin stresses so vehemently at times is not a possession which human beings enjoy because of their own capacities or merits. It does not imply that human beings live forever entirely under their own steam. Rather, human immortality is the gift of God. Importantly, Calvin insists that God alone has immortality, in which he follows 1 Tim. 6:16. In *Psychopannychia*, he writes: “When we say that the spirit of man is immortal, we do not affirm that it can stand against the hand of God, or subsist without his agency. Far from us be such blasphemy! But we say that it is sustained by his hand and blessing.”⁸⁸ For all its immortality, the human soul is for Calvin just as much a dependent part of creation as the body, albeit with quite different qualities. In the *Institutes*, he writes, “Therefore we must take it to be a fact that souls... are just as much created as angels are.”⁸⁹ Calvin is at pains to refute any doctrine of the soul’s emanation from God as being something divine: if the human soul were of one substance with God, then all the sinfulness of humanity must also be ascribed to God.

⁸⁵ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 451.

⁸⁶ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 9:338.

⁸⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 6

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 478.

⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 5. See also John Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, trans. Arthur Golding (1574; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 128, 616. For further examples corroborating this understanding of the soul’s dependence on God, see T. F. Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 26-31.

The final significant element in Calvin's doctrine of the human being is the image of God. The human soul is the seat of God's image in the human person. Although there may be sparks of the image of God in the body, it is primarily the human soul which shows forth God's glory.⁹⁰ Despite the human soul's bearing the image of God, the Fall has obscured this image, and corrupted the original nature of the human being. But the image of God can be rediscovered in that humanity which Christ has restored to human beings and to which they are drawn in the Christian life. Since this regeneration involves knowledge, righteousness and holiness, according to Paul, the original image of God in human being must be these particular characteristics. Conformity to Christ restores the elect human being to the bearing of the image of God, partially now, and fully in heaven.⁹¹ As Heinrich Quistorp points out, "Calvin's anthropology is thus to be understood less against the background of creation than against that of redemption and eschatology. Man's being is orientated towards the new creation in Christ; this is especially true of his soul, and his earthly life from the beginning is destined to eternity."⁹²

Death

Central to any exposition of Calvin's anthropology and individual eschatology must be his understanding of death – of all people, and of Christ in particular. At a basic level, Calvin understands that death is "something which we all undergo, as it were by a common necessity of nature."⁹³ More deeply, the necessity of death, for Calvin, is the consequence of the Fall which has plunged humanity into corruption and mortality: "death, which takes its origin from the fall of man, is accidental."⁹⁴ But he then makes a distinction between those who approach death in an attitude of fear and those who do not. The first group consists of those who are not found among the elect, for whom death appears as a curse. Calvin writes: "I acknowledge that death in itself is an evil, when it is the curse and penalty of sin, and is both itself full of terror and desolation, and drives those to despair who feel that it is inflicted on them by an angry and punishing God."⁹⁵ By contrast, death for believers, although the consequence of human sinfulness, holds no fear.

⁹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 3.

⁹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 4.

⁹² Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 66-7.

⁹³ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 457.

⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 7. See also II, 1, 6.

⁹⁵ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 483.

Why can a Christian be confident despite death? Calvin believes that the death of Jesus Christ neutralizes the power of death over the believer, enabling the person to enter into life. Christ's death redeems the elect to life; Christ delivers them from death. Calvin, writing of Christ, explains this mystery as follows:

He let himself be swallowed up by death, as it were, not to be engulfed in its abyss, but rather to engulf it that must soon have engulfed us; he let himself be subjected to it, not to be overwhelmed by its power, but rather to lay it low, when it was threatening us and exulting over our fallen state.⁹⁶

Calvin's imagery is of Christ's descent into hell, a descent in which the dead Christ destroys death itself. According to Calvin, Christ underwent "the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment."⁹⁷ He suffered not only bodily but in his soul, feeling himself forsaken, estranged from God.

Given this victorious combat Christ has with death, Calvin can write that death

has been destroyed in such a way as to be no longer fatal for believers, but not in such a way as to cause them no trouble. It is true that the Spirit of God, who dwells in us, is life; but all the same we still have a mortal body. The "stuff" of death in us will one day be taken away, but that has not happened yet... The sword of death used to be able to pierce right to the heart, but now it is blunt. It wounds still, of course, but without any danger; for we die, but, in dying, we pass over into life.⁹⁸

Later in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, Calvin makes even clearer the connection between Christ's victory and that of his followers: because Christ has conquered sin, "we are no longer lying under the power of death. Accordingly, even if all that those blessings involve has not yet been revealed to us, we may confidently glory in them; because what has been completed in the Head must of necessity be brought to completion in the members. We have every right then, to taunt death as a conquered power, because Christ's victory is our victory."⁹⁹

For Calvin, then, it appears as if death is not merely something to which Christians should be indifferent, but something which they should positively welcome. The believer's entry into eternal life seems to be at death, not at the Last Judgment and resurrection. (As we shall see, twentieth century Protestant eschatology does not follow Calvin here.) Death itself is the soul's release, the shedding of the rotten

⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 16, 7.

⁹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 16, 10.

⁹⁸ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 9:325.

prison, the gateway to life.¹⁰⁰ Calvin's positive attitude towards death follows in part from his conviction that the human soul is immortal. "What else is death," he asks rhetorically, "but a departing of the soul and body asunder?"¹⁰¹ Calvin's belief in the immortality of the soul renders this sundering of body and soul harmless for the Christian. Indeed, the loss of this corporeal body should not be lamented, since it is merely the rotten prison of our souls, the means by which the person sins. Death should be seen as the opportunity for our being unable to sin, entering the immortality to come "where a firm condition will be ours which nowhere appears on earth."¹⁰² Death then is to be welcomed by the believer, as "a kind of passage to the highest degree of immortality."¹⁰³ This "immortality" means something like eternal life, and is to be distinguished from what Calvin means by the immortality of the soul, which refers rather to the God-given ability of human beings to continue beyond the end of the body.

There is another side to Calvin's understanding of death, however, focussing on the consequences of the death of Christ. If our liberation from death – that is, what happens after death – is the first effect of Christ's death for us, the second effect concerns our progress towards death. Our participation in the death of Christ puts to death "our earthly members so that they may no longer perform their functions."¹⁰⁴ This putting to death, or *mortification*, of the flesh is the coming to life, or *quickenning*, of the spirit. The soul, as it were, becomes more spiritual the more we participate in the death of Christ.¹⁰⁵ As Christ's death gave way to resurrection, so our mortification with him – the death of the old person – gives way to revivification – the rising of the new, spiritual person.¹⁰⁶

Interim State

Given Calvin's belief in the immortality of the human soul, and description of death as the entry of the soul into eternal life unencumbered by the rotten body, it follows that immediately upon death, the soul of the believer enters some state of

⁹⁹ Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries*, 9:347.

¹⁰⁰ This has been noticed by Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 46-8, 80-1, 141.

¹⁰¹ Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, 616.

¹⁰² Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 9, 5.

¹⁰³ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 457.

¹⁰⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 16, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 443.

blissfulness. It also follows that he rejects the doctrine of Purgatory, as unscriptural, and negating the salvific work of Christ.¹⁰⁷ As we shall see, Calvin, in accordance with his reading of scripture, fully expects the immortal soul to be reunited with the body at the resurrection, and so the state immediately after the individual's death cannot be ultimate consummation of the person. So Calvin describes an interim state of the soul. He writes on 1 Corinthians 15: "The souls of the dead are now living and enjoying blessed rest," although, he adds, "the completion of their happiness and consolation depends on the resurrection alone."¹⁰⁸ Note that for Calvin, it is better for the soul to be without the present corrupt body than still united to it, but to be with the resurrection body will be better yet. The *rest* Calvin understands in *Psychopannychia* as "tranquillity of conscience and security,"¹⁰⁹ complete in the believer after death in the liberating absence of the flesh and its desires. The resting soul feels no guilt, and will not sin. Hence the rest is one of peace: a peace which

is increased and advanced by death, which, freeing, and as it were discharging them [i.e. souls] from the warfare of this world, leads them into the place of peace, where, while wholly intent on beholding God, they have nothing better to which they can turn their eyes or direct their desire.¹¹⁰

The bliss of the soul is not complete however, until the God whom it beholds is completely glorified. Calvin goes on: "Still, something is wanting which they desire to see, namely, the complete and perfect glory of God, to which they always aspire... Their desire is always moving onward till the glory of God is complete, and this completion awaits the judgment day."¹¹¹

In the later *Institutes* of 1559, some quarter of a century after the publication of *Psychopannychia*, Calvin's thought on the interim state is more hesitant. He points out that scripture says no more than that Christ is present with the souls of the elect after death, receiving them into paradise "that they may obtain consolation."¹¹² Nevertheless, he goes on to expound the meagre scriptural texts by writing that pious

¹⁰⁶ For T. F. Torrance, in *Kingdom and Church*, 93, the process of mortification and revivification is *all* Calvin means by the soul's release from the body, but Torrance appears to neglect the disdain for the body which Calvin displays.

¹⁰⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 5, 6-10.

¹⁰⁸ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 9:320.

¹⁰⁹ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 432.

¹¹⁰ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 436.

¹¹¹ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 436.

¹¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 6.

souls “enter into blessed rest, where in glad expectation they await the enjoyment of promised glory, and so all things are held in suspense until Christ the Redeemer appear.”¹¹³ In essence the interim state in early and later Calvin is the same: a state in which the soul has entered into bliss, rests, is consoled, and awaits the glorification of God in the Last Judgment when Christ shall appear, and the body is resurrected.¹¹⁴

The Resurrection of Christ

We have seen that for Calvin, while people die with Christ, they also rise with him, and so the resurrection of Christ is central for the doctrine of individual eschatology. Calvin’s main point in this respect is that Christ’s resurrection is the substance of all human resurrection. Commenting on 1 Cor. 15:12-13, Calvin paraphrases Paul as saying, “Christ did not die or rise again for Himself, but for us, therefore His resurrection is the substance (*hypostasis*) of ours, and that which was effected in Him must be brought to completion in us also.”¹¹⁵ The heart of the matter for Calvin is the believer’s being united to Christ, as part of his body, and so the resurrection of Christ is necessarily followed by believers’ own resurrection, as members of the same body. Again the efficacy of Christ’s death and resurrection is explored in the *Institutes*. Christ’s death extinguishes sin and death, and through his resurrection, “righteousness was restored and life raised up, so that – thanks to the resurrection – his death manifested its power and efficacy in us.”¹¹⁶ Death has lost its sting in Christ’s resurrection. Consequently Calvin can go on to say, “we are assured of our own resurrection by receiving a sort of guarantee substantiated by his.”¹¹⁷ Believers are joined to Christ, so his resurrection is the pledge of theirs: what was begun in the head must be completed in all the members.¹¹⁸

Human Resurrection and Eternal Life

For Calvin, the believer’s resurrection will be a resurrection of the body, in which the soul will be reunited with the resurrected body. This will take place at the time of God’s final judgment on creation, which is also described as the Day of Christ’s coming. Heavenly life will depend on this complete glorification of God. Calvin

¹¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 6.

¹¹⁴ On Calvin’s account of the interim state see the discussion in Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, 81-89.

¹¹⁵ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 9:318.

¹¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 16, 13.

¹¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 16, 13.

¹¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 3.

stresses the importance of that which the soul awaits. Even in *Psychopannychia*, where his argument is against those who leave all bliss until the Last Judgment, Calvin accepts that the soul's blessedness will be incomplete until the last day: "our blessedness is always in progress up to that day which shall conclude and terminate all progress, and... thus the glory of the elect, and complete consummation of hope, look forward to that day for their fulfilment."¹¹⁹ In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Calvin makes the same point: "Christians direct their hope entirely to the Day of the Last Judgment."¹²⁰ It appears that, in accordance with scriptural expectation, Calvin believes that our salvation would be incomplete, and the effects of Christ's death and resurrection would remain unfulfilled, without the Last Judgment. Calvin describes the day of Christ's coming as a putting in order of everything, "the peaceful haven, the situation immune from change of every kind."¹²¹

As to the resurrection body itself, Calvin is convinced that it will be the individual's same body which is resurrected: this follows, he believes, from the Pauline statement that the perishable nature must put on the imperishable. Furthermore, Christ's restoration applies to that which was fallen – which includes our own bodies. The alternative which Calvin considers only to discard – that God will make new bodies for us – neither follows scripture nor maintains the logic of Calvin's eschatology which throughout is obedient to the principle that our eschatological life is our own restored life wrought in Christ.¹²²

Although it is the same body which is resurrected (in Calvin's terminology, the body's substance will undergo no change), its form is quite different from that of ante-mortem life, as Calvin makes clear in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15. In the here and now, human bodies are animated by their souls, enabling life which requires the aid of drink, food, clothing and sleep, amongst other things. But the resurrection body although rejoined to the soul will not be determined by it but by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit which will give the body its life-giving power.¹²³ This spiritual life, restored from the consequences of the Fall, will not end in death, but will be eternal.¹²⁴ For Calvin, the nature of this inspired body remains somewhat

¹¹⁹ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 463.

¹²⁰ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 9:321. See also 12:362.

¹²¹ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 9:323.

¹²² Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 7.

¹²³ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 9:338.

¹²⁴ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 9:346.

mysterious, but clearly it will be superior to the corrupt body with which people labour in the here and now.¹²⁵

With the coming of the Day of Christ, and the resurrection of people's bodies to rejoin their souls, the process of regeneration wrought in the elect before their deaths will be brought to completion. Calvin, as we saw earlier, expresses this insight in terms of the image of God. Following the resurrection of the body, the image of God "will be restored to fullness in our body as well as our soul; what has now begun will be brought to completion, and we will obtain in reality what as yet we are only hoping for."¹²⁶ Knowledge, righteousness and holiness, which begin to be formed in the elect in the light of Christ's resurrection, will be perfectly manifested in the resurrection.¹²⁷ The kingdom of God is already begun in the elect, but will be consummated in the resurrection. All other rule but God's will end. In his commentary on Hebrews, Calvin makes evident the connection between the kingdom now and then: "It is now clear that the world to come is so described not only as that which we hope for after the resurrection, but as that which begins from the rise of the kingdom of Christ, and it will find its fulfilment in the final redemption."¹²⁸ Resurrection is the end of a process begun with Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Although it is good to think of eternal blessedness in order to kindle the desire for heaven, Calvin urges sobriety in attempts to describe its nature. Nevertheless, he does offer a description of blessedness at the heart of which is the encounter with God:

If God contains the fullness of all good things in himself like an inexhaustible fountain, nothing beyond him is to be sought by those who strive after the highest good and all the elements of happiness... If the Lord will share his glory, power, and righteousness with the elect – nay, will give himself to be enjoyed by them and, what is more excellent, will somehow make them to become one with himself, let us remember that every sort of happiness is included under this benefit.¹²⁹

Here is a vision of heaven as union with God, and hence, as sharing in every goodness and happiness of God save deity. Calvin describes the day when God "will

¹²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 8.

¹²⁶ Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries*, 9:341.

¹²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 15, 4.

¹²⁸ Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries*, 12:22.

¹²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 10.

receive his faithful people into the peace of his Kingdom” as the day when God “will feed them with the unspeakable sweetness of his delights, will elevate them to his sublime fellowship – in fine, will deign to make them sharers in his happiness.”¹³⁰ People become partakers even in God’s nature – they become like God – echoing Calvin’s understanding of the elect’s being transformed into the image of God in their restoration in Christ. This does not mean that they become God, but rather that their humanity, restored to perfect knowledge and righteousness, approaches divinity. Such happiness which follows from this sharing in divinity – in knowledge and love – must involve certain features of experience associated with temporality: duration and successiveness. Otherwise, it is hard to imagine the meaning of this “happiness.”¹³¹

One further aspect of heavenly life of which Calvin is convinced is that the resplendence of the righteous is in accordance with the measure of grace which they receive. Individuals will receive different rewards, according to their labours: “just as God, variously distributing his gifts to the saints in this world, beams upon them unequally, so there will not be an equal measure of glory in heaven, where God shall crown his own gifts.”¹³² Calvin draws a distinction here between the state of eternal blessedness and the degree of glory enjoyed therein: whereas the elect share the same blessedness, the degree of glory differs.

Finally, in discussion of resurrection and eternal life in Calvin, it should be noted that Calvin does not envisage the resurrection of the elect’s bodies without the resurrection of the world as a whole. There will be a repairing of the faults which the world suffers now as a consequence of the fall. (Calvin gives as an example impurities in metal.) The entire world will be restored alongside humankind, although the redeemed strictly speaking have no need for the material world.¹³³

4. The Patterns of Traditional Protestant Individual Eschatology

This section will summarize the common themes and approaches of classical Protestant theology as it deals with individual eschatology, before pointing out the

¹³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 9, 6.

¹³¹ See Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, 171-4 for a useful summary of Calvin’s comments on the blessed life, scattered throughout his commentaries.

¹³² Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 10. See also III, 25, 3; *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 9:324.

specific emphases of Luther and Calvin. A brief account will follow of the most common criticisms subsequent, particularly twentieth century theology, has brought against these views.

Common Ground between Luther and Calvin

First, classical Protestant eschatology, as it is found in Luther and Calvin, is based on the doctrine of God. God's omnipotence, holiness, goodness, and purpose for creation form the fundamental principles on which future hope is grounded. It follows that the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body are not properties of human beings which they hold independently of God's grace.

Although it is a natural property of the soul that it be immortal, this depends on God's creative will for human beings as much as any other property. As for the resurrection of the body, this is not a natural property of the body, but, given the body's mortality, is entirely the miraculous gift of God. In both cases, however, God's creative will is the ground for hope of life beyond death.

Second, for both Luther and Calvin, individual eschatology is only possible because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's death disables death's power over human beings, and his resurrection is the substance and pledge of their own, as part of his body. The resurrection of the body will occur, according to both Luther and Calvin, only on the day of Christ's coming, when he hands his kingdom to the Father. Indeed, the shape of true human life is entirely determined by the life restored to the redeemed by Christ, whose death and resurrection enables the human being to begin eternal life in the here and now. As well as being theocentric, it could be said that classical Protestant eschatology is Christocentric.

Furthermore, Luther and Calvin share the same broad approach in anthropology. The human being is created by God, is entirely dependent on God for existence, and is a unity of body and soul. In its natural pre-fallen state, the human being had a share in immortality. Following the fall, the human being is subject to death: the body is subject to pain, corruption and the withdrawal of the soul at death; and the soul is likewise affected, prone to sin, and unable to attain to a proper relationship with God. Nevertheless, the human soul does not cease to exist at death, but is separated from the body. In the here and now, each individual is capable of entering into a relationship with Christ, part of his body, and thereby may already begin to

¹³³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 11.

enter eternal life. Only at the resurrection, however, can this eternal life be possessed in perfection, given true human nature as a unity of soul and body.

This common ground in anthropology extends into their understanding of resurrection life. Both Luther and Calvin conceive of the life to come as the personal enjoyment by redeemed men and women of the presence of God. They describe eternal life as a righteous, joyful life lived by individuals who no longer suffer the effects of sin and corruption, but live spiritually, nourished entirely by God. People in heaven will be happy, having reached the highest good, sharing the happiness which God enjoys – an eternal life comprising a transfigured temporal experience. Yet for both Luther and Calvin, human fulfilment does not leave behind the life lived on earth, and both envisage the blessed in heaven receiving different measures of glory, depending on their works.

Finally, both Luther and Calvin envisage resurrected human beings as part of a new creation of heaven and earth. Neither conceives of heaven in utopian terms: by contrast, the temporal order in the world will be abolished at the Last Day, and God will rule directly in a spiritual kingdom. Nevertheless, human beings are not the only creatures to be created anew by God, and they will take their place amidst a restored world.

Points of Difference between Luther and Calvin

There are two crucial areas of difference between Luther's and Calvin's individual eschatology, important also for the criticism which followed. The first is their approach to the activity of theology. When Luther treats of the resurrection and Last Judgment in his commentaries, he is at pains to point out the lack of support from natural reason for these doctrines. Intellectual activity leads the enquirer to doubt the resurrection of the body, and so the proper attitude to these doctrines is one of faith in the Word. It is clear that Luther's understanding of individual eschatology is found within his overall framework of a theology based on the cross, and God's revelation there in the crucified Christ, rather than a theology of glory, based on God's supposed revelation in human nature and reason.¹³⁴

For Calvin, the issue is less clear-cut. Much of his thought on individual eschatology is found in commentaries on the Bible, but there is also considerable philosophical argument at work. For example, in the first book of the *Institutes*,

¹³⁴ See the Heidelberg Disputation, *Luther's Works*, 31:39–42.

Calvin outlines why human fulfilment must necessarily take place in another world, *on the basis of observation and experience in this present world*. Moreover, Calvin's account of the immortality of the soul owes more to Cicero and a popular understanding of Plato than to the pages of scripture.¹³⁵ Calvin believes that these arguments may be legitimately used by those believers who are also enlightened by God's revelation in scripture. Calvin, then, is more open to a variety of sources for eschatological reflection than Luther.

The second area of difference is related to the first. For Luther, who is dependent to a greater extent on the words of scripture, little can be said regarding what happens to the soul at death. His reading of the Bible assures him of a Last Judgment when Christ shall return to raise the dead, but he is content not to speculate about the time in between death and the Last Judgment. Consequently Luther follows Paul in describing death as sleep, in which there will be no conscious life. Calvin, able to draw on his more philosophical understanding of the soul's immortality, suggests in *Psychopannychia* that the soul enters a state of blissfulness immediately at death, in which it can behold God. The later *Institutes*, while preferring to think of the pious soul in blessed rest, in glad *expectation* of the final fulfilment, continues to articulate his belief in the soul's conscious life after death.

The consequence of this difference is in the timing and number of judgments. Calvin has to understand judgment as occurring at death, to admit the pious soul into blessed rest, and remove the damned soul from God's presence. Yet Calvin in accordance with the scriptures believes in a day of Christ when the resurrection of the body will take place. Nevertheless, this Last Judgment can do no more than confirm the judgment already made on the person at death, according to Calvin. For Luther, on the other hand, all judgment takes place at the one time, at the day of Christ, when the soul is reunited with the body.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ See John Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 103.

¹³⁶ This debate over the entry into bliss at death or at the Last Judgment repeats a near-identical debate between the fourteenth century popes John XXII and his successor Benedict XII. Against prevailing orthodoxy, John argues that the reward of heaven is only granted to people at the resurrection, since before being reunited with their bodies they are not whole people. Benedict reverted to the traditional position that at death, the souls of the just go straight to heaven where they enjoy the vision of God and eternal life, even before the resurrection of the body. Broadly speaking, Luther represents John XXII and Calvin Benedict XII in their revisiting of the dispute. See Simon

Twentieth century criticism of classical Protestant eschatology has concentrated on anthropological dualism, particularly as it is believed to exist in Calvin. Many twentieth century theologians, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, tend to believe the human being to be a unity which is not separable into the different substances of body and soul, and so Luther and Calvin are considered to hold to a mistaken anthropology. Reformation scholars are no less critical, particularly when considering Calvin. According to Heinrich Quistorp, for example, Calvin should be criticized for adopting a dualistic anthropology of imprisoning body and imprisoned soul because, in his view, it departs from the witness of scripture.¹³⁷ T. F. Torrance, in defence of Calvin, concedes that he appears to use dualist language, but claims that when Calvin talks about the soul escaping the prison of the body, he is referring to the Christian escaping sin – “the body of death.” Hence all the language of *soul* and *body* in Calvin should be understood as referring to the *new man* and *old man*.¹³⁸

However this interpretation seems to bend Calvin’s language beyond recognition; David Holwerda’s judgment is sounder: “One senses that Calvin’s anthropology is inclined towards a basic dichotomy between body and soul, earth and heaven.”¹³⁹

The first criticism of this dualist anthropology is that it fails to account for human experience of death. For Calvin, death is a consequence of the fall, the inherent limit of human beings’ subjection to flesh. Yet death should be welcomed, according to Calvin, because it means the immediate encounter of the human soul with God in bliss. However, as Margaret Miles points out, “The ‘flesh,’ the adventitious aspect of human being and the only aspect that merits death, is not the only part to experience it. The body also experiences death harshly and painfully.”¹⁴⁰ And, accepting for the moment Calvin’s distinction of body and soul, death is harsh and painful in the soul too. In short, the criticism states that Calvin’s adherence to a dualism of body and soul, which owes more than a little to a popular form of Platonism, leads to a treatment of death which amounts to a partial denial of its significance for human life.

Tugwell, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 133-38, 141-55, for a full discussion of the fourteenth century debate.

¹³⁷ Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 95-7.

¹³⁸ Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 92-3.

¹³⁹ Holwerda, “Eschatology and History,” 115.

¹⁴⁰ Miles, “Theology, Anthropology,” 317.

In a related criticism, Quistorp admonishes Calvin for maintaining the *immortality* of the soul, because it prevents him, in Quistorp's judgment, from dealing with the significance of the resurrection of the body, and takes away the point of the Last Judgment. Since the soul enters into bliss at death, and sees God, what need is there for resurrection or a Last Judgment, except as the completion of a process?¹⁴¹ Indeed, Calvin does consider death to be the transition to eternal rest, and believes in an interim state of guiltlessness and sinlessness. Quistorp further argues that this concentration on the individual's death and eternal bliss thereafter prevents a proper Christian hope for the whole of creation: "What Calvin says about the church as the corpus of a new humanity and its lordship over the world does not go beyond occasional indications. For he is less interested in the fulfilment of the church as a society than in the salvation of its individual members."¹⁴²

James Martin makes a similar attack. Like Quistorp, he believes that emphasizing immortality of the soul takes away from the significance of the Last Judgment. Martin summarizes his criticism of Calvin and the Reformed Orthodoxy which succeeded him as follows:

under the influence of Calvin the place given to death in the Last Things introduced an eschatological short-cut, by which all the blessings of heaven are the immediate possession of the believer. The spiritualized, individualistic eschatological tradition has here obscured the realistic view. The former connected the bliss of heaven with death; the latter related it to the Last Judgment and its Concomitants.¹⁴³

As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Martin's criticism of traditional Reformed eschatology of the individual is shared by many twentieth century theologians, including Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel.

But is this criticism entirely fair? Calvin does undoubtedly believe that the human person is both body and soul: the body being fleshly material with physical appetites, having the inevitable tendency to decay and die as a consequence of sin; the soul being the non-material faculty of reason and intelligence which, though affected by sin, does not cease with death but is separated from the body temporarily until the resurrection at the Lord's coming. Two points should be made clear regarding this supposed dualism. First, the soul's immortality is entirely the gift of God. One could

¹⁴¹ Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 95-6.

¹⁴² Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 180.

call it natural in that this nature is God-given. Calvin may not be accused of holding to human independence of God because of its immortality: by contrast, human immortality is a sign of human dependence on the creator God. Second, although the soul is superior to the body according to Calvin, he nowhere asserts that the soul is the person. The body may be a prison, but it is a prison which the person makes for him or herself through sin. The soul at rest after death may experience bliss, but it is a bliss which is incomplete in terms of the whole person before the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the body. Only with the re-uniting of soul and its own body is God's glory in creation fulfilled. The person is a unity of soul and body. These two points go some distance towards blunting the force of the twentieth century critique.

Furthermore, despite Calvin's adherence to the immortality of the soul in his understanding of the human person, the stronger note in his soteriology is the death and resurrection of Jesus, which deprive death of its power over the believer, and which form the model for the believer's own imitation of Christ. Immortality does not save the person, for Calvin; but rather is simply the God-given nature of human beings. Moreover, as Holwerda has persuasively argued,¹⁴⁴ Calvin exhorts contempt of the present life not because of disdain for the body given the pre-eminence of the immortal soul (though clearly he does feel disdain for the body), but rather because the Christian life is necessarily one of taking up the cross of Christ in the hope offered in the resurrection of Christ. The motive for the believer's desire for death is not escape from an evil body, but the desire to pattern one's life on the Lord. True, the absence of the body removes the occasion of much temptation and means by which it is acted upon, but the body itself is not the source of evil, which is sin. Anthropological dualism is certainly compatible with contempt for the present life, and may contribute in the background to Calvin's contempt, but it need not produce it. Immortality of the soul must therefore not be over-emphasized in Calvin's eschatology. His principal resource in grappling with death is not immortality of the soul, but salvation wrought in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But understanding the relationship between Calvin's anthropology and his exhortation to meditate on the future life does not yet answer the heart of the twentieth century criticism, which is that his eschatology is only interested in the

¹⁴³ James P. Martin, *The Last Judgment in Protestant Theology from Orthodoxy to Ritschl* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 17.

¹⁴⁴ Holwerda, "Eschatology and History," 116-21.

salvation of individuals, and by moving the individual's entry into bliss up to the moment of death, it removes any real need for resurrection of the body, a Last Judgment or a new creation. Calvin's individual eschatology implies that doctrines of the immortality of the soul and the immediate rest of the soul after death and before the resurrection *are compatible with* expectation of and hope for the last day when Christ shall come to judge the world, the dead shall be resurrected, the world shall be perfectly renewed and human beings will enjoy uninhibited communion with God. It is this compatibility which is doubted in much twentieth century Protestant theology. Given immortality of the soul, the critics say, the resurrection is redundant.

The fault-line is found in the hope for a new creation. As we saw above, Calvin argues for the doctrine of the world's restoration, but his reasoning is crucial:

It occurs to them [i.e., men hungry for empty learning] to ask what purpose is to be served by a restoration of the world, since the children of God will not be in any need of this great and incomparable plenty but will be like the angels, whose abstinence from food is the symbol of eternal blessedness. But I reply that in the very sight of it there will be such pleasantness, such sweetness in the knowledge of it alone, without the use of it, that this happiness will far surpass all the amenities that we now enjoy... It follows that an enjoyment, clear and pure from every vice, even though it makes no use of corruptible life, is the acme of happiness.¹⁴⁵

This, it will be argued in the twentieth century, is no real hope for the restoration of the world, for new heavens and new earth, for justice, for righteousness, for the defeat of evil, suffering and death. This is merely a new world as a perfect entertainment for the elect. And so, the argument goes, Calvin's individual eschatology is discredited as being individualizing – offering no real hope for anything but the individual – and spiritualizing – granting judgment and bliss regardless of resurrection.

The charge can be put another way – it is that the concentration on death and the beyond in Reformation eschatology is not authentic eschatology at all because it denies the connection between eschatology and history. Holwerda has nicely described the “authentic eschatology” of the twentieth century:

In terms of the contemporary discussion, an authentic eschatological vision perceives history and eschatology as one. Eschatology concerns the dynamic of human history, the cosmic sweep of the rule of God involving the judgment and renewal of human life and all its structures. Eschatology is not concerned just

¹⁴⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, 25, 11.

with the final momentary events of history, but with the dynamic force moving at the core of human history here and now, giving history its meaning and its destiny.¹⁴⁶

Holwerda offers the most thoughtful contemporary defence of Calvin's individual eschatology, and his approach deserves attention. He suggests that Calvin's vision of the kingdom of God *is* authentic, but only partially so, because it is limited initially to renewal in individual Christian lives. The kingdom, then, instead of referring to God's sway in every sphere of creation, is limited to the company of believers – the church. For Calvin, however, this is a matter of order: he sees the kingdom taking shape first in individuals and the church, then in creation as a whole. Holwerda concludes:

Neither the believer nor the church exists or is saved apart from the world. But the eschatological reordering of the world occurs here and now – at least in its beginnings – in the believer and the church. Hence the destiny of the world becomes visible in the reordering which occurs in the body of Christ.¹⁴⁷

Holwerda's argument is that doctrines of the immortality of the soul and the immediate rest of the soul after death, as part of Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life as drawn through suffering and death into resurrection life in imitation of Christ, *are compatible with* the broader picture of judgment, resurrection and new creation. This account of Calvin's writings on eschatological texts and subjects appears to be a more charitable reading of Calvin's own beliefs than much twentieth century criticism. Nevertheless, it is not clear that they reflect Calvin's own emphases. The charges made against Calvin's eschatology of being individualistic and spiritualistic may be more deeply rooted in the *Institutes* than Holwerda allows.

Luther's eschatology has not been criticized to the same extent as Calvin's. His belief in the soul's sleep after death rather than an immediate entry into bliss is praised by modern commentators who believe that he is thereby able to place greater stress on the Last Judgment.¹⁴⁸ Yet this does not mean that Luther's eschatology is much more "authentic" than Calvin's, or that it has a broader understanding of creation's fulfilment. One should recall these words from his lectures on 1 Timothy: "We believe in Christ not only for this life but also for that which is to come. You see, we believe in the Conqueror of death, the Destroyer of hell. No one believes in

¹⁴⁶ Holwerda, "Eschatology and History," 134.

¹⁴⁷ Holwerda, "Eschatology and History," 136.

Christ that Christ may fill his belly.”¹⁴⁹ Luther does not connect the feeding of the poor here and now with the kingdom to come: it seems he does not connect history with eschatology any more than Calvin does. In other respects, too, his eschatology shares the same apparent faults. Luther’s understanding of the human person is continuously informed by the distinction between soul and body, particularly in his description of the Christian life as the soul’s partaking in eternity in the here and now. Indeed, the temporal kingdom is abolished in the resurrection, leaving only the spiritual kingdom to be perfected, a consummation which, it has to be said, is focussed on the individual’s vision of God, in the enjoyment of a spiritual body. There is, then, much the same individualizing and spiritualizing in Luther’s eschatology as in Calvin’s.

5. Conclusion

To present-day minds, the eschatology of the sixteenth century wears its inadequacies on its sleeve. Its use of scripture is often uncritical: apocalyptic material is at times treated as a veridical account of future events like an eye-witness account of the past. Furthermore, it is unashamedly anthropocentric: of principal interest is the resurrection of human beings, particularly the elect, while the new creation of the heavens and the earth is added as something of an afterthought. As far as resurrected people are concerned, they are considered primarily as individuals, who enjoy perfect knowledge, righteousness and joy in the presence of God. There is little interest in social relations between human beings in the life to come. Crucially, dualistic models of the human person abound, less influenced by scripture than by Cicero and a popular Platonism revived in the Renaissance, or so it seems. It is the soul which has a foot in eternal life, the soul which bears the image of God, the soul which sleeps or rests after death, the soul which is re-clothed with a resurrected body. Calvin is particularly vulnerable to the accusation of spiritualizing eschatology, by envisaging judgment and entry into bliss at death, when the soul is still separated from the body. Moreover, his account of the significance of death amounts at times to a denial of the reality of death for human beings. Nevertheless, it has been shown that these dualistic assumptions regarding the human person are maintained within a

¹⁴⁸ See Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine*, 101, and Martin, *The Last Judgment*, 17, 23-4.

broader theological account of creation and redemption of the world as a whole and human beings in particular, soul and body.

The questions which guide this thesis are: given these difficulties with traditional eschatology of the individual, as exemplified in the individual eschatologies developed by Luther and Calvin, can Christians today still hold that individual human subjects will exist beyond death in heaven, enjoying perfect knowledge and love of God and others? Can Christians maintain the doctrine of heaven after the abandonment of dualistic anthropologies as used by Luther and Calvin? If so, they must listen and respond to the large body of twentieth century theology which takes issue with Luther and Calvin amongst others, and is hesitant to assert hope for individual survival and fulfilment beyond death. The chapters that follow, then, will trace the path of eschatology in the twentieth century interpreters and inheritors of the Protestant tradition, describing in greater detail their objections to the classical Reformation depiction of the life of the world to come, and outlining their own development of eschatology particularly as it impinges on the fate of the individual. To the towering figures in Protestant theology of the twentieth century we now turn: to Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann.

¹⁴⁹ *Luther's Works*, 28:249.

CHAPTER THREE

RUDOLF BULTMANN: DEMYTHOLOGIZED HOPE

1. Introduction

The influence of Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) among twentieth century Protestant theologians upon the century's theological thought is greater than all save Karl Barth's. As a New Testament scholar, the methods and findings of his exegesis were unsurpassed in significance for most of the century; as a theologian, his interpretation of Christianity developed in tandem with his exegesis was hardly less momentous. However, as the flood of publications on Bultmann slowing to a trickle would suggest, his position is no longer dominant in either New Testament scholarship or theology. Many of his followers have criticized certain of his positions, as we shall see later on. Nevertheless, no survey of Protestant eschatology of the twentieth century would be complete without close examination of Rudolf Bultmann, as this chapter will attempt to prove. His significant writings spanned much of the century, from *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, first published in 1921, to *Jesus Christ and Mythology* in 1958, and beyond. Yet many of his later views developed from and can be found in outline in much earlier essays. Bultmann's thought cannot be separated into earlier and later phases, and his publishing career displays a tremendous unity of purpose and argument.¹ Hence, this discussion of Bultmann's thought will draw widely from the length of his career, seldom distinguishing one "Bultmann" from another (as one must in the case of Barth). Although the focus of this dissertation may appear to be offstage in the following

¹ This is the position also of Schubert Ogden, in his Introduction to Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, ed. and trans. Schubert Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 10-11; and Robert Morgan, "Rudolf Bultmann," in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 1:115.

account of Bultmann's exegesis and theology, in reality it is only in the wings. The treatment of individual eschatology in Bultmann cannot be ascertained only by reading his explicit comments on the subject. They are few, and can only be understood in the context of his broader approach to theological content and method. It is this broader canvas which must be inked before the detail of his views on life beyond death can be given their proper colour.²

2. Sources of Theology

Rudolf Bultmann's famous call is for demythologizing. This, he believes, is the only way that modern, intelligent people can read the Bible, and thus forms the necessary, fundamental method of scriptural exegesis. An understanding of demythologizing is therefore central to an investigation of individual eschatology in Bultmann's thought, since the interpretation of scripture is as pivotal for this doctrine as for any other. As we saw in Luther and Calvin, the doctrine of heaven was developed in Protestant theology in large part by exegesis of the central scriptural texts on the question at hand, such as 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Cor. 5:1-10, John 14:1-2 and 1 John 3:2. But before any study can be made of Bultmann's interpretation of passages like these, care should be taken to establish the reasons for his programme of demythologizing. Otherwise, Bultmann's exegetical results would be left in mid-air, as it were, supported only by the slogan of demythologizing, itself apparently unsupported. But Bultmann does not leave demythologizing unsupported, and argues that it is essential for the following reasons.

First, the world-view of the Bible is not Christian.³ As a New Testament scholar, Bultmann distinguishes the variety of world-views which have influenced the text of the New Testament. He points out which beliefs and passages belong to Jewish

² For Bultmann's biography, see his own "Autobiographical Reflections," in *Existence and Faith*, 283-88, and John C. O'Neill, *The Bible's Authority: A Portrait Gallery of Thinkers from Lessing to Bultmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 284-99. Introductions to his thought can be found in Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, 9-21, by Schubert Ogden; Morgan, "Rudolf Bultmann," 109-133; and David Fergusson, *Bultmann* (Collegeville, Minn.: Michael Glazier, 1992).

³ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. H. W. Bartsch, trans. R. H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953), 3.

apocalypticism, a world-view and genre particularly well-represented in the New Testament's eschatological assertions: hope for the end of the world in the form of a cosmic catastrophe involving the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment. These apocalyptic hopes focus on the coming of the Son of Man as judge, and the necessity of repentance in the face of this catastrophic judgment.⁴ Jewish apocalypticism itself had grown out of and was part of Hebrew religion as represented in the Old Testament, which evinced in its prophetic works the hope for the fulfilment of Israel's aspirations in perfect peace and prosperity. On the other hand, Bultmann notices the widespread influence of Gnosticism, particularly the myth of redemption, sacramental systems, and the advocacy of detachment from the world, all of which he believes are found principally though not only in the Johannine writings.⁵ Bultmann's exegesis, then, uncovers the influence of Old Testament historicism, Jewish apocalypticism and Hellenistic Gnosticism on the New Testament text. It is not necessary for the present argument to describe these influences as Bultmann discerns them in any greater detail: what is necessary is to show what Bultmann believes these different influences share and therefore contribute as a whole to the New Testament's understanding of God and the world.

Bultmann's conclusion is simple. The text of the New Testament, under these many influences, is awash with supernaturalism. "The cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character."⁶ The biblical writers believe that there is a spiritual world of God, Satan, angels, demons, powers and principalities, which interacts with and intervenes in this world of flesh and blood. According to this world-view, God can send his Son to the earth from heaven, the Son can work miracles, descend into hell, rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. These beliefs betray not only a mythological understanding of God's relationship with the world, but a crude three-decker understanding of heaven above, earth here and hell below.⁷ This is a supernatural understanding of the world, entirely at odds with the scientific understanding which modern people have of natural phenomena: "modern science

⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, "History and Eschatology in the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954), 6-9.

⁵ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, trans. R. H. Fuller (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), 232-46.

⁶ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 1.

⁷ See Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 1-2.

does not believe that the course of nature can be interrupted or, so to speak, perforated, by supernatural powers.”⁸ Bultmann agrees with modern science; for him the natural world is an enclosed system, which proceeds entirely in accordance with its laws.⁹ The miraculous is meaningless. However, this does not entail that Christianity, whose scriptures are shot through with supernaturalism, is meaningless, because none of this supernaturalism, whether from Jewish apocalyptic or Hellenistic Gnosticism, belongs to Christianity. It is extraneous matter, encrusted on the hull of the faith much as barnacles cling to a wreck distorting its shape.

But even this is only the secondary reason to demythologize. So far, all Bultmann has shown is that the Bible expresses Christian beliefs in an out-dated world-view, which cannot be accepted given scientific understanding today. But he believes something else. It is not simply that the first century had the wrong world-view, but that it had a world-view at all. For Bultmann, the problem with all previous formulations of the Christian faith is that they were expressed in terms of a world-view. This means that theology attempted to talk of God as if God could be an object of thought, something discussed like a concept in a seminar-room, or a mountain in the Alps. In geography, if one asks how high Mont Blanc is, one makes Mont Blanc the object of one’s thought. This is appropriate, for one can be external to Mont Blanc. Mont Blanc is not a centre of subjectivity, cannot think, will or love, and does not exist in a relationship with the speaker. God, on the other hand, is a subject, and indeed, far more than this: God is the creator of the world and so the creator of every person. God is therefore not an object to any person, but, in Bultmann’s words, “the reality determining all else.”¹⁰ To ask how good God is, or whether God is love – in fact to ask or state anything of God – is thus to objectify the unobjectifiable. It is to make of God something that is not God in order to contain God within language. To return to the New Testament, Bultmann believes that Christianity, although expressed in terms of a particular world-view, did not

⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM, 1960), 15.

⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, “The Case for Demythologizing,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, vol. 2, ed. H.-W. Bartsch, trans. R. H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1962), 183.

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, “What Does It Mean to Speak of God?” in *Faith and Understanding*, ed. R. W. Funk, trans. L. P. Smith (London: SCM, 1969), 53.

depend on it when the texts were first read, and does not depend on it now. Christianity is entirely separable from any and every world-view.

A closer look at one essay should make this clearer. In "The Question of Natural Revelation," from 1941, Bultmann outlines the approach taken by those who believe that God can be known to some extent outside the Christian revelation, by extrapolating from human powerlessness, the human sense of moral demands and human temporality to God's omnipotence, holiness and eternity. This extrapolation is illegitimate for Bultmann. Human powerlessness tells us only of human powerlessness, and not of anything or anyone omnipotent. The sense of moral demands tells us only of human moral limitations, and not of anything or anyone entirely holy. The sense of human temporality tells us only of the world's finitude, and not of anything or anyone eternal. These arguments, reminiscent of Hume's and Kant's against natural theology, are given a dialectical twist by Bultmann. Those who make such arguments are mistaken because they "have not yet *understood their own finitude radically enough*."¹¹ When people infer God's transcendence from creaturely finitude, they seek to bring themselves into a relationship with eternity. Bultmann gives short shrift to such a project – it is sin.¹² Being finite, human beings cannot think of God except sinfully. Even in the Old Testament, where there appears to be revelation in nature and history, this revelation teaches us only "that we do not, in fact, possess the revelation, and that in what we are and have we are of no account in God's sight."¹³

We are now in a position to understand Bultmann's fundamental objection to mythology in the New Testament. Theology as expressed in mythology is a sinful attempt to reach God by emasculating God (though this is an unintended side-effect), and since mythology is the dominant form for theology's expression in scripture and all subsequent theology, Bultmann can see no alternative to demythologizing. Mythology, he writes,

speaks of gods who represent the power beyond the visible, comprehensible world. It speaks of gods as if they were men and of their actions as human

¹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, "The Question of Natural Revelation," in *Essays: Philosophical and Theological*, trans. James C. G. Smith (London: SCM, 1955), 101.

¹² Bultmann, "The Question of Natural Revelation," 107-8.

¹³ Bultmann, "The Question of Natural Revelation," 118.

actions, although it conceives of the gods as endowed with superhuman power and of their actions as incalculable, as capable of breaking the normal, ordinary order of events. It may be said that myths give to the transcendent reality an immanent this-worldly reality. Myths give worldly objectivity to that which is unworldly.¹⁴

Mythology is simply one form of objectifying the non-objectifiable. Bultmann's primary motive in demythologizing, then, is not the translation of God-talk into something modern people can understand or relate to (Bultmann thinks that the language and world-view of science would be equally manipulative) but the preservation of God's freedom from finite characterization.

Is that it then for theology? Must we simply be silent before the ineffable? Bultmann thinks not. It is in the question of human existence that the question of God can be raised. It is possible to talk of God in talking of one's existence. For Bultmann, talk of human existence never means bare existence as opposed to non-existence, but the positive, relational, moral understanding of existence developed in existential philosophy, where the ideal for the human person is truly to *exist*. An investigation into human existence in this sense may disclose the reality of God in relation to the person. If this looks on the surface like a straight substitution of the human person for God, it should be recognized that Bultmann means something quite different. The human person is not God. Nor is the human person, or human being, the object of our thought, grasped in the way a mountain is. That would be the objectification of human being, as illegitimate as objectifying God. Human beings too can think, will and love, and cannot be analysed apart from their concrete existence in encountering what is beyond them. It is persons, as existing beings, who analyse their existence – historical, active and passive – and in that analysis discover in the experience of *faith* the relationship between God and themselves. Perhaps a quotation from Bultmann will help to explain his approach:

Only such statements about God are legitimate as express the existential relation between God and man. Statements which speak of God's actions as cosmic events are illegitimate. The affirmation that God is creator cannot be a theoretical statement about God as *creator mundi* in a general sense. The

¹⁴ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 19.

affirmation can only be a personal confession that I understand myself to be a creature which owes its existence to God.¹⁵

It follows that other traditional attributes and actions of God, including God's love, God as Father, and the sending of the Son, can only be understood from within the context of the individual's being acted upon by God in his or her existence. In section 4 we shall explore further the existential understanding of human being which Bultmann advocates.

Yet this turn to existence as the place where the question of God is raised does not mean that Bultmann turns away from scripture. On the contrary, Bultmann was primarily a biblical scholar and not a philosopher. For all his talk of existential self-understanding, he still treats the New Testament as the authoritative source for theology. Why so? At a fundamental level, Bultmann, as a Lutheran, simply accepts the Bible as the only authoritative location for God's revelation. The centrality of scripture to Christian reflection and understanding is, for him, beyond question. If Bultmann does imply a more specific answer to the question as to the New Testament's authority, it would be that the New Testament witnesses to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, in which, uniquely, God is made manifest to the world (see section 4 below). It may also be true, as David Kelsey suggests, that Bultmann takes the New Testament texts as normative because they are the earliest such expressions of Christian self-understanding which survive, but such a reason would be subordinate to his prior conviction that God is revealed in its pages.¹⁶

When Bultmann does approach the Bible, his exegesis, then, is not the extrapolation of truth about God via mythology, but the discovery of concrete human existence then and there, particularly its relation to God. And in discovering what existence in its different conditions means in the New Testament, one is able to understand the true human relation to God, able to understand what it really means to be a Christian. Demythologizing is not a negative operation, but the positive process of interpreting mythological expressions according to the understanding of human existence which lies at their root: "The importance of New

¹⁵ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 69.

¹⁶ David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 75.

Testament mythology lies not in its imagery but in the understanding of existence it enshrines.”¹⁷

Existentialist analysis of scripture, then, does not dispense with mythology; rather it interprets it as follows. It discovers first of all that the New Testament is profoundly dualistic in its outlook.¹⁸ It sees two worlds: one the province of God, the angels, spirit, and our best impulses; the other the province of Satan, demons, sin, weakness, evil, corruption and death. This world in which we live is inescapably the worse of these worlds: indeed by “world,” John invariably means all that is against God. This world, in which everything is against God, is in fact God’s creation, but a creation spoiled by human beings’ choosing to be “the world.” The New Testament, however, has great hopes that God and the unworldly will triumph over this world, and places these hopes in the mythological phenomena of the last things, such as judgment, the coming of the Son of Man to separate the sheep from the goats, the heavenly banquet, the purifying fire and other apocalyptic images. The end of the world, for the New Testament writers, is the mythological expression par excellence of their hope in the world of God over this world, or in other words, that there is salvation from sin. Eschatological preaching in the Bible is about the importance of God’s transcendence, and the unreality of this temporal, empty world in the face of eternity.¹⁹ So for Bultmann the form of these eschatological hopes is irrelevant to their central content, namely, the unworldly: “If in the Old Testament, in Judaism, and in the New Testament, the unworldly takes the form of a future hope, of *eschata* – ‘last things’ in the traditional sense – that is only one among other possible conceptions of man’s relation to the unworldly.”²⁰

Bultmann is at pains to point out that this Biblical dualism should not be confused with a Platonic dualism of immaterial soul and physical matter. The New Testament does not equate matter with evil, or soul with good.²¹ Matter is simply matter, but under the sway of “the world,” matter becomes *flesh* (according to Paul), and this flesh is the anti-God approach to life, an approach which depends on the

¹⁷ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 11.

¹⁸ See Rudolf Bultmann, “The Eschatology of the Gospel of John,” in *Faith and Understanding*, 165-83.

¹⁹ See *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 22-23.

²⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, “A Reply to the Theses of J. Schniewind,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, 113.

²¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. L. P. Smith and E. Huntress (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1935), 48.

self instead of God, turning away from God and towards creation.²² The opposite of flesh is not soul, but *spirit*, which is Paul's expression for that impulse in creation to acknowledge the transcendence of God, and sovereignty over the person. In the same way, the soul is not a divine spark, or immaterial, immortal thing imprisoned in the body: it is simply another finite aspect of human existence, the gift of God and therefore capable of being abused and becoming flesh, as much as the body. According to Bultmann, "Paul does not know the Greek-Hellenistic conception of the immortality of the soul (released from the body)."²³

Within this framework of world and God, flesh and spirit, Bultmann interprets three principal stages of thought in the New Testament: Jesus, Paul and John. We shall look at Bultmann's interpretation of these very briefly in order to grasp the main thrust of his theology, particularly as it relates to eschatology. At each stage, Bultmann's thought is informed by detailed and extensive exegesis, whose subtleties must be neglected owing to the pressure of space.

3. New Testament Development

The first principal stage of New Testament thought for Bultmann is that of Jesus. Jesus, he believes, is an eschatological prophet.²⁴ Following the exegetical findings of Weiss and Schweitzer, Bultmann believes that Jesus (as we can dimly discern him underneath the synoptic traditions) was a figure who preached the coming of the end of the world in apocalyptic terminology. Jesus' message is that God will wrap up the experiment world very soon, and so there is not a moment to be lost. Be ready! Be on the side of God, not the world! Decide for God and God's coming kingdom! According to one of Bultmann's earlier works, the kingdom of God is for Jesus "the transcendent event, which signifies for man the ultimate Either-Or, which

²² Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM, 1952-55), 1:232-246.

²³ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:203. See also 201, 345-6.

²⁴ See Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:3-32, "History and Eschatology in the New Testament," 7-9, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, 102-10, and Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), 31-3, for Bultmann's understanding of Jesus' message.

constrains him to decision."²⁵ (It should be noted in passing the affinity that this early passage from Bultmann has with characteristically dialectical theology, especially its use of Kierkegaard's *Either-Or* and emphasis on decision. While the later Bultmann and Barth find each other's theology unappealing, a good case can be made that Bultmann never shed his early dialectical instincts. The next chapter will outline in greater detail the relationship between dialectical theology as found in the early Barth and individual eschatology.) Bultmann notes on a number of occasions that Jesus' use of apocalyptic language serves the particular purpose of stressing the vital importance of decision. The consequences of that decision are left vague by Jesus, however, and he does not describe the bliss to come, beyond saying that it is life.²⁶ According to Bultmann: "Any such description would be possible only by projecting the demands and ideals of man or his spiritual experiences into the other world; and thereby the essential character of the beyond would be taken away."²⁷ In short, any such description of the bliss to come would involve a world-view. For Bultmann, Jesus is heavily influenced by the apocalyptic hopes of the Judaism of his day, but largely dispenses with the speculative aspects of that hope. Perhaps it might be said that Jesus demythologizes Jewish apocalyptic, interpreting it consistently in terms of the decision which must be taken now. He is determined that his listeners enter the kingdom of God, but about what that kingdom is like he is fiercely reticent. We shall return to Bultmann's treatment of bliss to come according to Jesus when we come to examine the scholar's individual eschatology in section 5.

The next stage of New Testament thought according to Bultmann is that of Paul and the earliest church, who maintain Jesus' expectation that the world will end soon, and the conviction that they live in the last times. The influence of Jewish apocalyptic is still evident. Nevertheless Paul develops Jesus' insistence on decision, making the crucial step that "the turning point from the old world to the new was not a matter of the future but did take place in the coming of Jesus Christ."²⁸ For Paul, each person who decides to have faith in God receives God's grace which has appeared in Christ. This grace gives freedom from the determination of the past,

²⁵ Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 41.

²⁶ Bultmann, "History and Eschatology in the New Testament," 8.

²⁷ Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 56.

²⁸ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 32.

and so it is only by faith that a person can be saved from the powers of sin, death and the devil which pervade this world. By faith, the person is found with God, becomes righteous, and is free to see off the bad powers, no longer determined by them, able to live open to the future, and capable of right living.²⁹

By the time of John's writings, however, Jesus' expectation of the coming judgment has been *entirely* internalized in the individual, in Bultmann's view. The expected parousia of the synoptic gospels and Paul is, for John, the same event as the advent of Christ: "The eschatological event is already being consummated... The naïve division into a first and a second coming which we find elsewhere has been discarded."³⁰ So the parousia is the same event as the advent, but this is also the same event as the sending of the Spirit, which is the same event as the resurrection of Jesus. The equation has a further element: the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is the same event as his crucifixion.³¹ Eschatology has been demythologized by John, wrenched back from the future into the present, into the event of Christ, which can take place in every believer at any time. The believer is already saved in faith, already judged at the moment of belief, already has life in Christ. The seemingly external events of eschatology, expressed in phrases such as "in that day" and "the hour is coming," are really an inner event in the believer: "the victory which Jesus wins when faith arises in man by the overcoming of the offense that Jesus is to him."³² Examples of future eschatology in John, such as 12:25-6, 14:2-3 and 17:24, were inserted by a later redactor, too conservative to let John's radical reworking of the gospel loose to a credulous public.³³

For Bultmann, it is the Johannine writings which get closest to the central, unmythological core of Christianity. There is no future coming of God to expect – it has happened. Every moment is the moment in which one must have faith and so find life – every moment is the eschatological moment, made possible in hearing the proclamation of Jesus: "The crisis is truly brought about in the present, faith truly gives life now. But not in any now whatever, only in the now distinguished by the

²⁹ See Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 40-47.

³⁰ Bultmann, "The Eschatology of the Gospel of John," 165, 175.

³¹ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 33.

³² Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2:57.

³³ See Fergusson, *Bultmann*, 101.

proclamation of that historical fact... This *now* of being addressed at a specific time, this moment, is *the eschatological now* because in it is made the decision between life and death."³⁴ When Bultmann compares Paul with John, he sees their similarity outweighing their disparity. Despite Paul's adherence to apocalyptic ways of thought, particularly to images such as the return of Christ, the Last Judgment, and the resurrection of the dead, these do not control Pauline thought on the essence of Christianity. This essence is for Paul what it is for John: the possibility of being free from the past's determination of one's life, in faith in the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The New Testament's apocalyptic expectations are essentially about authentic human existence.³⁵ The entirely realized eschatology of John is "not fundamentally different from Paul, although Paul does not question the dramatic eschatology of apocalyptic."³⁶

4. Being a Christian

As we have seen, Bultmann believes that it is only in the relation to one's existence that God can be discerned. And so he thinks it vital that the enquiry into one's existence should proceed using the best philosophical tools available, and in particular, the best philosophical method for analysing existence. To Bultmann, that is the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), since "in this philosophical school human existence is directly the object of attention."³⁷ Heidegger's understanding of human being as inauthentic being seeking authentic being appeals to Bultmann as the best account of the problem of human existence, with the most appropriate terminology. Bultmann reads Heidegger's analysis of inauthentic being as being's attempt to ground itself on itself, and hence as determined by the past. For Bultmann this is the most adequate description in philosophy of the human condition which the New Testament understands as sin.

³⁴ Bultmann, "The Eschatology of the Gospel of John," 174, 175.

³⁵ See Walter Schmithals, *An Introduction to the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1968), 311.

³⁶ Bultmann, "The Eschatology of the Gospel of John," 176 (footnote). See also Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 151.

³⁷ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 55.

As for the description of authentic being which Heidegger holds out as the ideal for human beings, Bultmann defines it as freedom for the future. Bultmann sees this as a description of the general Christian life of faith as response to God. Note, however, that for Bultmann, existential analysis does not lead to an understanding of existence in the abstract, but to an understanding of one's own self in the concrete encounters of the here and now.³⁸ Existentialist philosophy therefore offers an accurate analysis of the human condition, and suggests something akin to salvation, but, and this is important for Bultmann, existentialist philosophy cannot account for the means by which one in one's own concrete situation passes from inauthentic to authentic being, from sin to grace:

Existentialist analysis may assert that freedom for the future is a mark of authentic Being. But is this knowledge sufficient to enable man as he actually is to attain it? It cannot do this any more than it can impart existence as a whole. All it can do is to tell us that if we want to attain authentic existence we must be free for the future.³⁹

This is where the human being requires the action of God. Only the saving act of God can bring the human being out of the power of death and darkness – inauthenticity to the existentialist – and into the light of a faith open to the future – authenticity. Human being, according to the New Testament, is totally incapable of being released from fallenness. Mere reflection on the human plight will not release human being from the past, as existentialist philosophy wants to believe.⁴⁰ Such an “escape” would be another form of worldliness, when by contrast the only means to righteousness is by receiving it as a gift from the other-worldly, a gift given by the future, as Bultmann puts it.⁴¹ For Bultmann this saving event is the event of Jesus Christ, in whose death and resurrection the believer can pass from death to life, using Johannine categories, or from inauthentic to authentic existence, in the language of existentialism. Furthermore, there are ethical consequences of salvation:

³⁸ See Rudolf Bultmann, “Bultmann Replies to his Critics,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, 203.

³⁹ Bultmann, “Bultmann Replies to his Critics,” 205. See also *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 77.

⁴⁰ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 27.

⁴¹ Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 150.

Christ's death on the cross encourages people to make his cross their own in a life of love for others, shedding their self-centred impulses.⁴²

Bultmann understands Jesus' death and resurrection to be related as follows: Christ's resurrection is the revelation of the meaning of the cross. For Bultmann, the cross of Christ is a historical event (indeed, it is the only historical event that he allows in the life of Christ – the only event which may be called a fact), but the resurrection is not a historical event. To call it so would be to fail to demythologize at precisely the place where Christians must be at their most tenacious. The resurrection of Jesus is presented in scripture as a miracle, and according to Bultmann, miracles are a mythological way of expressing existential faith in God. Hence, "*faith in the resurrection is really the same thing as faith in the saving efficacy of the cross.*"⁴³ The cross and the resurrection are the same event and so neither verifies the other. Bultmann claims that the question as to the bodily resurrection of Jesus is of no interest to the Christian, because it is meaningless to ask whether a dead man can rise. For himself, Bultmann is convinced that "a corpse cannot come back to life or rise from the grave."⁴⁴ Christ rises not in body, but he does rise in the word of preaching: "The resurrection cannot – in spite of 1 Cor. 15:3-8 – be demonstrated or made plausible as an objectively ascertainable fact on the basis of which one could believe. But insofar as it or the risen Christ is present in the proclaiming word, it can be believed – and only so can it be believed."⁴⁵ What does this mean? Bultmann argues that Christ is proclaimed as the one who announced the necessity of decision for God, and so the proclaimer is proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel (which Bultmann almost invariably calls the kerygma). This proclamation of Christ is, on every occasion on which it occurs, the direct encounter between the Word of God and the individual. It is not the memory of a past event, but a present encounter, and so preaching is "the true way of making present the historical fact of Jesus."⁴⁶ Mythologically, this encounter with the Word which calls for decision now is expressed as "resurrection." Therefore for Bultmann, Christ is "risen" in the

⁴² See Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 36.

⁴³ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 41.

⁴⁴ Bultmann, "The Case for Demythologizing," 184.

⁴⁵ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:305.

⁴⁶ Bultmann, "The Eschatology of the Gospel of John," 177.

kerygma: "Christ meets us in the preaching as the one crucified and risen. He meets us in the word of preaching and nowhere else."⁴⁷

Coming to faith in the risen Christ happens, and can only happen, in the existential response to the word of preaching. As Christ is proclaimed, and the message heard, one either believes or chooses not to believe the message: "The eschatological event which is Jesus Christ happens here and now as the Word is being preached... regardless of whether this Word is accepted or rejected."⁴⁸ In accepting the Word, one passes from death to life, no longer determined by the past, by one's history, and instead open to the possibility of having a future. This must mean that in accepting the Word, one's will becomes, in some essential sense, free. Bultmann describes the event of salvation then as a "gift of freedom, by which man becomes free from himself in order to gain himself."⁴⁹ This is a faith open to the future, which issues in love for fellow human beings,⁵⁰ and in detachment from the worldliness of the world.⁵¹ In this eschatological event, the human person becomes new.⁵² But how does Bultmann relate this salvation from the powers of death and darkness to the individual's existential relation to his or her own death? May it be hoped in the grace of God revealed in Christ that death is not the end?

5. Death and Life

For individual eschatology, the key phrase in Bultmann's understanding of salvation is that the new person has *a faith which is open to the future*. What does this mean? Faith seems to signify life and not death.⁵³ It is the "the readiness to enter confidently into the darkness of the future."⁵⁴ Eschatological faith is equivalent to being prepared for a future which is necessarily unknown. It is relatively easy to say what Bultmann does not mean by this. He does not mean the confidence that belief

⁴⁷ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 41.

⁴⁸ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 81. See also Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 151-2.

⁴⁹ Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 150-51.

⁵⁰ See Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, 152.

⁵¹ Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies to his Critics," 208.

⁵² See Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 32.

⁵³ Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 19.

in immortality of the soul would offer. He does not mean knowledge about the future, which he terms as having disposal over the future.⁵⁵ So perhaps faith means nothing more than the acceptance of ignorance about the future, and a certain impotence in the face of it. The future, for Bultmann, is opaque: it is the unknown. The meaning of faith is the obedient acceptance of that opacity.

Part of that unknown future is the one certain event of life – death. Bultmann discusses at some length the Biblical understandings of death, drawing out the development of these understandings much as he does in the case of eschatology. In the Old Testament, death is simply the end of life, which is the supreme gift of God. Death then is not to be welcomed, nor faced with equanimity. Rather it is something for which there is no remedy. A good (meaning happy) life is a long one; indeed a good (meaning faithful to God) life is rewarded with length. Premature death is punishment for the sinner.⁵⁶

The New Testament's views of death are, he believes, more complicated; his analysis can be stated briefly as follows.⁵⁷ (1) As in the Old Testament, death is the end of life which is God's gift. It is unnatural, the last enemy, and connected with sin. (2) Specifically, death is seen as both the consequence of and punishment for sin, divergent views which Bultmann considers to be unreconciled in Paul's thought.⁵⁸ (3) Death is followed by judgment either to resurrection or to torment, though details vary as to how far death involves future torment. At any rate, "physical death becomes quite definitively death through God's judgment."⁵⁹ Whether or not death exerts its power through future torment, it certainly has a destructive power over life before death, robbing it of its true quality. (4) Through Christ, God has destroyed death. In Christ's death, "God took death to Himself" and "it lost its destructive character and became a creative divine act."⁶⁰ Believers are still subject to physical death, but it no longer has its sting – its destructive

⁵⁴ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 41.

⁵⁵ See Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 30 and *History and Eschatology*, 100. See also Bultmann, "elpis," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 2:533, where he claims that apart from Revelation, the New Testament offers no pictures of the future.

⁵⁶ Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, 52-53.

⁵⁷ Bultmann, "thanatos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:7-25.

⁵⁸ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:249.

⁵⁹ Bultmann, "thanatos," 17.

power. Death therefore is destroyed in the obedience of faith, a destruction which is manifested in a righteous life, expressed as dying with Christ.

The heart of the New Testament understanding of death, then, is that in the light of revelation death has lost its sting. Does Bultmann interpret the consequences of this belief for life after death, or the life of heaven? The answer is no. Bultmann has no individual eschatology: he offers no depiction of the life to come, and, as we saw earlier, is at pains to point out that Jesus is not interested in this subject either. This becomes evident on examination of his exegesis. John's eschatology (which is for Bultmann superior to that of Jesus or Paul) he considers to be entirely ahistorical, offering little or nothing by way of apocalyptic hope at the end of time or individual hope at the end of one's own time. But what about those Johannine verses which seem to hint at life beyond death? Bultmann's exegesis of John 14:2 in his commentary is typical: "The promise," he writes, "is in its entirety made in mythological language."⁶¹ Furthermore although this verse is about the *way* (Jesus says in v. 4, "you know the way to the place where I am going.") it quickly becomes a question about the present encounter with Jesus, "so that the anxiety in which the believer is placed is not anxiety about the promised other-worldly future, but about the believing existence in the world. This is why the promise of an other-worldly future does not contradict the idea that the resurrection is already experienced in faith now."⁶² In other words, Bultmann's interest in this verse is only whether it would contradict the dominant realized eschatology, as he reads it in John. It does not, and so the verse can safely be disregarded. There are no significant references to John 14:2 in his *Theology of the New Testament*.

John 17:24 is treated as follows. Jesus' desire, that those whom the Father has given him may be with him where he is to see his glory, is not to be interpreted in the sense of an apocalyptic eschatology, since John rejects such an eschatology elsewhere. It indicates rather a desire that his own "should be united with him after their worldly existence."⁶³ Bultmann goes on to explain that this desire has no

⁶⁰ Bultmann, "thanatos," 18.

⁶¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, ed. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 600.

⁶² Bultmann, *John*, 602.

⁶³ Bultmann, *John*, 519.

specific content because it is not something immanent in history, but rather belongs to the judgment of God. He comments further: "it is also true of the believer that his participation in life is not exhausted in his historical existence within time, even though nothing positive can be said about the 'then' beyond death."⁶⁴ So Bultmann allows that John says negatively that this temporal existence, when it is over, leaves as it were a remainder, but contends that John can say nothing positive about what the remainder might be. Indeed, the Evangelist must not ask that question: "nothing further can be given beyond the gift of the love of God, and any further questioning about the future has not only become meaningless but would also be a case of unbelief."⁶⁵

As for Paul, when Bultmann discusses his biblical anthropology he concludes that Paul has little or no belief in the immortality of the soul, a finding which he thinks is typical of both Old and New Testaments.⁶⁶ Further, he considers scriptural mentions of the resurrection of the dead as belonging to the outdated world-view of apocalyptic Judaism. Hence, speaking of 1 Corinthians 15, Bultmann writes: "The details in his picture of the cosmic drama have no theological importance."⁶⁷ Moreover, he believes that Paul himself is not interested in offering speculation as to the resurrection life, since the only thing Paul says about life after the resurrection is that the believer will "be with Christ."⁶⁸

Bultmann attempts to show, then, that while both John and Paul believe that the life received from God in faith is not exhausted by this temporal existence, both express this belief only by means of the phrases "with Christ" or "with me," meaning Christ, without expanding or explaining what such a being with Christ might entail. Apocalyptic material in the New Testament is of no help now in elucidating this idea. Nothing positive about it can or should be said. The Christian is instructed to "refrain from painting in the future which God bestows in death, for all pictures of a glory after death can only be the wishful images of imagination, and

⁶⁴ Bultmann, *John*, 520.

⁶⁵ Bultmann, *John*, 522.

⁶⁶ See Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, 52 and *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:203.

⁶⁷ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:346.

⁶⁸ Bultmann, "Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*," in *Faith and Understanding*, 93.

to forgo all wishful images is part of the radical openness of faith in God's future."⁶⁹ As Walter Schmithals points out, Bultmann's predominant approach to individual eschatology is to advocate silence.⁷⁰

6. Bultmann and his Critics

The first question that comes to mind when reading Bultmann in order to uncover his view of individual eschatology is this: Does Bultmann think that with death it's the end? His silence on life after death might be taken to indicate so, but I think that would be to make a fundamental mistake as to his theological method. Bultmann is a neo-Kantian in his epistemology. There is no way to pass from empirical experience to knowledge of God. That is to mistake knowledge of God with a world-view, which, by its very nature, prevents any knowledge of the transcendent God from being revealed. Only God can reveal Godself, and that only happens in the existential encounter of faith. Of what, then, can the theologian have knowledge? Of God, yes, but only in the moment of God's encounter with him or herself. History and nature run their own courses, and the only way that the world can be interpreted as involving the action of God is if that world is interpreted by the eyes of this momentary faith. Bultmann writes:

for my existential life, realized as it is in face of encounter, the world is no longer a closed weft of cause and effect. In faith the closed weft presented or produced by objective observation is transcended, though not as in mythological thought. For mythology imagines it to be torn asunder, whereas faith transcends it as a whole when it speaks of the activity of God.⁷¹

All theology then is eschatology, by which Bultmann means the encounter with the otherwise unknowable God, and all eschatology is present. Having faith means being thrown open to the future, but it is a future about which, because it is *God's* future, absolutely nothing can be known. The future belongs to God; it is not

⁶⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, "The Christian Hope and the Problem of Demythologizing," trans. Conrad Bonifazi, *The Expository Times* 65 (1954), 278.

⁷⁰ Schmithals, *Introduction*, 324.

⁷¹ Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies to his Critics," 198-9.

something human beings could possess. Theologically, Bultmann is in no position to say whether or not with death it's the end. All he can say is that, the person will be with Christ, "not released from the hand of God."⁷²

To help understand Bultmann's point, we should be clear what consequences an alternative epistemology might have. Our study of Calvin's eschatology provided one example of an exegete who brought to bear philosophical insights on the nature of the human person in his reading of scripture. For Calvin, God's revelation is found pre-eminently in scripture, but is also evident to believers in the natural world and in their own feeble religious impulses. So Calvin can develop an individual eschatology, partly because he reads scripture pre-critically, but also because his theological epistemology does not disallow the possibility of natural revelation. A further example is John Baillie (1886-1960), writing in the same period as Bultmann. Baillie in his theological epistemology refuses to limit the revelation of God to the event of Jesus Christ, and maintains that God reveals Godself in other religions, in moral activity and in philosophical thought. For Baillie, salvation may be found in Christ alone, but it does not follow that the knowledge of God is similarly restricted.⁷³ While Baillie, then, would agree with Bultmann that our future belongs to God, he would be willing to make inferences from that that God would not let our relationship to God cease even after death, and that the moments of eternity we experience now might reveal our greater participation in the Eternal after death and the resurrection.⁷⁴ It is these inferences which Bultmann considers to be meaningless, as we shall see in greater detail in chapter 7.

Bultmann expresses himself in the following way: "De-mythologizing is the radical application of the doctrine of justification by faith to the sphere of knowledge and thought."⁷⁵ Whereas for Paul and Luther, the heresy in their sights is that good works lead to righteousness, for Bultmann it is that objectifying knowledge leads to a right knowledge of God. No human work, no world-view and no process of rational reflection will lead to an understanding of God. Indeed,

⁷² Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, 4 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933-65), 3:164; quoted in Schmithals, *Introduction*, 321.

⁷³ John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 255.

⁷⁴ See John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 157-97.

⁷⁵ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 84.

attempting to comprehend God in this fashion is sinful. Just as in the traditional case of justification by faith, every attempt to establish right knowledge (traditionally righteousness) on the wrong foundation only further deepens the actual sinfulness of the human being.

How does the theologian who wants to develop a doctrine of heaven counter Bultmann's approach? An attempt to suggest an alternative theological epistemology will be made in chapter 7, offering a way beyond Bultmann's and others' restrictions on how to think about God and the possibility of life beyond death. That attempt will follow from the recognition that the main problem with Bultmann's theological epistemology, which governs his attitude towards individual eschatology, is his opposition to the objectifying of God. It is simply not evident that Christians should, in developing their understanding of God, shy away from reflecting on life, history, nature and their own experience of faith. Bultmann's stark dichotomy between understanding God in the concrete moment of encounter with human beings in their existence, and all other approaches to God, the former valid, the latter sinful, is untenable.

However, there are more immediate critical remarks which can be made of Bultmann's approach. First, one can raise questions as to Bultmann's exegesis which can seem unbalanced at times, particularly in the case of his reading of John. As we have seen, Bultmann's John believes in realized eschatology – that in the death of Jesus, the believer has already passed from death to life and is already judged. Material in John which seems to indicate future eschatological events Bultmann assigns to a conservative redactor. David Fergusson, however, helpfully summarizes the difficulties associated with this approach:

The idea that believers remain dependent upon the power of God to raise them up “on the last day” is thought by many commentators to be integral to Johannine eschatology. Moreover the references to future eschatology seem to be more extensive than Bultmann recognizes and, given the eschatological nature of early Christianity, it seems unlikely that the Evangelist could have departed from it altogether.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Fergusson, *Bultmann*, 101.

In other words, Johannine eschatology is probably more future-oriented than Bultmann allows, a critique which, if correct, has damaging consequences for much of Bultmann's thesis. It raises significant doubts as to the plausibility of Bultmann's central claim that eschatology is wholly concerned with the *present* encounter with God. It forces the reader of the New Testament back to the texts to consider whether and how the writers conceived of a genuinely *future* life, perhaps even beyond death.

This specific objection to Bultmann's exegesis of certain texts leads to a more general objection to his method of interpreting scripture. Like all interpreters of the Bible, Bultmann works according to certain assumptions. It is clear that for Bultmann, the principal assumption which guides his exegesis is a neo-Kantian disbelief in natural theology. Nothing we could say about the world around us or the history of the human race would imply any theological conclusions. For example, whether or not miracles happen, the idea of the miraculous is useless for theology, because such an idea draws theological conclusions from worldly events. It follows that any scriptural language which conceptualizes the action of God as miraculous, that is, which conflates the otherworldly with this world, is to be demythologized. Where scripture seems already to be demythologizing, then that is when scripture becomes normative for our reading of the rest of the Bible, and for our understanding of the essence of Christianity. So the Bible's discovery of realized eschatology (John) is used by Bultmann to criticize more primitive understandings of eschatology (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15). This, however, is circular. Anthony Thistleton puts it nicely:

It is difficult to see what, on the basis of Bultmann's assumptions, *could have counted against this interpretation*. For the retention of futurist imagery is regarded as evidence in the New Testament for the *need* to demythologize; while realized eschatology is regarded as evidence that the *process* of demythologizing has begun in the New Testament. Either way, Bultmann claims to find support for his argument, *whatever* exegetical considerations are brought into play.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), 266.

In other words, Bultmann appears to criticize the scriptural text on internal grounds, but in reality, his critical principles have come from outside. As we shall see further in chapter 5, Jürgen Moltmann finds fault with Bultmann's exegesis in just this way, and criticizes him for failing to respect the significance the New Testament places on eschatology as concerning God's activity, not only in the present but in the future.⁷⁸

A related difficulty concerns Bultmann's project of demythologizing. There is, it is suggested, a naivety in his dissociation of form from content – in the case of the New Testament, form being mythology and content being true Christianity. The idea that the abstraction of Christianity from its scriptural forms releases Christianity from its mythological shackles assumes and indeed asserts that such an abstraction is possible without removing the essence of Christianity. By contrast, however, it has been argued that myth is the necessary expression of religious truth, and that even the encounter with God is inescapably understood and expressed in mythological form. Instead of Bultmann's conviction that mythology distorts the essence of Christianity, it is suggested that demythologizing is distorting.⁷⁹

Perhaps the best way of understanding this criticism of Bultmann is by examining one expression of it in an essay by Karl Barth. In "Rudolf Bultmann – An Attempt to Understand Him," Barth criticizes the project of demythologizing as follows: "Surely, if we were to understand any given text, the provisional clue to its understanding must be sought from the text itself, and moreover from its spirit, content and aim."⁸⁰ For Barth, with Bultmann in his sights, myth cannot "be interpreted entirely and exclusively, in a totalitarian fashion, so to speak, as the expression of a particular self-understanding of man."⁸¹ Barth, as we shall soon see in chapter 4, shares the fundamental presupposition of Bultmann's theology, that objectification of God is sin, and so theology can only proceed from and be a response to the self-revelation of God. But Barth believes that Bultmann has failed

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), 20-21.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Fergusson, *Bultmann*, 129; Thistleton, "Two Horizons," 442; Paul S. Minear, "Rudolf Bultmann's Interpretation of New Testament Eschatology," in *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Charles W. Kegley (London: SCM, 1966), 78; Terence Penelhum, "Religious Belief and Life After Death," in *Philosophy of Religion: Proceedings of the 8th International Wittgenstein Symposium, 15th to 21st August 1983, Kirchberg/Wechsel (Austria), part 2*, ed. Wolfgang L. Gombocz (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1984), 37-45.

⁸⁰ Karl Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann – An Attempt to Understand Him," in *Kerygma and Myth*, 2:108.

to be true to this basic approach to theology. What Bultmann calls a pre-understanding, that is, the analysis of what it means to exist according to Heidegger's philosophy, is for Barth the smuggling in of natural theology. He expresses this objection as follows: "How can we listen to the New Testament if we are always thrusting some *conditio sine qua non* between ourselves and the text. To do so is to invite all kinds of wrong exegesis, if nothing worse."⁸² To the later Barth, demythologizing involves a particular self-understanding of the human person, and so commits the error of failing to respect the absolute objectivity of God's self-revelation. One does not need to accept the precise form of Barth's critique of Bultmann in order to follow the more general point he makes: the problem with demythologizing is that in attempting to free Christianity of one form of mythological expression, it necessarily replaces it with another. There is no such thing as a formless essence of Christianity.

The fault-line for the project of demythologizing is the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is risen, according to Bultmann, in preaching. When Christ's death is preached, and the hearer encounters God in the preaching, Jesus is raised. The resurrection is the revelation of the event of Jesus' life and death: as Barth points out, for Bultmann "nothing can be said about the risen Christ as such. He is not allowed any life of his own after he rose from the dead."⁸³ There is not the space here to launch a full-scale discussion of the nature of Jesus' resurrection. However, we should be clear how damaging Bultmann's interpretation of it is for individual eschatology. Jesus' resurrection is considered by Christians to be both the cause and the model of the resurrection of human beings generally. If Jesus himself is not allowed any life of his own in being raised, then human beings cannot expect a life of their own either. If resurrection for Jesus is essentially the revelation of his life and death, then the implication is that the biblical hope for resurrection for all people amounts to the hope for the revelation of people's lives and deaths. However, Bultmann's interpretation of Jesus' resurrection has seemed to many commentators to involve a highly forced reading of the New Testament, and has

⁸¹ Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann," 115.

⁸² Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann," 124.

⁸³ Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann," 101. In the following chapter, we shall see that Barth may not be immune from the very criticism he makes of Bultmann.

failed to persuade many biblical scholars or theologians in the rest of the century – as we shall see in subsequent chapters.⁸⁴

A further question to raise regarding Bultmann's presentation of Christianity is whether he demythologized enough. Despite his avowed intention of ridding theology of mythological interpretations of scripture, Bultmann himself offers a profoundly religious interpretation of the events of the New Testament. The death and resurrection of Jesus are accorded overwhelming significance by Bultmann for the life of every human being. Indeed, it is at this point that mere existential philosophy cannot offer any resources by which people may be saved. For Bultmann, the reality of sin and the need for salvation are at the heart of his understanding of the human condition. And in faith in Jesus Christ, the human person can be freed from the past and become open to the future. At the very least then the following religious concepts are at work in Bultmann's interpretation of the Bible: sin, salvation, forgiveness, God. Yet it is far from clear why these elements from the New Testament should not be subject to demythologizing alongside heaven, hell, demons, healing and so on. There is a suspicion at least that Bultmann's project of demythologizing the New Testament is inconsistent. Indeed, some Bultmannian thinkers did demythologize these concepts. For example, Alistair Kee considers that Bultmann's demythologizing programme would present Jesus Christ even more effectively to the twentieth century world if it went one step further: "A final stumbling block has been overlooked by Bultmann and his critics, which prevents modern man from coming to terms with the gospel of Jesus Christ... That stumbling block is God."⁸⁵ What this criticism points to is that Bultmann lacks a convincing hermeneutical principle for demythologizing. Why demythologize certain religious concepts evinced in the New Testament but not others?

Another inconsistency in Bultmann's position stressed by certain of his followers is his understanding of the historical Jesus. For a number of post-Bultmannian

⁸⁴ For a fair though critical response to Bultmann's account of Jesus' resurrection, see Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 96-147. Carnley emphasizes the point that Bultmann's treatment of the resurrection, like so much of his theology, follows from his epistemological presuppositions.

⁸⁵ Alistair Kee, *The Way of Transcendence: Christian Faith Without Belief in God* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), xix.

thinkers, Bultmann drew too rigid a line between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. For Ernst Käsemann, for example, it was important to retrieve as much of Jesus' life as possible, in order to establish some sense of continuity between the historical Jesus, who lived and died in Nazareth, and the Christ of faith presented in the preaching of Christ by the first Christians and today. The "that" of Christ must be connected to the "what" and "how" of Jesus' life and message: "we must look for the distinctive element in the earthly Jesus in his preaching and interpret both his other activities and his destiny in the light of this preaching."⁸⁶ Günther Bornkamm similarly emphasized continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ: "The Easter aspect in which the primitive Church views the history of Jesus must certainly not be forgotten for one moment; but not less the fact that it is precisely the history of Jesus before Good Friday and Easter which is seen in this aspect."⁸⁷ And so, a new quest for the historical Jesus commenced, which attempted to understand more clearly the history of Jesus of Nazareth, and establish a measure of continuity between that figure and Christ preached in the church, and encountered in faith. Another representative of the new quest was Gerhard Ebeling: "The search for the historical Jesus is a search for the hermeneutic key to Christology."⁸⁸ Now, it might be argued that a better understanding of the events of Jesus' life may help Christians to revise their concept of God, since Christians follow Paul in holding, at the very least, that God was in Christ. And so perhaps new understandings of God given in historical understanding of Jesus may open up the possibility of greater freedom in the development of individual eschatology. After all, Christian hope for individual life beyond death depends closely on one's understanding of God.

However, it would seem difficult for the post-Bultmannians themselves to make this step towards individual eschatology. For all their interest in the historical Jesus, they still labour according to the dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the

⁸⁶ Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1964), 44.

⁸⁷ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey, with James M. Robinson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 22-3.

⁸⁸ Gerhard Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation: A Discussion with Rudolf Bultmann*, trans. John Riches (London: Collins, 1966), 55. See also Ernst Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, trans. Andrew Scobie (London: SCM, 1964) 31.

Christ of faith, a dichotomy between which they see continuity but also discontinuity in a variety of ways. Christian theology is ultimately reflection on faith *as opposed to* the findings of history. As Bornkamm puts it, “faith cannot and should not be dependent on the change and uncertainty of historical research.”⁸⁹ The pre-Easter historical Jesus gives way to the risen Christ of faith in Christian preaching. Ultimately, their understanding of eschatology remains the same as Bultmann’s, as the always-present encounter between the individual and Christ proclaimed in preaching. Furthermore, their doctrine of God is not really affected by their historical research into the life of Jesus, but it too remains the same as Bultmann’s, as the non-objectifiable transcendent one who calls his creatures to repentance and commitment. So, as long as historical research into the life of Jesus’ is contained within a so-called post-Bultmannian framework, it can hold little interest to the enquirer into life beyond death.

7. Conclusion

It seems that we have been led back to the place we started – the possibility of knowledge of God. Bultmann’s exegesis and demythologizing programme are led by his philosophical presuppositions as to the possibility or impossibility of speaking about God, and therefore about life beyond death. There are two related issues which focus the debate, issues which centre on the verifiability of theological claims, and the possibility of the knowledge of God.⁹⁰

First, what are the criteria for assessing Bultmann’s theological vision? If all theological content is contained within the faith-encounter, and “God” is not properly understood in any other context, how could one criticize the text of Bultmann’s theology? This is, of course, the point of Bultmann’s theology. His theology, alone amongst versions of Christianity, is not a world-view. His theology,

⁸⁹ Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 9. See also Fergusson, *Bultmann*, 134; Carnley, *Structure*, 132-3; and James P. Mackey, *The Problems of Religious Faith* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), 148.

⁹⁰ See John Painter, *Theology as Hermeneutics: Rudolf Bultmann’s Interpretation of the History of Jesus* (Sheffield: Almond, 1987), 6: “the central thrust of Bultmann’s theology is concerned with ‘knowledge’.”

alone, does not objectify God. There can be no conversation about the Christian faith. For one commentator, at least, this is a fatal flaw: "On Bultmann's terms, Bultmann's position is the only possible conclusion. Bultmann cannot be allowed his terms because they are terms which preclude not only argument with him but argument with anyone at all."⁹¹ Certainly, if one wants to think theologically about the possibility and possible character of life beyond death, then Bultmann cannot be allowed his terms.

Second, is Bultmann right in his fundamental assumption that all theology which mixes the worlds of nature and history with God is sinful? If he is, then his theology has a certain internal logic. It is a logic, however, which leads in two ways to the impossibility, and indeed sinfulness of developing a doctrine of the life of heaven beyond the individual's death. First, an approach which begins from the nature of temporal, earthly existence, and attempts to infer the possibility and character of eternal life thereby, falls into the category of natural theology, objectifying God, driven by the sinful human desire for self-possession. The Platonic account of immortality of the soul is an example of this approach for Bultmann, and is therefore illegitimate for the Christian to apply in any form however modified. Second, our interpretation of scripture must also avoid all objectification of God and attempts at self-possession. Thus Bultmann defends the necessity of demythologizing the Bible. All eschatological statements, whether taking the form of apocalyptic expectation or expressing hopes for the individual beyond death, must be demythologized. In this way, eschatology is found to be entirely realized in the temporal life lived on earth. The combination of neo-Kantian philosophical presuppositions and the form of historical-criticism it leads to in Bultmann's scholarship are thus the principal factors behind the absence of a doctrine of heaven in his writings. Despite the strong element of Lutheranism in Bultmann's theology, the individual hope elaborated by Luther himself is absent.

As we shall see, the related issues which lie at the heart of the critique of Bultmann – the verifiability of theological claims and the possibility of knowing God – are at the heart of twentieth century theology, and are thrown into sharp relief by the questions of individual eschatology. But is Bultmann's a lone voice in twentieth

⁹¹ John C. O'Neill, *The Bible's Authority*, 307.

century Protestant theology? Do the other central theologians of this era, who would not be called Bultmannians, share or dispute his reluctance to develop a vision of life beyond death? The next voice in this roll-call is a man who at different times was one of Bultmann's closest comrades and fiercest objectors – Karl Barth.

KARL BARTH

ETERNAL LIFE AS THE RESURRECTION OF LIMITED LIFE

Karl Barth

Although Karl Barth was not a twentieth-century Protestant theologian, his influence on twentieth-century Protestant theology is profound and significant for those thinkers beyond and within the tradition. In part of this thesis (the subsequent chapters will deal with the rest) I argue that twentieth-century Protestant eschatology is focused on the main insights provided by Barth. It is his difficult, complex treatment of the resurrection which provides the years which follow with the eschatological ideas which have shaped twentieth-century Protestant eschatology.

Throughout the chapters I will refer to individuals in the tradition of individual eschatology. I will not refer to Barth through the vast expanse of Barth's writings. Barth himself, in his *Church Dogmatics*, collected part of his earlier eschatological thought into a volume that he considered to be completed in his own lifetime. It presents itself, therefore, as a direct discussion of Barth's eschatology and, thus, supplies the main source for Keesmaat and I. *Confession 15* (which Barth called 'The Church's eschatology', the *Church Dogmatics* section 44) is the major source. Barth writes of the eschatology of the

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, (Geneva: 1961), pp. 104-105, CD 4/1, 104-105, 105.

CHAPTER FOUR

KARL BARTH:

ETERNAL LIFE AS THE ETERNALIZATION OF LIMITED LIFE

1. Introduction

Alongside Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth (1886-1968) towers over twentieth century Protestant theology. For this reason alone, he deserves inclusion in any study of the century's eschatological thought. In addition, at different times and in different forms, eschatology is central to Barth's theology, and highly significant for those thinkers around and subsequent to him. Indeed it is part of this thesis (as subsequent chapters will show) that the main stream of twentieth century Protestant eschatology is formed using the tools and insights provided by Barth. It is his influence – accepted uncritically or with reservations – which pervades the years which follow until the century's close. Hence a close study of Barth's individual eschatology must form the basis of discussion about the doctrine in twentieth century Protestant theology.

Throughout the chapter we will be guided by our interest in the questions of individual eschatology, which will help us find a path through the vast expanses of Barth's writings. Barth himself, in his mature *Church Dogmatics*, criticized part of his earlier eschatological thought as one-sided, a problem that he considered to be remedied in his later writings.¹ It seems correct, therefore, to divide discussion of Barth's eschatology into two: first, the early commentaries on Romans and 1 Corinthians 15 (which forms section 2 of this chapter); and second, the *Church Dogmatics* (section 3). In the earlier period, Barth writes very little explicitly on the

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. Bromiley et al (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-75), II/1, 634. (Henceforward CD.)

issues of individual eschatology, and much of the following discussion must proceed by way of inference. By contrast, in the *Church Dogmatics* there are extensive passages on death and the beyond, and so exposition can proceed on the basis of what Barth writes explicitly. As in our consideration of Bultmann, the status of theology and possibility of eschatology are very much at issue: indeed, in the case of Barth, it would be possible to write a dissertation on these questions alone. Again we need to pick a path carefully through his thought. These questions – centring on how to do theology, particularly eschatology – have been tackled here in the context of Barth’s eschatological writings alone, since when he treats substantive issues Barth’s philosophical presuppositions as to the possibility and nature of theology are clearly displayed.² A fourth and final section will evaluate Barth’s proposals in the area of individual eschatology, and compare them with those of the classical Protestant tradition.

2. Eschatology as the Otherness of God

Romans

The early Barth’s most famous piece of writing is the second edition of his commentary on Romans. To understand his approach to eschatology in that text, we have to appreciate his relationship to one particular nineteenth century figure – the church historian and New Testament scholar Franz Overbeck, discussed briefly above in chapter 1. Overbeck’s stark comparison of the eschatological and world-

² For discussions of Barth’s eschatology, see the following: Gotthard Oblau, *Gotteszeit und Menschenzeit: Eschatologie in der Kirchlichen Dogmatik von Karl Barth* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1988); G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. H. R. Boer (London: Paternoster, 1956), 151-65, 328-46; Ingolf Dalferth, “Karl Barth’s Eschatological Realism,” in *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 14-45; Nicholas Lash, “Eternal Life: Life ‘After’ Death?” in *Theology on Dover Beach*, 164-82; John S. Reist, Jr., “Commencement, Continuation, Consummation: Karl Barth’s Theology of Hope,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 87 (1987), 195-214; George M. Schurr, “Brunner and Barth on Life After Death,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 24 (1967-68), 95-110; John Webster, “Assured and Patient and Cheerful Expectation: Barth on Christian Hope as the Church’s Task,” in *Barth’s Moral Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 77-97; Gerhard Sauter, “Why is Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics Not a ‘Theology of Hope’? Some Observations on Barth’s Understanding of Eschatology,” trans. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999), 407-29; and Norman R. Gulley, “Eschatology of Karl Barth” (unpublished Ph. D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1970).

negating message of the Gospel with the cultured, unchallenging Christianity of the nineteenth century impressed the early Barth some half-century later, who considered him to stand at the gate of a new theology. Barth writes:

There were good reasons for Overbeck himself to refrain from the attempt to pass all the way through – and we are grateful to him for so refraining. A theology which would dare that passage – dare to become eschatology – would not only be a new theology but also a new Christianity; it would be a new being; itself already a piece of the “last things”, towering above the reformation and all the “religious” movements. Whoever would dare to build on that tower would truly do well to sit down first and count the cost.³

It seems now that that passage was dared by Barth himself, in the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*.

The fundamental contrast which Barth finds Overbeck to be using is that between time and eternity, a contrast he also discerns in Kierkegaard. Correspondingly he writes in the Preface to *Romans*, that his “system,” if he has one, is a “recognition of what Kierkegaard called the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: ‘God is in heaven, and thou art on earth.’”⁴ Barth’s central point in *Romans* is that all that history (or temporality) appears to offer the seeker after God as a basis for theology, such as progress, development of revelation and so on, is utterly worthless. Something verifiable in the ordinary way of historical investigation cannot reveal God. All that such an approach to God will discover is a false God. God is *eternal*, beyond time, and thus equally near and equally far from every moment in time. Indeed, “eternity” seems almost to be a cipher for God in the early Barth. Eternity’s relation to time is itself timeless: it intersects the temporal sequence in a non-temporal moment. For Barth, this fundamental distinction at the heart of his theology between the eternal God and temporal creation makes his theology *eschatological*. It is an eschatology which is rooted in the otherness of God; indeed for Barth the terms might even be synonymous: “Direct communication from God is no divine communication. If Christianity be not altogether

³ Barth, *Theology and Church*, trans. L. P. Smith (London: SCM, 1962) [1920], 73.

⁴ Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the sixth edition by Edwyn Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 10.

thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ.”⁵

How then is any knowledge of God possible at all? According to Barth, Jesus Christ is the medium in which God reveals Godself: “God is Personality: He is One, Unique, and Particular – and therefore He is Eternal and Omnipotent. To Him the human historical Jesus bears witness.”⁶ But this revelation is indirect: the revelation of God is veiled in Jesus Christ. There is a risk that God will be identified wholly with the historical existence of the man Jesus, and theology will once again domesticate and thus falsify the eternity of God. Therefore there was no mission of the Son “except in the form of a servant, except in His impenetrable incognito.”⁷ Hence the *resurrection* of Jesus is strictly speaking the only revelation of God. How so? Because Jesus’ resurrection is entirely unhistorical: it was unpredictable, has no analogies in historical events, and is therefore unverifiable, “not directly intelligible.”⁸ Jesus’ resurrection, being unhistorical, does not enable God’s revelation to be dependent in any way on creaturely observation and inference. Only the unhistorical resurrection could be *God’s* revelation to creation. Barth writes:

The Resurrection is the revelation: the disclosing of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God, and the apprehending of God in Jesus... In the Resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh, but touches it as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it. And, precisely because it does not touch it, it touches it as its frontier – as the new world. The Resurrection is therefore an occurrence in history, which took place outside the gates of Jerusalem in the year A. D. 30, inasmuch as it there “came to pass”, was discovered and recognized. But inasmuch as the occurrence was conditioned by the Resurrection, in so far, that is, as it was not the “coming to pass”, or the discovery, or the recognition, which conditioned its necessity and appearance and revelation, the Resurrection is not an event in history at all.⁹

What then of the future? Christian theology, as we saw in Luther and Calvin, has traditionally stressed the future parousia, the return of Christ to the earth, the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment. How does Barth understand this

⁵ Barth, *Romans*, 314.

⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 276-7.

⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 279.

⁸ Barth, *Romans*, 224.

⁹ Barth, *Romans*, 30.

expectation? He replies by saying that talk of the delay of the parousia misses the point: we do not await it as a temporal event which will follow history. The End-times are not the End in any temporal or final sense, but only in the sense that God is beyond time, unlimited by it, and related timelessly to the temporal. As Jesus' resurrection is like a tangent touching but not breaking into the circle of human history, and so not historical, so the parousia will not break into history, will not be historical. (Indeed, in a 1920 address, he had identified the non-historical resurrection of Jesus with the non-historical parousia: "The resurrection of Christ, or his second coming, which is the same thing, is not a historical event."¹⁰) Despite the scriptural exhortation to wait, it is clear that Barth rejects all apocalyptic expectation: "The end of which the New Testament speaks is no temporal event, no legendary destruction of the world. . . The end of which the New Testament speaks is really the End; so utterly the End, that in the measuring of nearness or distance our nineteen hundred years are not merely of little, but of no importance."¹¹ The parousia – the End – refers not to a temporal coming of God, but the eternity of God which stands in judgment over the temporal: "Standing on the boundary of time, men are confronted by the overhanging, precipitous wall of God by which all time and everything that is in time are dissolved. There it is that they await the last hour."¹²

In Barth's *Romans* then, eschatology does not refer to future events. Barth is no literalist reader of the New Testament's apocalyptic passages. But what does he think of Christian hopes for life in heaven? At first he seems negative: Paul does not "redress the tribulation of the world by fixing our attention upon the compensating harmony of another world."¹³ There is no answer from human resources for the suffering of life, and for death, "even if we evoke in our imaginings an infinite divine harmony beyond this world of ours."¹⁴ There is to be no imagining of heaven at all: "If we are even to begin to find consolation, we must first recognize that we have no consolation, we must acknowledge that our comfort is in vain."¹⁵ Yet in the

¹⁰ Karl Barth, "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), 90.

¹¹ Barth, *Romans*, 500.

¹² Barth, *Romans*, 500.

¹³ Barth, *Romans*, 302.

¹⁴ Barth, *Romans*, 303.

¹⁵ Barth, *Romans*, 303.

question and answer of the cross, we gain “hope of the restoration of the unobservable union between the Creator and the creature.”¹⁶ The revelation of God in Jesus’ resurrection has made every moment a possible moment of revelation, of relationship between God and the human subject. And in this there is hope for union between Creator and creature. Indeed, there is even some sense of hope for the future, although not a temporal hope. Everything created by God “bears its eternal existence in itself as unborn, eternal Future, and seeks to give it that birth which can never take place in time.”¹⁷ There is perhaps the outline in these tantalizing remarks of an individual eschatology as part of hope for the cosmos, albeit absolutely non-temporal. Whether this could have any plausible meaning will be the subtext of much of this thesis.

The Resurrection of the Dead

Barth’s discussion of 1 Corinthians 15, which forms the centrepiece of his book *The Resurrection of the Dead*, was originally published in 1924, only two years after the second edition of *Romans*, and so belongs to the same period and same theological programme. He finds in Paul’s chapter support for the fundamental distinction between eternity and time, which characterized the work on *Romans*. “Last things” are not the final possibilities of a historical end but refer instead to the end in the following sense: “He only speaks of last things who would speak of the end of all things, of their end understood plainly and fundamentally, of a reality so radically superior to all things, that the existence of all things would be utterly and entirely based upon it alone.”¹⁸ “Last things” refer to the ground of temporality – to eternity. “It is God’s eternity which sets a limit to the endlessness of the world, of time, of things, of men.”¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15 is therefore not an attempt “to bring forward something about death, the beyond and world perfection.”²⁰ It is about God as eternal, and the source of the world of time in that eternity. By “resurrection,” Paul does not mean “a higher future possession, but the source and

¹⁶ Barth, *Romans*, 309.

¹⁷ Barth, *Romans*, 310.

¹⁸ Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), 110.

¹⁹ Barth, *Resurrection*, 112.

²⁰ Barth, *Resurrection*, 113.

truth of all that exists.”²¹ Hence, the chapter is not really about the events of the end, but “could be better described as the methodology of the apostle’s preaching, rather than eschatology, because it is really concerned not with this and that special thing, but with the meaning and nerve of its whole, with the whence? and the whither? of the human way as such and in itself.”²² Resurrection, for Barth’s Paul, signifies that God is transcendent: “Without any doubt at all the words ‘resurrection of the dead’ are, for him, nothing else than a paraphrase of the word ‘God.’”²³

It is clear from the scriptural text that Paul’s emphasis on the bodily resurrection is directed against certain opponents who say there is no resurrection of the dead. For Barth, these opponents consist of all those who do not understand the radical otherness of God: “What is involved is the *substance*, the *whole* of the Christian revelation. It was *not a theological doubt*.”²⁴ The bodily resurrection, he believes, cuts right across all attempts to be religious without basing everything on God’s revelation. The resurrection of Christ is a question of the revelation of God: “Either God is known and recognized as the Lord and Creator and Origin, because He has revealed Himself as such, or there is no revelation in history, no miracle, no special category ‘Christ.’”²⁵ Barth’s point is this: the bodily resurrection of Jesus is inconceivable historically; indeed, it is not a historical event – not verifiable as other events in history are. By this act, therefore, God reveals God’s relationship to temporality, as the One who reveals Godself in it as eternal. All that belongs to temporality has its source then in God who is eternal, as revealed by Christ’s resurrection. Disputing the resurrection of the dead is, for Barth, to dispute the meaning of revelation.

Barth connects the Corinthians’ scepticism as to God’s revelation with their beliefs about the life to come. He believes that Paul’s opponents in Corinth held to “a continued existence after death in a somehow conceivable beyond... a spiritual,

²¹ Barth, *Resurrection*, 114.

²² Barth, *Resurrection*, 115.

²³ Barth, *Resurrection*, 202. See also Barth, *Word of God*, 88: “Resurrection – the Easter message – means the sovereignty of God.”

²⁴ Barth, *Resurrection*, 119.

²⁵ Barth, *Resurrection*, 162-3.

an immaterial existence.”²⁶ They believed in a soul which lived on after the death of the body. Paul’s argument is therefore directed against this position: resurrection of the dead means that the kingdom of God is not “a higher continuation of this life.”²⁷ Hence, “the new life must consist in the re-predication of [a person’s] corporeality,”²⁸ and not be a translation of the person to a non-bodily existence. For Barth, as for Bultmann, Paul’s teaching on resurrection is contrary to any doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and for Barth is explicitly directed against such a doctrine as it was followed by the Corinthians:

We know only the natural body, at any rate, the human body, but the body. And to this body that we know belong corruptibility, dishonour, weakness, together with the soul, or, at least, without the soul altering in any way the character of that which makes it a human body, an organ of spiritual spontaneity, and the body is man, I am the body, and therefore what am I?²⁹

Barth’s own understanding of what the resurrection of the dead, what “re-predication of corporeality” might mean positively, in a substantive sense, is more elusive. The resurrection will be of the body, although the Pauline phrase, “spiritual body,” means nothing else for Barth than “the most radical expression of the idea that God is the Lord.”³⁰ There is no immortality of the soul; rather the Spirit of God will be in the resurrection. The change from natural to spiritual body is the return from creaturehood to primordially.³¹ Hope for ourselves in the face of our finitude can only come from heaven, as absolute miracle.³² Only in Christ, the second Adam, may we hope that new life awaits us in death: “Behind the impenetrable walls of impenetrable reality in front of which we stand, and whose unmistakable sign is death, stands and awaits the new real life, which has appeared in

²⁶ Barth, *Resurrection*, 122-3. Barth’s evidence that Paul’s opponents in Corinth rejected the resurrection of the body on the grounds of a belief in the immortality of the soul is extremely flimsy, relying on forced interpretations of vv. 18 and 19 in particular. This seems to be a clear case of imposing a twentieth century debate, between immortality of the soul versus resurrection of the body, on a first century text. See chapter 7 for a more detailed account of the debate.

²⁷ Barth, *Resurrection*, 180.

²⁸ Barth, *Resurrection*, 201.

²⁹ Barth, *Resurrection*, 205.

³⁰ Barth, *Resurrection*, 204.

³¹ Barth, *Resurrection*, 208.

³² Barth, *Resurrection*, 211.

Christ, but is the very life of all of us.”³³ Every expression then which Barth uses to comprehend the resurrection of the body is about God. The resurrection is the action of God and there is nothing in human nature which gives any hope or indication of life beyond death. Consequently, Barth refuses to speculate as to the nature of the resurrection body, or the life to come.

Pre-Dogmatic Eschatology

At this stage of Barth's published work, the dominant note is reminiscent of the closing chapters of Job. In answer to Job's many questions regarding the justice of God in the face of his own seemingly undeserved suffering, God replies with a cascade of questions declaring God's own sovereignty and righteousness, and the arrogance of Job to question God's purposes. Likewise, the early Barth answers the inquisitive theologians of liberal Protestantism with the assertion that God is in heaven and humanity on earth: which might well seem a complete irrelevance from their point of view. Clearly, Barth and Bultmann have much in common in their reaction against their theological tradition. Both consider their immediate theological forbears to have objectified God, failing to appreciate the absolute difference between God and the object of all our human ways of expressing our faith. For the Barth of this period, the task of theology is to say as stridently as possible that God is eternal and creation is temporal, and that this means that we cannot know God by any other means than God's revelation in one place and time, in the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

One seeks in vain therefore for dogmatics. And one seeks in vain for any understanding of eschatology other than the understanding of God as eternal and humanity temporal. Even his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 at times relegates questions of the nature of the resurrection of the body to the polemical issue of what implications Jesus' resurrection has for the nature of revelation. Barth's focus is so firmly on the proper practice of theology (and hence the correct understanding of God) that he does not have the time to develop answers to familiar eschatological questions of substance, such as: what is the nature of eternal life?

³³ Barth, *Resurrection*, 174.

A further question, however, is whether it is not merely that the early Barth does not have the time for substantial eschatological thought, but that his theological presuppositions deny him the possibility of eschatology in the sense of the future, whether of the individual or the world as a whole. As we have seen, in *Romans* and *The Resurrection of the Dead*, God's relation to the world is understood as one of Eternity confronting the temporal in judgment. This judgment is equally close and distant from every moment in time, and may be revealed equally at any moment; and so the Last Judgment cannot be conceived of as a future event. Barth has been criticized widely on this point. Wolfhart Pannenberg judges the early Barth as follows: "this eschatology lost its specific temporal structure, its tension relative to the future consummation."³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann makes the same criticism: "If eschaton means eternity and not End-time, then eschatology has no longer anything to do with the future either."³⁵ For these theologians, the early Barth's eschatology of eternity and time cannot accommodate the questions repeatedly thrown up by consideration of life. What will happen when I die? What will happen to the world?

A possible defence of Barth has been argued by one of his most acute interpreters, Bruce McCormack.³⁶ He admits that Barth's use of the time/eternity dialectic is open to the charge that it leads to a historical scepticism, both towards the past and the future. Nevertheless, the time/eternity dialectic is not essential to Barth's theology, and could be left behind without any real loss. The fundamental distinction with which Barth works is not time and eternity but revelation and revelation's medium. It is this latter distinction which Barth believes liberal theology to have breached. The language of time and eternity is an "apparatus" to express the fundamental distinction which Barth upholds between revelation and its medium. So those theologians who consider Barth's time/eternity dialectic to prevent any interaction of God with time have mistakenly taken the apparatus for the central content of Barth's theology. Nevertheless, as McCormack notes, the use of time and eternity as apparatus standing for a different distinction is obscure, and Barth

³⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. G. Bromiley, 3 vols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-8), 3:537.

³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), 15.

³⁶ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic*, 262-6.

himself in the *Church Dogmatics* is critical of certain aspects of his earlier understanding of time and eternity. To this later period of his thought, which contains much more in the way of developed ideas about eternal life, we now turn.

3. Christological Eschatology

Barth's *Church Dogmatics* runs to four immense volumes, the fourth unfinished. Their themes, respectively, are the Word of God, and the doctrines of God, creation and reconciliation. Barth intended a fifth and final volume on redemption, focussing on eschatology, but he died without writing it. We do not have, then, an extended multi-part doctrine of eschatology in the later Barth's writings to match his output on, for example, creation or Christology. However this is not to say that there is nothing on eschatology in the *Church Dogmatics*. Indeed, there is more on eschatological themes in the *Dogmatics* than in the avowedly eschatological writings of many theologians. It is quite possible, then, to discover the central eschatological ideas of the later Barth as they are scattered throughout the *Dogmatics*. The rest of this section will describe these ideas, which spiral around the central theme of Christological eschatology.

The Meaning of God's Eternity

Where to begin? The best starting-place is probably Barth's criticism of his earlier use of eschatology in *Romans*. This appears fairly early in the *Dogmatics*, in II/1. In a section on the eternity and glory of God, Barth discusses the nature of God's eternity, and concludes that eternity means that God is pre-temporal, supra-temporal and post-temporal. By pre-temporal, Barth means that God was in the beginning, such that God's existence precedes that of creation.³⁷ By supra-temporal, Barth means that God faithfully accompanies time, as eternity in the midst of time.³⁸ And God's post-temporality means that God "is, when time will be no more."³⁹ Eternity is the simultaneity to God of beginning, middle and end; indeed, God's eternity

³⁷ Barth, *CD* II/1, 621.

³⁸ Barth, *CD* II/1, 623.

“decides and conditions all beginning, succession and end.”⁴⁰ There is no opposition in God between past, present and future: all three are maintained within God’s being.

Using this framework for understanding God’s eternity, Barth criticizes his own earlier theology for focussing exclusively on God’s post-temporality. He thinks it was an understandable one-sidedness, given the liberal Protestant theology to which he was reacting. The catalyst for Barth’s *Romans* was the use theologians had made of the exegetical discoveries of the nineteenth century by Overbeck and others, including Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss, that the Jesus of the gospels is an eschatological prophet. Barth believed that this exegetical insight had led, not to an expectation for the future, but to a concern for the present, since *today* was the day to be saved. This was to conceive of God as entirely supra-temporal. And so *Romans* protested: Barth and others “felt compelled to press beyond all temporal expectations... to the view of a pure and absolute futurity of God and Jesus Christ as the limit and fulfilment of all time.”⁴¹ The problem with this emphasis is that it does not lead to God-talk but merely to limit-talk. Barth goes on to confess that in his exegesis of Rom. 13:11f., in which he wrote of the End being no temporal event, he missed the passage’s distinctive feature, “the teleology which it ascribes to time as it moves towards a real end.”⁴²

Barth’s change of mind is significant for his eschatological thought. Whereas his earlier thought resisted all expectation of an end to the temporal in any future sense, his later thought ascribes to time a real end, by virtue of his broader understanding of eternity as pre-, supra- and post-temporal. Nevertheless it is not self-evident why Barth feels able to make this change, from the simple distinction between the eternal and the temporal to the threefold understanding of God’s eternity. It is only when Barth describes the Christological basis for the doctrine of God’s eternity that the change from *Romans* becomes clearer. Barth writes:

A correct understanding of the concept of eternity is reached only if we start from the other side, from the real fellowship between God and the creature, and

³⁹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 629.

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* II/1, 610.

⁴¹ Barth, *CD* II/1, 634.

⁴² Barth, *CD* II/1, 635. Cf. Barth, *Romans*, 498-502.

therefore between eternity and time. This means starting from the incarnation of the divine Word in Jesus Christ. The fact that the Word became flesh undoubtedly means that, without ceasing to be eternity, in its very power as eternity, eternity became time... In Jesus Christ it comes about that God takes time to Himself, that He Himself, the eternal One, becomes temporal, that He is present for us in the form of our own existence and our own world, not simply embracing our time and ruling it, but submitting Himself to it, and permitting created time to become and be the form of His eternity.⁴³

The emphasis in *Romans* on the eternal God as utterly distinct from and hence standing in judgment over temporal creation is here qualified (though not denied) by a counterbalancing emphasis on God's temporality in the Incarnation. This shift, which has been described as the "nerve-centre" of Barth's theology,⁴⁴ has far-reaching consequences for Barth's understanding of God, and appears much more promising for the prospect of an individual eschatology. The early Barth conceives of temporality as a created status from which the individual may be plucked, as it were, in the act and moment of revelation, to knowledge of God. But that temporality itself bears no prospect of fulfilment. In the *Dogmatics*, however, God's eternity takes the form of temporality, in the man Jesus. In the fulfilment of Jesus' humanity, Jesus' temporality, there is perhaps a clue, unavailable to the theologian of crisis, to the fulfilment of human beings.

This has a consequence for the path we will take through the *Church Dogmatics* in attempting to trace the later Barth's individual eschatology. Consideration of individual eschatology, which undoubtedly involves questions of temporality and eternity – after all, the Christian hopes for *eternal* life – must start from the Incarnation. Eschatology must be Christological, because eternity and temporality meet in the person of Christ. There can be no investigation of God that does not begin from the enfleshment of the Word, and the revelation of God in Jesus' life, death and, in particular, his resurrection. Since God has become temporal, we cannot understand God apart from temporal existence. And there can be no theological analysis of the human person that, similarly, does not begin from the enfleshment of the Word: since God has become temporal, we cannot understand

⁴³ Barth, *CD* II/1, 616.

⁴⁴ Richard Roberts, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications," in *A Theology on Its Way: Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 30.

temporal existence apart from God. The study of individual eschatology is the study of God and human being together. It is in Barth's theological anthropology, then, that we find the most developed account in the *Dogmatics* of death and beyond.

The Creature

Barth's anthropology is found in volume III/2 of the *Church Dogmatics*. Questions of life's span, its birth and death are dealt with in the closing section §47, entitled *Man in his Time*, but the rest of the part-volume provides the context for understanding his remarks regarding the human being in time. A summary of Barth's central theses in III/2, focussing in particular on the Christological basis of anthropology, is therefore necessary before the closing section is examined in greater detail.⁴⁵

In §43, *Man as a Problem of Dogmatics*, Barth establishes the centrality of the human being in creation, not because of any unique capacity or distinguishing possession, but because God has turned to the human being in the covenant of grace. This is about Jesus Christ: "it is very man that God Himself has become in the perfect and definitive revelation of this Word of His. Who and what man is, is no less specifically and emphatically declared by the Word of God than who and what God is. The Word of God essentially encloses a specific view of man, an anthropology, an ontology of this particular creature."⁴⁶ At the very outset then, Barth makes clear his fundamental approach to anthropology: the meaning and nature of human being is revealed by God, and that revelation takes the form of God becoming a human being.

There is a problem, however. God's revelation of the human being reveals that it is sinful, so how can this revelation lead us to a knowledge of anything but corruption and distortion of creaturely nature?³ Barth answers by saying that God's revelation in Jesus shows that there is a human essence which sin does not change. God's attitude and relationship to the man Jesus, "His election of this man; His

⁴⁵ For discussions of anthropology in *CD* III/2, see Stuart D. McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981); W. A. Whitehouse, "The Christian View of Man: An Examination of Karl Barth's Doctrine – I: The Nature of Man," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2 (1949), 57-74; and J. B. Soucek, "The Christian View of Man: An Examination of Karl Barth's Doctrine – II: Man in the Light of the Humanity of Jesus," trans. Robert Smith, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2 (1949), 74-82.

⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 13.

becoming and remaining one with Him; His self-revelation, action and glorification in Him and through Him,”⁴⁷ reveal the faithfulness of God to the creature. God’s relationship to all human beings is discovered in God’s relationship to Jesus, and therefore *true* human being – human being before God – is found in Jesus alone:

The nature of the man Jesus alone is the key to the problem of human nature. This man is man. As certainly as God’s relation to sinful man is properly and primarily His relation to this man alone, and a relation to the rest of mankind only in Him and through Him, He alone is primarily and properly man.⁴⁸

Anthropology therefore is founded on Christology. Of course there are differences between Jesus and other human beings: Jesus has a human nature but uniquely is without sin because of his unique relationship to God. Nevertheless, in looking at Jesus we see ourselves. We are the copies of Jesus’ original. In questions of human life, death and resurrection, then, “we must always look in the first instance at the nature of man as it confronts us in the person of Jesus, and only secondarily – asking and answering from this place of light – at the nature of man as that of every man and all other men.”⁴⁹

True to this Christological basis for anthropology, the remaining four sections in III/2 begin with a sub-section on Jesus before discussing the human being in general. §44, *Man as the Creature of God*, which follows as the second section in III/2 is no exception, discussing “Jesus, Man for God” before moving on to the “Phenomena of the Human” and “Real Man.” Barth discovers that, as a creature, Jesus’ being is found in his actions. These are the acts of saving, acts in which Jesus places himself wholly at the disposal of God. This is who Jesus is – the man for God. In moving from Christology to anthropology, however, it is not good enough, thinks Barth, for the simple inference to be drawn that since Jesus is the man for God, the meaning of human being is that it too is for God. We, as sinners, are different from Jesus, and so we must *translate* Christology into anthropology. Knowledge of Jesus gives us only *indirect* knowledge of ourselves.

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 41.

⁴⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 43.

⁴⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 46.

Barth then discusses alternative approaches to understanding the nature of true human being. He considers naturalistic analysis of human phenomena, Fichte's anthropology of freedom, and Jaspers' existential analysis of frontier-situations. He rejects each attempt to encapsulate the nature of human being because each deals with the phenomena of the human, not with the real human being. Barth disputes whether "any understanding of real man can be attained at all by man's autonomous attempt at self-understanding in any of its phases."⁵⁰ The human being cannot be seen apart from God, and for all their talk of transcendence, even Fichte and Jaspers fail to comprehend the human being because their analyses lack God as the true counterpart to human freedom and existence respectively.

A further possible approach to theological anthropology is dispatched in the form of Emil Brunner (though it would apply equally to Karl Rahner). Barth describes Brunner as arguing that by self-examination, the seeker might discover an innate awareness of God, such that the relation to God would then be a kind of human attribute. The human being would realize the limited nature of life, and that a real other confronted the human being's existence. But this reasoning is flawed according to Barth. All such an analysis could show is the "supposition of any kind of reality distinct from man,"⁵¹ such as death or one's fellows.

The upshot of all this is to come back to the point Barth makes again and again in III/2: Jesus is the only true human being, and any attempt to understand the human being without recourse to the revelation of the Word made flesh is at best *partial*. *Theological anthropology* begins only from the incarnation. Theological anthropology teaches us that to be human is to be with Jesus as the one "who is the true and primary Elect of God."⁵² As Jesus exists in his history so human being is a history, in which human beings encounter God who moves towards them. This leads Barth to a description of real human being, before God. Human being is a being in gratitude, as the creaturely counterpart to God's grace. Human being is a being in responsibility.

The following section §45, *Man in his Determination as the Covenant-Partner of God*, again begins with a Christological sub-section, "Jesus, Man for Other Men," before

⁵⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 122.

⁵¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 127.

going on to discuss human relationships. It is the humanity of Jesus which forms the basis of the inquiry into the form and nature of humanity generally.⁵³ Jesus, Barth discovers, is “the cosmic being which exists absolutely for its fellows.”⁵⁴ In every action of his life, and particularly his sacrificial death, Jesus lets his being be dictated “by an alien human being;”⁵⁵ indeed, “His being is wholly with a view to this alien being;... He is active only in the fact that He makes its deliverance His exclusive task.”⁵⁶ Again, Barth makes it clear that general humanity is not simply read off from Jesus’ humanity. Rather, in being for other human beings, Jesus affirms ordinary human being as being like his in some basic form.⁵⁷ They too find their true humanity in being with the other: humanity is constituted by helping one another.

While the discussion of III/2 has thus far provided the context for Barth’s explicit treatment of individual eschatology, the next section §46 “Man as Soul and Body,” is more directly relevant to the theme of this enquiry. Once again, the first subsection, entitled “Jesus, Whole Man” supplies the Christological basis for the theological anthropology which follows. What is the constitution of the humanity of Jesus? Barth answers that the New Testament portrays him as “one whole man, embodied soul and besouled body.”⁵⁸ There is no opposition between Jesus’ body and soul, but there is an order: the soul is first and the body second. Barth writes: “This is the irreversible order within the oneness and wholeness of the man Jesus. His body is the body of His soul, not vice versa.”⁵⁹

Again, it is the picture of this man Jesus which is the pattern for all theological knowledge of the condition of human existence.⁶⁰ And based on this understanding of Jesus, Barth goes on to expound the human being as a unity of soul and body. While Jesus is the body of his soul, the human being is the soul of his or her body (an expression he uses here but explains later). Barth argues that the existence of the

⁵² Barth, *CD* III/2, 145.

⁵³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 207.

⁵⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 208.

⁵⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 214.

⁵⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 215.

⁵⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 223.

⁵⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 327.

⁵⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 339.

⁶⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 344.

human person as the soul of the person's body is grounded and maintained by God. This grounding by God Barth expresses in the form: "Man has Spirit." "As he is man and soul of his body, he has spirit."⁶¹ It is only because God gives human beings the Spirit that they live; if it is withdrawn, they return to dust.⁶² That the human being has the Spirit means that God is there for the person, whose being as the soul of his or her body is then made possible. However Spirit should not be identified with the soul. Although the Spirit creates the soul and dwells in it, the soul remains creaturely. The human soul is not divine.

How are we to understand the relationship between soul and body? Barth attacks as profoundly mistaken the traditional view, heavily influenced by a popular version of Plato and accepted by the reformers, in particular Calvin (as we saw in Chapter 2), which states that the human being is made up of mortal body and immortal soul. The biblical conception of the human person, the biblical understanding of Jesus Christ and ordinary ways of speaking presuppose that the human person is a unity. No dualistic conception of soul and body can accommodate this fundamental unity. But Barth also rejects all attempts to understand the human person monistically, either as really material or really spiritual. Although body and soul are a unity, they are not identical. Human beings are more than their bodies; but their bodies are more than mere shadows of their selves. "Materialism with its denial of the soul makes men subjectless, spiritualism with its denial of the body makes him objectless."⁶³ So Barth wants to speak in terms of soul *and* body, and speak thus: "Man's being exists, and is therefore soul, and it exists in a certain form, and is therefore body."⁶⁴ There is differentiation without distinction: "We must accept a differentiation between soul and body, while never speaking of two distinct substances."⁶⁵ The expression which Barth settles on is that a person is *the soul of his body*. The soul could not be inner if there were no outer – the body. Soul could not move in time if there were no spatial complement – the body. Soul could not fulfil itself in specific perceptions, experiences, thoughts and feelings, if there were no

⁶¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 354.

⁶² Barth, *CD* III/2, 362.

⁶³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 392.

⁶⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 325.

⁶⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 417.

means in and through which it could exhibit itself – the body. As soul it is not without a body. According to Barth, the soul is the life of the human being.

Barth goes on to delineate soul and body in their particularity. That the human being is a soul means that being his or her own centre – “the subject of specific engagements, opinions, views and resolves; a subject which is ordained for action and from which therefore actions are expected.”⁶⁶ As for the body, it is “a spatio-material system of relations”⁶⁷ which has life only insofar as it is ensouled. “Body would not be body, if it were not besouled.”⁶⁸ That the person is a body means the capability of taking action appropriate to the soul’s determination. In the area of perception, while the soul has a special relation to thinking, the body has a special relation to sensing. In the field of action, the soul has a special relation to willing, while the body has a special relation to desiring. None of these activities, however, is unique to body or soul. The human person senses, thinks, desires and wills as a unity. Barth concludes this section by stating that there is an order to soul and body. “The soul *precedes* in its perception, both as awareness and thought, and its activity, both as desire and volition, and... the body follows.”⁶⁹ It is in this sense that Barth believes the human person to be *rational* – the soul rules and the body serves.

Barth develops the following implications of this depiction of the human being as the soul of his or her body for the understanding of death. If the Spirit is withdrawn, human beings die. It is Spirit which is immortal, whereas the person is mortal. “God is not bound to let His Spirit dwell in men always, and when He does so no longer, then it is all up with breath and life, with the being of man as the soul of his body; he must return to the earth from which he was taken, and die.”⁷⁰ Of course death is the end of the body: “where there is no more ruling, there is no more serving.”⁷¹ But death is also the end of the soul: “Death puts an end to his freedom, to the lordship of his soul over the body and therefore its direction, so that further life-acts are made impossible.”⁷² The soul cannot continue without the body; a

⁶⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 397.

⁶⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 376-7.

⁶⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 350.

⁶⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 418.

⁷⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 362.

⁷¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 426.

⁷² Barth, *CD* III/2, 425.

bodiless soul is impotent. "In death man is only the spent soul of a spent body."⁷³ There is no immortality of any part of the human person.

Nevertheless, there are also hints in this section that death is not the last word for the human being as the soul of his or her body. Death may occur when God's Spirit is withdrawn, but that understanding of death is the basis for our hope. Even though God gives death, God remains the God from whom the human being is.⁷⁴ Death means the end of the whole person, body and soul, but Barth adds a significant qualification – "unless the God who let him live and then die gives him new life."⁷⁵ In death, the soul becomes bodiless, and so impotent, but even in death, the human being does not and cannot suffer from the destruction of the soul's and body's interconnection, "for even in death God watches over him."⁷⁶ The order of soul and body would have the last word if there were a "deliverance from death, a death of death."⁷⁷ Barth's hints may be summed up as follows: It is not immortality which is promised to the person, but resurrection, the deliverance from death.⁷⁸

The Creature in Time

Barth's anthropology, like a whirlpool, has been spiralling closer and closer to the central questions of human existence, birth and death. In the last section §47 of III/2, entitled *Man in his Time*,⁷⁹ the human being as the soul of his or her body is discussed in its inescapable condition – temporality. The human being could not be human without time. The human being "has time and is in time."⁸⁰ This is not God's eternity, but is given to the human being in a fixed span when created as the soul of his or her body.

As he has throughout his theological anthropology, Barth begins with Jesus. To understand what it is for human beings to be in time, the being of Jesus in his time

⁷³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 370.

⁷⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 348.

⁷⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 370.

⁷⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 371.

⁷⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 428.

⁷⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 379.

⁷⁹ For discussions of this section of the *Church Dogmatics*, see Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (London: SPCK, 1997), chap. 2; Roberts, *A Theology*, 49-55; and Gulley, "Eschatology of Karl Barth," chap. 6.

⁸⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 437.

must first be grasped, for Jesus is their contemporary. Perhaps a quotation will help explain this:

The answer given by the life of Jesus to the questions of God and man makes His time the time which always was when men lived, which always is when they live, and which always will be when they live. It makes this life at once the centre and the beginning and the end of all the times of all the lifetimes of all men. It is the time of man in its whole extent.⁸¹

How does Barth get from the lifespan of one man Jesus to its vast significance for the time of human being in its whole extent? For Barth, the answer is something like this: Jesus does not merely live in his own time, but he is the Lord of time. The basis for this assertion is Jesus' bodily resurrection. The forty days of Jesus' resurrection appearances are unique amidst the entirety of God's revelation in Christ. In these forty days alone, Jesus is *fully* revealed as the Revealer, and not revealed in the hiddenness which marks his life and death. In these forty days, God's presence in Jesus was pure, and not paradoxical. The forty days uniquely constitute fulfilled time. This purity of presence allows Barth, he believes, to say that after the resurrection, Jesus is present to all people regardless of whether they have been, are now or will be. Jesus, having been the full revelation of God in time is really present now, is also really a being in the past and also really a being in the future.

Help in understanding this idea is found in I/2, where Barth writes, somewhat obscurely, that God has time for us.⁸² Jesus' resurrection constitutes God's time which is different from created or fallen time. This third time, this fulfilled time, is the time in which all human beings are contemporaries of Jesus.⁸³ The Easter stories, Barth argues, speak of "an eternal presence of God in time,"⁸⁴ a time of the pure presence of God among human beings. Because God was purely present in the resurrection, it cannot be consigned merely to the past, but must also be expectation. If God once had time for us, then God will have time for us. It seems that in this pure presence in time, God has assumed time for us, and thus granted God's time to

⁸¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 440.

⁸² Barth, *CD* I/2, 45.

⁸³ Barth, *CD* I/2, 67.

⁸⁴ Barth, *CD* I/2, 114.

us as a gift.⁸⁵ All time is Jesus' time: this gives us hope for the future as under the Lordship of Jesus.

This understanding of the future Lordship of Jesus is of particular interest to our eschatological theme. As this coming being, Jesus is expected to return, as a future being. Barth disparages all versions of Christianity which find in the resurrection the basis for progress or optimism. By contrast, the New Testament hopes for the return of Jesus to judge, towards which Christians should have hope. "In the New Testament, neither the inner life of the community nor its missionary proclamation suggests the initial stages of a growth leading to a better future either here or hereafter."⁸⁶ Nevertheless, for Barth, this future coming of Jesus is the unveiling of what is already accomplished in the cross and resurrection: the final unveiling of our reconciliation. "What the participants in the forty days saw in the Easter revelation in His person was already the great *consummatum est* – in its fulfilment."⁸⁷ The end-times have, then, already taken place in the resurrection, and so resurrection and parousia are, for Jesus, the same event: "Nothing which will be has not already taken place on Easter Day – included and anticipated in the person of the one man Jesus."⁸⁸ The eschatological in no way goes beyond the Christological: the future of Jesus will bring nothing new save the disclosure of that which has already taken place. Barth is able to say therefore, that "there are no 'last things,' i.e., no abstract and autonomous last things apart from and alongside Him, the last One."⁸⁹

It should be clear at this point how Barth's emphasis has changed from *Romans* and *The Resurrection of the Dead*. In these works, all expectation for the future coming of Christ was regarded as an expression of the fundamental truth that God is eternal, and that the creature is temporal. Jesus' resurrection reveals the possibility of union with Christ at any moment, but Barth has no interest in a consummation to the event of God's revelation in the cross and resurrection. But in the *Dogmatics*, Barth, while in no sense going back on his earlier linchpin of God's eternity and creation's temporality, adds a further dimension. The End does not simply refer to God's

⁸⁵ See also Barth, *CD* III/2, 455.

⁸⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 486.

⁸⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 488.

⁸⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 489.

⁸⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 490.

Eternity; it refers also to the consummation of Jesus' activity in revealing God. The fact – the central fact of Barth's mature eschatology – that Jesus is Lord of time, means that the End must be understood not only as beyond time, but as the fulfilment of time itself. The End, though not a temporal event itself, will be the consummation of God's assumption of time and gift of time to the creature.

How does Barth relate Jesus' temporality to human temporality generally? Again, Barth reiterates that anthropology, while based on Christology, is not a simple deduction.⁹⁰ We are different from Jesus. Our past is in the past, and our future is still an open question. Even our present seems unattainable. We never seem to "have time," and this leads to insecurity; we run from the riddle of time. We have no control over time and our being in time. We long for autonomy and so find our temporality to be monstrous. Our unlikeness to Jesus in this respect is clear, because our experience is of sinful humanity in time.⁹¹ What Christology teaches us, however, is that we should not be horrified at our temporality: "the existence of the man Jesus in time is our guarantee that time as the form of human existence is... willed and created by God, is given by God to man, and is therefore real."⁹² And God willed and created time "in order that there might take place His dealings in the covenant with man."⁹³ The eternal God gives us time.

When we consider our future, Barth continues, even though we must reckon with the threatening prospect of catastrophe at every moment, we should not be pessimistic. Yet nor should we be blithely optimistic towards the future. Both pessimism and optimism discount the fact that time is created and willed by God. "If God is taken into account, we have to say that even in the future tense time is a reality which is assured and which assures our life. It is the framework of our being, and its end will not be terror and cannot terrify."⁹⁴ True, judgment awaits, which is the cause of fear in us, but it is a fear of falling into the hands of the living God, who is gracious.

⁹⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 512.

⁹¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 517.

⁹² Barth, *CD* III/2, 520.

⁹³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 527.

⁹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 546.

Barth goes on to claim that time is not merely given to the person by God, but the person's time is *allotted* by God. It is a limited span, with beginning and end: "This span begins at a certain point, lasts for a certain period and finally comes to an end."⁹⁵ We protest against the end, and rightly so, for we sense that our duties to God and our fellow human beings cannot be fulfilled within the span of life. We should not be resigned to our end. However, we must recall that creaturely life necessarily has boundaries, both of beginning and end. Furthermore, if life had no boundaries, this would be no guarantee that we could fulfil our striving for perfection. It would be rather more likely to offer further opportunities for frustration. As against our longing for endless duration, "It is good and salutary for man to live in his allotted time."⁹⁶ "All our chafing against the limitations of our life must be irrelevant and superfluous. The apparent threat and restriction must be overshadowed by a mighty beneficent promise."⁹⁷ God has willed that human lives be in their allotted span, and this should be an occasion for gratitude, for the gracious God is the beyond. There is no natural immortality, but this does not mean that human beings will not have the duration and perfection we rightly crave: "if we do not sink back into the void, if our life and being are sustained, it is because – but only because – He is there for us."⁹⁸

Barth develops his insistence on the limitedness of human life in later parts of the *Dogmatics*, to which we will make a brief detour. In III/3, §49, Barth discusses the divine preserving of the human creature. This preservation by God involves the giving of more time to the creature, but not endlessly: "He does not preserve it illimitably, but within the limits which correspond to its creaturely existence... To no creature does it belong to be endless, omnipresent or enduring."⁹⁹ Indeed, infinite existence (if such a thing can be conceived) would exclude a being from the history of grace. (Barth's treatment in this section of God's preservation of the creature in eternity will be discussed later.)

⁹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 554.

⁹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 562.

⁹⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 563.

⁹⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 568. See Oblau, *Gotteszeit*, 151: "The irrevocable limitation of human life does not mean, according to Barth, that the human being by virtue of his death sinks into nothing. God can preserve the person eternally – in the limits of his or her time." (My translation.)

⁹⁹ Barth, *CD* III/3, 61.

The following part-volume III/4 discusses the human being's allotted time under the heading *Freedom in Limitation*. Here Barth develops the ethical consequences of humanity's limitedness. God ordains the limits to life, and these limits must be accepted. It is positive to be limited by God: "The man who is limited by Him is the man who is loved by Him."¹⁰⁰ There are clear examples of sinful behaviour in response to recognizing our limitedness: we desire "to break free from it, to play the immortal, to bewail one's mortality,"¹⁰¹ – all forms of self-deception. Our limitedness should not be a curse to us, because it is God's word to us. Indeed, we should welcome our limitedness because God entered it in Jesus Christ: "in Him God has had a tent like ours and recognized it as His creation and found it a worthy dwelling-place... In Him God Himself has gone the way from birth to death."¹⁰² Jesus' birth and death are the presupposition of ours. The ethical consequences of God's limiting us are as follows: "The man who grasps his unique opportunity, who occupies his place, may be known by his constant readiness and joyfulness in face of the fact which unambiguously characterizes his being in time as a limited being, namely that he will one day die."¹⁰³ We now turn back to *Church Dogmatics* III/2, to Barth's more detailed examination of these limits, both birth, and in greater depth, death.

Death and Beyond

In the section "Beginning Time," Barth discusses briefly our birth in time. "There was a time when I myself as the soul of my body, I myself as the unity and totality of my psycho-somatic existence, did not yet exist, but I began to be."¹⁰⁴ That once we were not is a shadow lying over us, though it is not something which should unduly frighten us, since God was before us: "there is nothing mysterious or terrifying about the time before we were."¹⁰⁵ What the fear regarding our beginning tells us is that we have an even greater fear towards our end, the subject to which Barth now turns.

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 568.

¹⁰¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 570.

¹⁰² Barth, *CD* III/4, 577.

¹⁰³ Barth, *CD* III/4, 594.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 574.

¹⁰⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 577.

The sub-section "Ending Time," which concludes this part-volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, is Barth's principal meditation on death, and has been profoundly influential for subsequent Protestant thought, as the following chapters will show. That human life in time is given and allotted by God means that we are limited by God. Our life has a temporal span, going in one direction, from birth to death. The closing limit to life is death. (In III/4, Barth puts it with admirable clarity as follows: "That we shall die is the limit of our existence in time somewhere ahead of us. Then it will all be up with us... Our existence is our existence in time, and to this time there belongs decisively its end, i.e., that we must and shall die."¹⁰⁶) Barth notes that we face our end with disquiet, since we still hunger and thirst after further life, even when we cannot live any longer: "The last of the ice-floes on which we placed our feet again and again will no longer support us."¹⁰⁷ This end of our life is our death: "We shall die. This, and nothing else, will be the end awaiting us."¹⁰⁸

The question Barth now raises is this: "whether and how far we have to understand the finitude of our allotted time, and death as the termination of human life, as a determination of the divinely created and therefore good nature of man."¹⁰⁹ The issue with which Barth is wrestling is how to hold together the following two principles – first, that death is the natural end of our allotted span, which Barth's theological anthropology is bound to affirm; and second, that death is the wages of sin, as Paul held and the theological tradition has consistently accepted. This is a central issue for Barth's individual eschatology. If it were shown that death was not part of God's good will towards creation, that is, if it were shown that we were not properly limited by God in birth and death, then we might be led to believe that "man's redemption and deliverance from death ought to consist in the renewed possibility of a temporally infinite life on the other side of death."¹¹⁰ In other words, if death is unnatural, human beings should ideally go on for ever. But Barth believes this would be to misunderstand death and our beyond. As is becoming clear from

¹⁰⁶ Barth, *CD* III/4, 589.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 587.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 588.

¹⁰⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 593.

¹¹⁰ Barth, *CD* III/2, 627.

our study of Barth's theological anthropology, humanity must be understood as finite from first to last.

How does Barth attempt to resolve this dilemma? He begins with the second principle, that death is the wages of sin. What is indisputable for Barth is that death has the character of God's judgment upon us. Before all understandings of death as somehow natural, he perceives in death something negative, even sinister. This is bound up with human guilt:

That we are guilty in this boundless and quite inexcusable way is what will confront us at the end of our time and stare us in the face when we die. It is in this irreparable state of transgression that we shall be translated from being to non-being and brought face to face with our Creator. . . Can we doubt that for this reason death must inevitably seem to be negative and have only the character of an unqualified evil? What else can its onset mean but the approach and execution of God's judgment upon us?¹¹¹

Death, then, is a sign of the judgment of God. It is the wages of sin. However, even as Barth expresses the traditional understanding of death as the consequence of our sin, he tempers this assertion by holding that death must not be seen as *wholly* negative:

Of death as it actually meets us we certainly cannot say that it is an inherent part of human nature as God created it and as it is therefore good. There is no doubt whatever that it is something negative and evil. *Yet we have to realise and state that it is an evil ordained by God as a sign of His judgment, and not therefore a fate but an ordinance which proceeds and is to be accepted from God.*¹¹²

The essential point for Barth is that it is not intrinsic to human nature to stand under this sign of judgment. It is possible for human death to have a different character; the problem is that this intrinsic quality of death is "unfathomably and inaccessibly concealed"¹¹³ by its anti-natural guise as judgment.

Where can we see the different character of human death, not as judgment, but as intrinsic to the creature, natural, normal and good? *Where else*, and this is the crucial part of his argument, *but in Jesus?* Jesus' life was finite, yet did not stand under the

¹¹¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 596.

¹¹² Barth, *CD* III/2, 597 (my emphasis).

¹¹³ Barth, *CD* III/2, 598.

shadow of guilt: "In His human person there is manifested a human existence whose finitude is not intrinsically identical with bondage to that other death."¹¹⁴ Jesus died, not as the sign of God's judgment, not as a consequence of his guilt, but as Judge and Judged. His mortality was good. And as we must follow this true man, so mortality must be good for us too: "To belong to Him we must be finite and not infinite. Finitude, then, is not intrinsically negative and evil. There is no reason why it should not be an anthropological necessity, a determination of true and natural man, that we shall one day have to die, and merely have been."¹¹⁵ For Barth, then, the voluntary death of the sinless man Jesus reveals that death is part of God's good will for creation, including humanity. Death is natural. We die because we are finite, and willed to be finite by God. Nevertheless, death is the sign of God's judgment on us in our sin, and is met with fear.

Having discussed Barth's account of this intrinsic quality of death, we must now briefly set out how he describes our redemption from the negative character of death as judgment. It is the finite Jesus who suffers this death. In Jesus' death, God sides with humanity, snatching us from the jaws of death. We no longer have to suffer judgment itself, but only its sign, death. We are delivered from sin and guilt, and are therefore liberated from death as judgment. Jesus' death limits and relativizes death-as-judgment. In the fact that God acted for us on the cross, we can separate the good death that is part of our finitude and the death as the consequence of God's wrath. They need not be the same for us.¹¹⁶ It is now possible for human beings to die a good death.¹¹⁷

As Jesus' death reveals the nature of death for the human being, so his resurrection is clearly essential for understanding God's relationship to us in our death. It is evident from other passages in the *Dogmatics* that for Barth, Jesus'

¹¹⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 629.

¹¹⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 631.

¹¹⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 629-30.

¹¹⁷ See Oblau, *Gotteszeit*, 150-1: "For Jesus, the finitude of his life had an indispensable function. Jesus had to be mortal, so that in his life's end he was able to suffer in our place the death we deserved. Therefore his finitude appears to be the anthropological necessity for our deliverance from judgment." (My translation.) A more critical reaction to Barth's understanding of human death is found in Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 340-5, e.g., "Nothing that Barth adduces in support of the thought that death need not be feared any longer proves that death was originally a *good* limitation of the life of man. On the contrary, everything points to *reconciliation* as the conquest of the *triumph* of death." (343)

resurrection is fundamentally the event of his self-declaration. The resurrection does not involve any change on Jesus' part, but rather means that the same Jesus could now be seen in his divine glory. The resurrection was "a lifting of the veil."¹¹⁸ The events of his life and in particular his death – which had been hidden in humiliation – are disclosed fully in his resurrection, which

was not a prolongation of His existence terminated by death like that of every other man, but the appearance of this terminated existence in its participation in the sovereign life of God, in its endowment with eternity, in the transcendence, incorruptibility and immortality given and appropriated to it in virtue of this participation for all its this-worldliness. He came again in the manifestation or revelation of this prior human life as it had fallen victim to death as such, but had been delivered from death, invested with divine glory, and caused to shine in this glory, in virtue of its participation in the life of God.¹¹⁹

So Jesus' resurrection is not the beginning of a new exalted life, but the revelation of who it was who preached and healed and suffered and died. Jesus' resurrection is the disclosure of the presence of God in Jesus throughout his life. In this revelation, it is shown that Jesus is delivered from death, in that his terminated life participates in God's life.¹²⁰

Similarly, in our death, we deal with God: "in death we shall finally fall into the hands of the living God."¹²¹ And this God is gracious. Die we must, but although we die, God will still be gracious to us, and present with us. God "does not perish with us. He does not die or decay."¹²² A quotation from the later IV/2 should clarify Barth's meaning here:

His [i.e., Jesus'] end and issue, His crucifixion, i.e., His life as it is fulfilled and triumphant in His crucifixion, because and as it is lived for us, shines as a direction on the existence of us all as it is determined by our finitude... He gives us... the freedom to rejoice as we arrive at our end and limit. For He is there.

¹¹⁸ Barth, *CD* IV/2, 133.

¹¹⁹ Barth, *CD* IV/3, 312.

¹²⁰ For a detailed examination of Barth on Jesus' resurrection, see C. A. Price, "The Resurrection: aspects of its changing role in 20th century theology" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., St Andrews University, 1986), chaps. 2, 4, 8. A clear critique of Barth's account of Jesus' resurrection can be found in Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 96-147.

¹²¹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 609.

¹²² Barth, *CD* III/2, 611.

He lives there the life which as eternal life includes our own. He is our hope. And He bids and makes us hope.¹²³

We have reached, at the end of Barth's exhaustive Christological anthropology, his understanding of the end of the human being's life, and of life's beyond. Christ's resurrection ushers in the last day, a day beyond which there will be no future. The corruptible will put on incorruption and the mortal will put on immortality, although

nothing further will follow this happening, for then "there shall be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6). There is no question of the continuation into an indefinite future of a somewhat altered life. The New Testament hope for the other side of death is very different from that. What it looks forward to is the "eternalising" of this ending life.¹²⁴

Our past and limited life will participate in new life: that will be eternal life in God. It is the life we have already had which will be glorified in Christ. And this is the resurrection of the dead, "our hope in the time which we still have."¹²⁵ Of what happens in death we cannot know; all we can say with certainty is that God will exist. "It cannot be and should not be too small a thing for us that He and He alone is our hope, our future, our victory, our resurrection and our life."¹²⁶ It is true that one day we will have been, but God will be there for us, hence "our future non-existence cannot be our complete negation."¹²⁷ We must accept our finitude, accept that our life spans the time from birth to death, and die with confidence that our dying does not mean that we must suffer God's wrath as the final word on our life. We do not hope for any life with altered circumstances beyond death, for any redemption "from the this-sidedness, finitude and mortality"¹²⁸ of our existence. Jesus' resurrection offers no basis for any such hope. "Man, as such... has no beyond. Nor does he need one, for God is his beyond."¹²⁹ Barth's anthropology,

¹²³ Barth, *CD* IV/2, 468.

¹²⁴ Barth, *CD* III/2, 624. It should be noted that while the Greek of Rev. 10:6 (*chronos ouketi estai*) does literally mean "time shall be no more," it is usually interpreted as meaning "There will be no more delay," e.g., NRSV. It is not at all clear that the book of Revelation indicates that time will be no more in its vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

¹²⁵ Barth, *CD* III/2, 624.

¹²⁶ Barth, *CD* III/2, 615.

¹²⁷ Barth, *CD* III/2, 611.

¹²⁸ Barth, *CD* III/2, 633.

¹²⁹ Barth, *CD* III/2, 632. See also *CD* III/4, 594.

grounded as it always is in Jesus' humanity, and oriented always to the human relationship to the eternal God, begins and ends with those words: God is our beyond.

In a number of other places in the *Dogmatics* and elsewhere, Barth writes further on death and eternal life. The same central principles which emerge in his anthropology guide his discussion: human finitude; death as the God-given limit of human beings; eternal life as the eternalizing of this mortal life. It is this last central theme of Barth's individual eschatology which is the most fascinating yet tantalizing. What does "eternalizing" mean? Let us discover whether and how Barth fills out this fundamental phrase of his anthropology. In III/4, §56 *Freedom in Limitation*, as we have already seen, Barth discusses again the limitedness of human life between birth and death. He goes on to consider the beyond:

What is beyond does not belong to him [i.e., the human being]. It is part of the pure promise of existence, not in another time but in the eternity of God. Nor do the promise and hope of this eternal life refer to a continuation of his life in infinite time, but to his limited life in his time, *to its glorification*, to the revelation of the omnipotence and mercy, of the faithfulness and patience, with which God has been and is and will be the Lord of his limited life in time. When his time and all time shall have passed, he will be caught up by the eternal God as the one who exists in his time, not according to his nature, but according to the promise of God. Even from this standpoint he is only in this time of his. And this time will pass away.¹³⁰

Barth seems to say here that eternal life is the glorification of the life the human being has already lived. What does glorification mean here? It seems that the revelation of God's grace towards that temporal life is glorification. An analogy, though risky, may help: it is as if eternal life is a timeless playback of the life's record, with all the currently dark obscurities of God's relation to that life voiced-over.

Yet a few pages later, Barth suggests that God will clothe us with eternal life causing us "to participate in unbroken, direct and manifest fellowship with Himself."¹³¹ Such a fellowship cannot, of course, involve any continuation of life. It seems that by fellowship, Barth must mean that the eternalized lived life of the human being participates in fellowship with God. It seems extremely difficult to

¹³⁰ Barth, *CD* III/4, 569 (my emphasis).

understand how to conceive of such a participation.¹³² One could begin to understand God's knowledge of the glorified life, but not the relation the eternalized life could have to God. How could the glorified life know or love God? If that is Barth's understanding of eternal life, then we must be clear that it denies some central aspects of Christian hope in traditional eschatology: that the redeemed will enjoy perfect knowledge and holiness, and will perfectly know and love God (as we saw in chapter 2).

Further elucidation is found in III/3, in a sub-section on The Divine Preserving. Barth counters a possible interpretation of "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28) that God will be alone, as follows: "It means rather that in the final revelation of His ways He will be seen by the creature to have attained His ultimate good in all things with the creature, the creature not ceasing to be distinct from Himself."¹³³ Barth goes on to expound God's justification in the following passage, which needs to be quoted at length:

The time will come when the created world as a whole will only have been. In the final act of salvation history, i.e., in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Foundation and Deliverer and Head of the whole of creation, the history of creation will also reach its goal and end. It will not need to progress any further, it will have fulfilled its purpose. Everything that happened in the course of that history will then take place together as a recapitulation of all individual events. It will be made definitive as the temporal end of the creature beyond which it cannot exist any more. Its life will then be over, its movement and development completed, its notes sounded, its colours revealed, its thinking thought, its words said, its deeds done, its contacts and relationships with other creatures and their mutual interaction closed, the possibilities granted to it exploited and exhausted. And in all this it will somehow have a part in that which Jesus Christ has been and done as its Foundation and Deliverer and Head. It will not need any continuance of temporal existence. And since the creature itself will not be there, time which is the form of its existence will not be there.¹³⁴

The image suggested earlier of the eternalized life as a playback of life with a voice-over describing the divine activity towards the temporal life seems to be confirmed

¹³¹ Barth, *CD* III/4, 572.

¹³² But see John Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1989), 151, for an example of a reader who thinks he can make sense of participation in eternal life according to Barth.

¹³³ Barth, *CD* III/3, 86.

¹³⁴ Barth, *CD* III/3, 87-88.

by this passage. Barth describes it as a “recapitulation,” its notes sounded and colours revealed. And, crucially, the creature *will not be there*.

Yet again, in typical dialectical fashion, Barth seems to say two pages later that the creature *will* be there, for God “will not be alone in eternity, but with the creature. He will allow it to partake of His own eternal life.”¹³⁵ So Barth asserts both that eternal life involves no continuation of the human being and that it will be participation in God. Preferring not simply to accept this as an antinomy,¹³⁶ let us ask: *what* partakes of God’s eternal life? The only answer Barth could presumably offer would be – the life that has been, the recapitulation. Once again, eternal life appears to involve, for Barth, God’s eternal relation to our history, without a corresponding relation of human beings to the eternal God.

We might say that conceptually this is not problematic. After all, as its creator, God presumably relates to a lump of rock, but we would not say that the lump of rock relates to God. Yet discovering the conceptual possibility of this one-way relation reveals its difficulty for individual eschatology. Is Barth saying that in dying, the human person becomes no more a centre of love and knowledge than rock, albeit a creature who once was a centre of love and knowledge? If so, then his individual eschatology is a chilly and austere doctrine.

A later text from *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 offers a slightly different perspective on these questions. Here Barth says that the life of a creature after death can only be “its new life from God and with God. It can be only the eternal life which is given it by God after the manner of His own life.”¹³⁷ The human being’s this-worldly existence may have a future by the power of the presence of God. This sounds more promising. But later in the same part-volume, Barth reverts to the same playback-image outlined above:

Those whom He calls out of their temporal existence and ministry, He does not set in the darkness of no more being. He rather takes them out of the darkness of present not yet being into the light of his consummating revelation, in which,

¹³⁵ Barth, *CD* III/3, 90.

¹³⁶ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Barth’s thought is irretrievably inconsistent on this point. George Schurr pointedly concludes his excellent discussion of the tension in Barth’s thought between his polemic against continuation and emphasis on fellowship beyond death as follows: “Barth refuses to submit to systematic conclusions.” “Brunner and Barth on Eternal Life,” 107.

¹³⁷ Barth, *CD* IV/3, 311.

together with all that will only have been when He comes, their concluded existence, though it be only a torso or the fragment of a torso, will be seen as a ripe fruit of His atoning work, as a perfect manifestation of the will of God fulfilled in Him, being thus illuminated, having and maintaining its own light, and bearing witness to God in this renewed form in which it is conformed to the image of the Son of God.¹³⁸

The context of this passage is Barth's denial of the existence of Purgatory. His insistence, then, on the conclusion of life with death, accords with the Reformation principle that at death we are clothed with Christ's righteousness and so have no need of further refining. Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 2, classical Protestant eschatology, despite opposition to Purgatory, did not deny the possibility of experiences in bliss, principally of knowing and loving God.

As should be clear by now, the images of illumination, of revelation, of uncovering and unveiling come thick and fast in Barth's eschatology. Two works on the creed from the 1940s exemplify this. *The Faith of the Church*, transcribed from lectures given by Barth in 1940-43, is based on Calvin's Commentary on the Creed. Here the image of unveiling is paramount in our attempt to understand eternal life:

Even though we cannot imagine for ourselves the resurrection – and we simply cannot – it is important to retain at least this: if the resurrection is a passage, if it endows us with absolutely new qualities, still it deals with this same life, our life that we live here. It deals with the appearing of eternal life in our life itself as it is. Often I have tried to imagine this for myself in the following manner: our life is hidden under a veil. This veil is the present times. At the resurrection, this veil will be removed, and our whole life, from the crib to the grave, will be seen in the light and in its unity with the life of Christ, in the splendour of Christ's mercy, of his grace and of his power.¹³⁹

Dogmatics in Outline, from lectures delivered immediately after the war, provides another example of Barth's favourite image for eternal life. Commenting on "Resurrection of the Body," Barth says:

Resurrection means not the continuation of this life, but life's completion... So the Christian hope affects our whole life: this life of ours will be completed... The Christian hope does not lead us away from this life; it is rather the

¹³⁸ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 927-8.

¹³⁹ Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, trans. G. Vahanian (Glasgow: Collins, 1960), 140. See also 145.

uncovering of the truth in which God sees our life... In the eschaton the light falls from above into our life. We await this light.¹⁴⁰

One final quotation from Barth will emphasize the consistency with which he uses “unveiling” to understand eternal life. In a letter from the last decade of his life, Barth writes:

Eternal life is not another and second life, beyond the present one. It is this life, but the reverse side which God sees although it is as yet hidden from us – this life in relation to what He has done for the whole world, and therefore for us too, in Jesus Christ... The new thing will be that the cover of tears, death, suffering, crying, and pain that now lies over our present life will be lifted, that the decree of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ will stand before our eyes, and that it will be the subject not only of our deepest shame but also of our joyful thanks and praise.¹⁴¹

To conclude this account of Barth’s individual eschatology, let us consider some lines from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Jaques says:

And so, from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale.¹⁴²

It could be argued that Barth’s eschatology of the individual is neatly encapsulated in these lines. We rot, and how we rot, for Barth. Our lives, sinful, slothful, lead inexorably to death, a death which we as sinners fear, unable to accept our God-given finitude. Indeed, as sinners, we cannot separate our death from the wrath of God which ordains death as the consequence of sin. Nevertheless, we ripen also. In the death of the man Jesus, God has become the Judge judged in our place, and enables us to be reconciled to the Creator. As reconciled human beings our lives ripen in fellowship with Jesus, although we are still subject to suffering and death. Only at the resurrection will the reality of our lives be revealed: that while we seemed only to be rotting, we were in fact ripening as the fruit of God’s self-

¹⁴⁰ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM, 1949), 154.

¹⁴¹ Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, ed. J. Fangmeier and H. Stoevesandt, trans. and ed. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 9.

¹⁴² *As You Like It*, 2.7.26-28.

revelation in Jesus Christ. Eternal life will be the eternalizing of this rotting life as one that is eternally ripe.

4. Analysis of Barth's individual eschatology

Eternalization: Logic and Difficulties

The question which drives Bultmann's theology motivates Barth's too: how can there be knowledge of God? Both Bultmann and Barth are convinced that theology is separable into natural and revealed varieties. Natural theology attempts to grasp God in categories and language developed over millennia to express natural phenomena, and fails therefore to take account of God's transcendence. It does not therefore talk about God though it may seem to, but in reality it speaks about creation, and sinful creation at that. Only a theology which responds to the direct revelation of God, not generally but specifically in the person of Jesus Christ, can escape the Achilles' heel of natural theology, undipped in the waters of God's self-revelation. Yet, as we saw in the case of Bultmann, such a prohibition leaves the theologian struggling to make sense of God's self-revelation. Who receives this self-revelation? And how may it be received? And so Bultmann adopts the best available understanding of human existence he was aware of, in the form of Heidegger's philosophy of human being, in order to understand the relationship between God and human beings. Barth, too, after an initial engagement with a theology of crisis, finds that proclaiming the transcendence of God cannot of itself supply the resources for Christian dogmatics. He too requires a principle for interpreting the self-revelation of God. For Barth, this principle of interpretation is the very content of the self-revelation: Jesus Christ. As has been shown in detailed discussion of *Church Dogmatics* III/2, at every stage in Barth's anthropology he begins with an account of the man Jesus, and only then draws out the nature of the real human being in the light of this. Jesus is the original, and we are the copies. With this principle in place, Barth is able to go on and develop specific doctrine, including individual eschatology.

We have seen how Barth's account of the nature of the human person, birth, death and the beyond are controlled by the revelation of true humanity in the man Jesus. Scripture witnesses to Jesus being the body of his soul, a unity of two inseparable yet distinct aspects to his humanity. So for Barth it follows that a human being generally is a unity, as the soul of his or her body. Scripture witnesses to Jesus being Lord of time. So for Barth it follows that human being lives in the time given and allotted by God. Jesus dies a natural death. So for Barth it follows that human being is mortal, and dies in accordance with God's good will. In Jesus' resurrection, his life terminated by death appears in the eternal life of God. So for Barth, again, it follows that human being will receive resurrection to an eternal life consisting of the eternalization of the lived life in God.

How then does Barth deal in the *Dogmatics* with the passages in scripture that seem to discuss the nature of resurrection life? There is space here only for representative examples of exegesis, but a pattern will emerge. A study of all the major references to 1 Corinthians 15 shows the following: Barth emphasizes that the future eschaton will be an unveiling of what we already have in Christ, that the end will involve no continuation or development of the individual, and that the work of Christ will be complete. There is no discussion of resurrection in terms of "spiritual body" or "imperishability."¹⁴³ Barth's exegesis of 2 Cor. 5:1-10 emphasizes the requickening of this life of ours, that "what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (v. 4), that the world we live in now veils the salvation effected already, and that our mortal flesh will not be with us at the eschaton. Barth disregards Paul's hints as to heavenly existence, for example, to be further clothed (v. 4), to be at home with the Lord (v. 8), and appearance before the judgment seat and recompense (v. 10).¹⁴⁴ As for 1 John 3:2, Barth's exegesis looks at all of the verse except for the words *for we shall see him as he is*. Hence he finds in the verse confirmation of the not-yet quality of salvation, our ignorance of its form, and the imperceptibility of life with God on the basis of life now.¹⁴⁵

This brief outline of Barth's exegesis of eschatological passages in scripture demonstrates that his Christological approach to eschatology allows only for a

¹⁴³ CD III/2, 624, 639; III/3, 501; IV/4, 40.

¹⁴⁴ CD I/1, 388; IV/1, 330; IV/2, 628-9.

narrow interest in what the New Testament says about resurrection life. When the writers stress the discontinuity of life now with the life to come, Barth concurs, emphasizing the sheer otherness of the beyond. But when the writers tentatively hint at the nature of life in the resurrection, Barth either turns a deaf ear or interprets the passages as if the hints as to the nature of eternal life serve no other purpose than to emphasize how radically we shall be changed. It seems that Barth's approach to the knowledge of God prevents an exegesis of eschatological passages of scripture which would make better sense of their hesitant but hugely suggestive remarks on the nature of the life to come.

More broadly, there are a number of difficulties with the approach Barth takes to matters of individual eschatology here, revolving around two main principles underpinning his thought – the relationship between time and eternity, and the Christological basis for anthropology. First, the reader will recall that much of the critical reaction to Barth's second edition of *Romans* focussed on his use of the time/eternity dialectic, but that McCormack argued that such a dialectic is not essential for Barth's earlier thought. By contrast, however, there is a strong possibility that Barth's overwhelming Christological focus in the *Church Dogmatics* is another version of the time/eternity dialectic. Two critics have written penetratingly on this subject: Robert Jenson and Richard Roberts.¹⁴⁶ Jenson explores time and eternity in the *Dogmatics*, and finds that, for all Barth's intention to express his belief that the eternal God occurred among us as the temporal Jesus, it appears as if the time which Jesus has is God's time all along – and God's time is eternity. The problem for Barth is how to express God's transcendence and immanence, even in a Christocentric theology. He tries to do this in terms of the eternal God and temporal creation, but cannot find a way to express Jesus' deity and humanity in terms of time and eternity without making it sound as if the entire gospel is about eternal beings, which human beings manifestly are not. In other words, the time/eternity dialectic is still a controlling factor in Barth's thought: "Barth may have

¹⁴⁵ CD II/2, 608; IV/1, 600; IV/3, 319.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 151-56; Roberts, *A Theology*, 1-58.

banished the Cheshire cat of timeless eternity from his theology, but the grin decidedly lingers on."¹⁴⁷

Richard Roberts, in his essay "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time," examines the *Church Dogmatics* closely to see whether Barth's Christological understanding of God overcomes his earlier dialectic of eternity interposing itself into time in a non-temporal moment. He finds that, despite Barth's claim that God becomes temporal, embracing, even submitting to time, Barth's God never really leaves God's own time. The central claim Barth makes is that Jesus' time is the time of human beings, because God posits Godself in the union of human and divine in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the reality of time is only established in God's act of raising Jesus Christ from the dead, when time is fulfilled. But, and this is Roberts' crucial point, Barth cannot affirm without ambiguity that Jesus Christ's being in time means for him what it means for us all, for Jesus' time is always included in the divine time: "The significant time of revelation remains within the theological realm whose bounds have been traced from their ultimate ontological source."¹⁴⁸ Essentially, then, human time is utterly different from God's eternity, and despite Barth's careful elaboration of God as pre-, supra- and post-temporal, he fails to find any theological significance in the phenomenon of human temporality. Understandably, and with perfect logic, individual eschatology for Barth cannot contain any possibility of the establishment of creaturely temporality within eternity. They are unrelated. In the words of Roberts' pointed critique: Barth's "creation stands before us as a warning as to what may happen if the God of the orthodox Christian gospel is prized apart from the structures of contemporary human life."¹⁴⁹

Barth's difficulty with time and eternity has ramifications throughout his theology. It affects his Christology, making it difficult to see in what sense God truly enters time in the presence of Jesus. This has a knock-on effect in his anthropology, according to which, Barth argues, no understanding of the human being in time is possible without prior understanding of Jesus Christ in his time, a human being like us. Yet the strength of the time/eternity dialectic forces an understanding of the

¹⁴⁷ Jenson, *God After God*, 153.

¹⁴⁸ Roberts, *A Theology*, 42.

¹⁴⁹ Roberts, *A Theology*, 57.

human being as limited in its finitude to the span between birth and death, not eternal (Jenson), and prized apart from God (Roberts).

A further effect of Barth's dialectic between time and eternity is his neglect of the risen humanity of Jesus. Barth's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus is complicated, but primarily it functions as the revelation of the presence of God in Jesus throughout his life and death. Christ's resurrection discloses the meaning of the cross. In the resurrection, the terminated life of Jesus enters the eternity of God. Furthermore, the forty days during which the appearances of Jesus occur are the event of the pure presence of God. There is little sense, however, that for Barth the humanity of Christ continues because of the resurrection. By contrast, the resurrection reveals the termination of this human life. As there is no real doctrine of the risen humanity of Christ according to Barth, there is no basis for any sense of continuation of the human being in eternal life. If even Jesus' risen humanity does not seem ontologically significant for the man Jesus, it is unlikely that the resurrection of other human beings could offer them ontological reality, beyond the eternalization in God's eternity described above as a sort of playback with the divine relation to the lived life voiced over. This is not to say that Christ's risen humanity should in opposition to Barth be understood as a naïve return to life as it was before. Yet, as Brian Hebblethwaite puts it, "in some sense we must surely say that the life of the risen Christ whom we encounter in prayer and in the Eucharist comes 'after' the short span of his life on earth."¹⁵⁰ The problem with the absence of the risen humanity of Jesus in Barth is that it prevents the development of any eschatology on the basis of the beginnings of eternal life in people's relationship to God now, after Jesus' resurrection. Our prayer-life, devotion to God, or participation in Christ's body here and now imply nothing for eternal life beyond death, according to Barth's schema. Our life is rotting now; at death we will be found to be ripe; but in the absence of the risen humanity of Christ, we cannot develop an understanding of the Christian life as first-fruits, as a ripening which begins now and is to be completed beyond death.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Brian Hebblethwaite, "Time and Eternity and Life 'After' Death," *Heythrop Journal* 20 (1979), 61.

¹⁵¹ Gulley makes a similar argument, *Eschatology of Karl Barth*, 491-96.

The real problem for Barth is that for him time and eternity are strictly and statically defined. Time is the successiveness of past, present and future, whereas eternity involves these three but, maintained in the being of God, no longer retaining successiveness. The question is: what form would resurrection life take? On Barth's schema, resurrection life cannot be temporal in the ordinary sense of successiveness, for with the return of Christ the end shall come, righteousness shall be revealed, and there can be no sense of passing through time. But nor can resurrection life be eternal, for eternity is maintained in the being of God. Only God exists in eternity. Creation cannot enjoy eternity without being God. The prospect of resurrection life is caught on the horns of a dilemma, and consequently Barth develops an understanding of eternal life which is neither temporal nor eternal but the eternalization of the limited life which has been lived. What Barth does not countenance is the possibility of something other than time or eternity in their somewhat schematized forms in the *Dogmatics*. He does not consider the possibility of a form of temporality appropriate to the risen humanity of Christ, and to human beings' resurrection life, which differs from the temporality of ordinary day to day existence. Furthermore, he does not contemplate that even in ordinary existence, that resurrection time may be experienced by individual subjects, who from one perspective experience time in the successiveness of past to future, but from another, are participating in eternity. Barth's understanding of time lacks the imagination necessary for an individual eschatology.

The second difficulty with Barth's individual eschatology involves the cogency of his Christological basis for anthropology. What sense can we really make of Barth's discussion of human being in the light of Christ's humanity? It has always been part of theological understanding that Jesus is pre-eminent among human beings, enjoying a unique closeness of relationship with God and ability not to sin. His humanity is the model on which Christians should pattern their own humanity. Nevertheless, Barth takes the much bolder step of saying we cannot develop *any* understanding of the human being before God without first understanding *Jesus'* relationship to God, as disclosed in scripture. Yet, at the risk of asking a simple-minded question, how could this real humanity as found in Jesus Christ possibly be comprehended were it not for our ordinary, everyday understanding of what it

means to be a human being? It is because Jesus Christ is clearly a man like all other human beings that we can begin to understand him in his humanity, and contemplate the far-reaching implications of the incarnation. In other words, despite the strenuous efforts Barth makes to derive anthropology from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it is simply unbelievable. He has got things the wrong way round. Of course, Barth sees things his way round because he is still haunted by the question which he tried to answer in *Romans* – how can we have knowledge of God? If any other source of anthropology were acknowledged besides the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it would follow that in principle, knowledge of God might be achieved, if hazily, from this other source, for example, from the structure of humanity. And as we saw in his treatment of Brunner, Barth will not allow an alternative source for knowledge of humanity, and thereby God, than God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

The objection to this theological presupposition in the context of individual eschatology is that it places Barth unnecessarily in a strait-jacket. All consideration of the possibility of a beyond in or after death must be referred to the history of Jesus, a finite man who died. The finitude of human beings is thereby established. But what of a beyond? There Barth limits himself to the second history of Jesus, the shadowy appearances during the forty days between the discovery of the empty tomb and the ascension. His reading of the New Testament accounts of these appearances convinces him that the point of Jesus' resurrection is to reveal God's previously hidden identity with the suffering and dying Christ. It follows (and this is the key move) that the general resurrection of the dead when Christ shall be revealed will mean the revelation of the actual history of every person as seen from God's point of view. Barth's logic is impeccable. But one cannot help but feel that it has led to an eschatology with one hand tied behind its back. It is far from obvious that Barth interprets these appearance-narratives aright. Furthermore, as we shall see more clearly in chapter 7, there are good reasons why individual eschatology ought not to be derived solely from these narratives.

It has been argued that Barth is of course smuggling in huge amounts of other resources beyond the text of scripture. Not only do theological tradition and

intricate philosophical argument play their part in the *Dogmatics*, but, according to Berkouwer, a prior philosophical commitment controls Barth's reading:

A way of thinking which is alien to the whole of Scripture suppresses the eschatological perspectives of the New Testament. This manner of thinking could, in my judgment, arise neither from Christology nor from the Scriptures, but only from an anthropology which, in terms of the idea of "limitation" of human life, dominated Barth's thinking from the beginning.¹⁵²

In other words, for all his protestations, Barth's anthropology does not really depend on his Christology. If Barth's anthropology is free-standing, then it would appear that the argumentative thrust of this and other bulky part-volumes is fatally blunted, and we must simply disregard the logic of his argument. However, this argument does not take us much further forward, for the task remains of comparing Barth's substantive account of eternal life, *however he came to it*, with other accounts both in the classical tradition and the theologians who follow him. This leads to a brief comparison between our findings in chapter 2 on classical Protestant eschatology and that of Barth, which forms the conclusion of this chapter.

Comparison with Luther and Calvin

There is of course a great deal of overlap in the approaches to eternal life of Luther and Calvin, and Barth. The representatives of both the sixteenth and twentieth centuries maintain a theocentric and Christocentric focus; for both the death of Christ removes death's wrathful aspect for the elect; for both Jesus' resurrection is in some way the pledge of all human resurrection. But compared with the classical Protestant view as found in the reformers, Barth's individual eschatology differs in three crucial respects.

First, he does not develop an understanding of eternal life as commencing now and consummated in the life to come (the first difficulty outlined above).

Second, his anthropology stresses the finitude of the human being, its limitedness between birth and death, and the importance for the human being, body and soul, of accepting its limitedness. While Barth understands the human being as the soul of his or her body, this is strictly opposed to any understanding of the human being as

immortal, whether by virtue of an immortal soul, or any other source. Both Luther and Calvin, however, maintain human immortality as the gift of God, although only Calvin develops explicitly a philosophical account of the immortal *soul*.

Third, as the culmination of all the difficulties mentioned already, it appears that Barth does not believe that in the resurrection the human person will be a centre of knowledge or will (although the evidence here is somewhat ambiguous).¹⁵³ As we saw in chapter 2, both Luther and Calvin retained this aspect of Catholic theology. For Luther, all people in the resurrection will share the vision of God, and will be completely righteous. Such vision and righteousness are not merely the revelation of God's mercy towards our past, but a vision of God as God *is*, and righteousness in heavenly *activity*.¹⁵⁴ Similarly for Calvin knowledge, righteousness and holiness will be perfectly manifested in the resurrection, not as the eternalization of the past, ended life, but as a consummation which will involve the enjoyment of union with God. Barth's proposal for the doctrine of eternal life offers a subtle twist on traditional reformed eschatology. It retains as the essence of eschatology the revelation of Jesus as the coming Lord, the revelation of our righteousness, and the revelation of the defeat of death. Yet for all that Barth retains, he has also developed, in certain respects, a demythologized eschatology. Based on his Christologically formed anthropology, he denies the oxygen which animates much of classical reformed thought. Against Calvin in particular, he argues against the mythological immortality of the soul, and so has no conception of an interim state between death and the resurrection where the soul awaits the return of the body. For Barth, the human being is finite, and finitude cannot mean anything else for the human being than temporality and mortality. Furthermore, and related to this, there

¹⁵² Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 340.

¹⁵³ Berkouwer is rare among Protestant critics for taking issue with Barth on this point. For him, "The Bible can be understood only on the presupposition of continuity. This continuity lies in the hand of God, it is true, but *in* that hand it will become reality." Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 330-31. Gerhard Sauter opposes Berkouwer's (and my) interpretation of Barth, saying that "we as persons do not fall out of view." "Why is Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics Not a 'Theology of Hope?'" 429.

¹⁵⁴ Significantly, when Anthony Thiselton attempts to show the continuity between Luther and Barth on the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15, he only quotes Luther on the nature of the spiritual body, despite holding that both Luther and Barth hold to the same thesis regarding it. As we have seen, Barth is unwilling to describe the nature of the spiritual body at all, in obvious contrast from Luther. See Anthony C. Thiselton, "Luther and Barth on 1 Corinthians 15: Six Theses for Theology in Relation to Recent Interpretation," in *The Bible, the Reformation and the Church: Essays in Honour of James Atkinson*, ed. W. P. Stephens (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 258-89, especially 285-89.

is no time for creation outside the time given and allotted by God: there could be no heavenly time. So in distinction from Calvin and Luther, he argues against any understanding of heavenly bliss as involving continuation of experience, of knowledge, of love. Human being has no beyond: God alone is the beyond.

JOSEPH MOLTISMAN
THE NEW CREATION OF ALL THINGS

In 1964, Karl Barth wrote *The Word of God and the Church*, a 38-year-old, who had now become a leading theologian of modern dogmatic theology. The book was *Thoughts on Dogmatics*, but its title changed to *Word of God and Church* (1926). Barth wrote: "I have been writing for decades, for the sake of peace and promise, mostly the man of the new creation, but I have not sought or asked what I intended and did as thought, but what was achieved, a product of an independent development." (Barth, *Thoughts on Dogmatics*, p. 10). Barth might be that child, but with the help of others, he had a very successful initial impression. Nevertheless, he was "very much aware of the 'new creation'." In the study of individual religious psychology, we now turn to Moltmann, asking whether he is a theologian who deals positively with particular reference to the New Testament. Moltmann's *Theology* will be divided into two sections, first his earlier work, *Theology of the Word of God*, and then his more recent *Eschatological Theology*, which is eschatological in the most developed in the Christian tradition. In between these analyses, certain parts of the earlier *Theology of the Word of God* will be discussed, but his eschatological *Theology* is more recent, based on his later death, and are inadequate in the development of his early *Theology*. In following exposition of the later Moltmann we will be particularly in search of how he would have

¹ Karl Barth, *Letter to the Church*, trans. G. W. Bromberg (1964), p. 10, and in G. Bromberg, *Barth's Theology*, p. 10.

CHAPTER FIVE

JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN: THE NEW CREATION OF ALL THINGS

1. Introduction

In 1964, Karl Barth wrote from his hospital bed to a youngish theologian, 38 years old, who had sent him a copy of his first book of creative dogmatic theology. The book was *Theologie der Hoffnung*, and its author Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926). Barth wrote: "I have been looking for decades... for the child of peace and promise, namely, the man of the next generation who would not just accept or reject what I intended and did in theology but who would go beyond it positively in an independent conception."¹ Initially, Barth thought that Moltmann might be that child, but, as the letter makes clear, Barth does not maintain his initial impression. Nevertheless, he asks, "why should you not become that child?"² In this study of individual eschatology in twentieth century Protestant theology, we now turn to Moltmann, asking whether he does go beyond Barth positively, with particular reference to the life to come. Analysis of Moltmann will be divided into two sections, first his earlier works, principally *Theology of Hope* (section 2), and then his more recent contributions to systematic theology, whose eschatological ideas are most developed in *The Coming of God* (section 4). In between these analyses, criticism made of the earlier Moltmann by Stephen Sykes will be discussed, that his eschatological ideas misrepresent traditional belief in life after death, and are inadequate in the development of theodicy (section 3). Following exposition of the later Moltmann we will be in a position, in section 5, to examine how his more

¹ Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, ed. J. Fangmeier and H. Stoevesandt, trans. and ed. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 175.

recent theology responds to the sort of criticism put forward by Sykes. A conclusion (section 6) will compare briefly Moltmann's account of individual eschatology with the theologians already encountered in the thesis.

Reading Moltmann one is always aware of the influences on his thought. Studying at Göttingen initially, he was grounded in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, a work which seemed to him to be the apex of theology: "Surely he had already said everything there was to say, and said it once and for all."³ But two other thinkers began to imprint themselves on Moltmann's mind, and lead him in an eschatological direction: Arnold van Ruler and Ernst Bloch. Indeed, the latter's thought has been a principal dialogue partner for Moltmann's theology throughout his entire career. In Bloch's secularized version of Jewish eschatological hope, Moltmann found the key for unlocking Christianity's eschatological essence, and developed "a parallel theological treatment of the philosophy of hope on the basis of the Christian faith's own presuppositions and perspectives."⁴ Other influences are also significant: Luther's theology of the cross, and Hegel's ideas about tragic suffering in God; Moltmann's experience of despair in the aftermath of the Second World War as a prisoner of war, and the fact of the Holocaust; contemporary Jewish exegesis and theology. Tracing the path of Moltmann's individual eschatology involves seeing how his central concerns of theodicy, eschatology and divine involvement with the world interpenetrate.

2. Hope Seeking Understanding

Hope and its Implications

Theology of Hope (1967⁵) has proved to be one of the most influential books of the theological century, on eschatology and beyond. Its general argument is relevant for understanding Moltmann's views on individual eschatology in both explicit and

² Barth, *Letters*, 176.

³ Jürgen Moltmann, "Why am I a Christian?" in *Experiences of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1980), 11.

⁴ Moltmann, "Why am I a Christian?" 11.

⁵ Years of publication placed in parentheses in the text refer to the first English publication of the work.

implicit ways, as follows. First, traditional theology, for Moltmann, has made the mistake of relegating eschatology to the end of the doctrinal scheme, as “the last things,” having little or no effect upon the doctrine of God which has already been elaborated in the system. By contrast, according to Moltmann, eschatology is not an appendix to theology, but is the fundamental category for understanding God. “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.”⁶ God is not to be understood according to the present experience we have of God without reference to the future; rather God is the God of promise. It is in our hope for what God will do that God is revealed, as scripture makes plain. In the Old Testament, God reveals Godself “in the form of promise and in the history that is marked by promise.”⁷ God makes promises regarding God’s own faithfulness to God’s people, and these promises are found to be true in the experience of God as the one who is faithful. As for the New Testament, the promise given to Abraham is now available to all, constituted in the resurrection of Christ. So Paul believes that the promise of God is that God will raise the dead and call into being things that are not. All our understanding of God must reckon with the fact that what is revealed about God is that God draws creation towards the fulfilment of God’s promises to it, both in the events of the Old Testament, and fundamentally in the resurrection of Jesus, who has his own future. The future of the risen Jesus is the eschatological hope.

Second, and following from his fundamental understanding of God as the God of promise, eschatology for Moltmann is genuinely futurist. Here he develops his argument in opposition to Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. According to Moltmann, Barth’s eschatology, whether in *Romans* or the *Church Dogmatics*, is unable to refer to the actual future, because the revelation of God is understood only as God’s self-revelation, and not the revelation of God’s promises for creation. The problem for Moltmann is that Barth’s concept of revelation is expressed as the

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967), 16. This theme has been repeated throughout Moltmann’s theology. For example, in “Why am I a Christian?” 12, Moltmann writes, “Christianity is completely and entirely and utterly hope.”

⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 42.

revelation of the eternal presence of God in time. When applied to God's self-revelation in Christ, this denies the crucifixion and resurrection any future-oriented sense: "the event of the resurrection of Christ would in itself already be the eschatological fulfilment, and would not point beyond itself to something still outstanding that is to be hoped for and awaited."⁸ Revelation according to Barth does not open up the promise of God's future, but is only an unveiling of what has already happened in the death and resurrection of Christ. The End for Barth can only be an unveiling of what has happened rather than a new creation. For Moltmann this is inadequate.

Against Bultmann, Moltmann makes the similar claim that his eschatology is denuded of all futurist elements. Bultmann's demythologizing of the scriptural material referring to the parousia and the end-times leads him to interpret eschatology unhistorically, as the realization of authentic existence in response to the call of God now. For Moltmann, this is tantamount to an evasion from history, which involves an inadequate understanding of the human person who is social and historical, and an inadequate understanding of God who is the God of promise. For Moltmann, Bultmann's eschatology can be summarized thus: "Hope then fades away to the hope of the solitary soul in the prison of a petrified world, and becomes the expression of a gnostic longing for redemption."⁹ Moltmann sees Barth and Bultmann as having the same mistaken concept of God as a God who, transcendent over creation, relates to creation vertically, in the individual moment. By contrast to Barth and Bultmann, Moltmann's eschatology envisages that God is essentially related to us as coming from the future to us in advent.

Third, since God is a God of promise, and the future of Jesus Christ is still to come, it follows that Christian hope contradicts the world of present reality. Despite the death and resurrection of Jesus, the world is unredeemed: it awaits redemption from the coming God. Hence, the theology of hope has serious consequences for politics and mission. "Present and future, experience and hope, stand in contradiction to each other in Christian eschatology, with the result that man is not brought into harmony and agreement with the given situation, but is drawn into the

⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 58.

⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 69.

conflict between hope and experience.”¹⁰ The word of promise “stands in contradiction to the reality open to experience now and heretofore.”¹¹ The future of Jesus Christ is to be radically different from the world as it is, and those who live in the light of this hope are an exodus church, moving towards the future for which they hope. Where there is suffering in the world, they protest against it; they seek to transform society in the light of their hope. The future is responsible for hope for the present. This action is not merely a creaturely reaction to God’s revelation, but can also be understood as the future of God Godself which changes present conditions in the world and in humanity.¹²

Fourth, Moltmann never identifies the historical transformation of society in obedience to the future of Christ with the end of time itself.¹³ *Theology of Hope* develops in some detail a vision of the Eschaton, which comprises the hope which is creation’s goal, but not a goal which can be attained from within this world. Moltmann approaches discussion of the Eschaton from a number of directions. It will be a *new creation with new life and new being for all*. The necessary consequence of the resurrection of Jesus will be “the end of death, and a new creation in which amid the life and righteousness of all things God is all in all.”¹⁴ This creation, subjected to vanity, marked by suffering, chaos, death and nothingness, will give way in the redemption to come to a new creation, in which death will be defeated.¹⁵ Moreover, the Eschaton will be the *completion of all things*. Humanity and all things will be

¹⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

¹¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 103.

¹² See Jürgen Moltmann, “Theology as Eschatology,” in *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology*, ed. F. Herzog (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 8. This emphasis of the theology of hope corresponds closely to the central concerns of liberation theology, a movement to which Moltmann has been extremely sympathetic, and which in turn has drawn on his thought. Much as in the case of the early Moltmann, however, liberation theology’s concentration on eschatology as the inspiration of hope for the present tends to eclipse discussion of life beyond death. Indeed, traditional eschatology’s interest in the fate of the individual in and beyond death is criticized by liberation theology, as obscuring the nature of God’s justice, and deflecting demands for justice in the here and now. See Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, trans. John Drury (New York: Orbis, 1978), 244-5; and Dennis McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981), 172-5. For a Protestant example of a liberation-influenced theologian, see Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (New York: Corpus, 1969).

¹³ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 172.

¹⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 88.

¹⁵ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974), 169: “The symbol of ‘resurrection from the dead’ means a qualitatively new life which no longer knows death.”

glorified: "the urge of the raising of Christ is towards life in the Spirit and towards the eternal life that is the consummation of all things."¹⁶ Christian hope "awaits the fulfilment of the promised righteousness of God in all things, the fulfilment of the resurrection of the dead that is promised in his resurrection, the fulfilment of the lordship of the crucified one over all things that is promised in his exaltation."¹⁷ It is not merely humanity which is saved out of the world, but humanity redeemed with the world. Furthermore, the Eschaton will be the *vindication of God's righteousness*. The righteousness of God has its ground in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but is only anticipated in the Christ event before the new creation, when the whole will be made righteous: "The divine righteousness which is latent in the event of Christ has an inner trend towards a totality of new being. The man who is justified follows this trend in bodily obedience. His struggle for obedience and his suffering under the godlessness of the world have their goal in the future of the righteousness of the whole."¹⁸ The world will be saved from sin and death, though salvation "does not mean merely salvation of the soul, individual rescue from the evil world, comfort for the troubled conscience, but also the realization of the eschatological *hope of justice*, the *humanizing* of man, the *socializing* of humanity, *peace* for all creation."¹⁹ All these approaches to the Eschaton are encapsulated for Moltmann in the concept of the kingdom of God. It is this kingdom which is promised and expected, this kingdom which will be a new creation of new life and being, involving the consummation of all things in justice and peace, the unimpeded presence of righteousness.

A further criticism of traditional eschatology which runs throughout the book is that it envisages redemption much too narrowly. Moltmann accuses theological tradition of holding that salvation is *of* the immortal soul, *from* the world around it including the body. Moltmann makes the oft-repeated charge that Judaism had no place for the Greek (in particular Platonic) doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and rather held the resurrection of the dead. Resurrection in scripture is "not a symbol for the hope of immortality."²⁰ By contrast resurrection emerges in the latter

¹⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 213.

¹⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 229.

¹⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 207.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 329.

²⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 208.

stages of the Old Testament, principally in Daniel, as an expression of the demand for God's justice to be accomplished. Resurrection is an approach to theodicy.²¹ Consequently, Moltmann asserts that understanding the human being as possessing an immortal soul which is saved from the world for life after death leads to an inadequate attitude towards the world – resignation. Hope for the future of this world is banished from Christianity. It is only when “the promise of the kingdom of God shows us a universal eschatological future spanning all things” – not just the soul – that “it is impossible for the man of hope to adopt an attitude of religious and cultic resignation from the world.”²² So Christians ought not to hope for individual bliss in heaven: in true eschatological hope, “the soul does not soar above our vale of tears to some imagined heavenly bliss.”²³ Moltmann's conviction that at the Eschaton all things are consummated does not imply that the human being as a soul escapes this world; rather, the human being, *body and soul*, awaits the new creation of all things, in which he or she will be fulfilled.

The Crucified God (1974) makes this approach to individual eschatology clearer. There is no place for resignation in the Christian's attitude to the world: “The memory of the crucified anticipator of the kingdom makes impossible for a Christian any spiritualization or individualization of salvation, and any resigned acceptance of participation in an unredeemed world.”²⁴ The crucial passage is this:

“resurrection of the dead” excludes any idea of “a life after death”, of which many religions speak, whether in the idea of the immortality of the soul or in the idea of the transmigration of souls. Resurrection life is not a further life after death, whether in the soul or the spirit, in children or in reputation; it means the annihilation of death in the victory of the new, eternal life (I Cor. 15.55). The notion of “life after death” can coexist peacefully with the experience that this life is a “life towards death”. But the “resurrection of the dead”, understood as a present hope in the midst of the “body of death”, contradicts the harshest facts of life which point in the opposite direction, and cannot leave either death or the dead in peace, because it symbolises the future of the dead. Thus the expression “resurrection of the dead”, which seemed to follow from the Easter visions, does not deny the fatality of death, whether this death is the death of Jesus on the

²¹ See Jürgen Moltmann, “Resurrection as Hope,” trans. Frederick Herzog, in *Religion, Revelation, and the Future* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 45.

²² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 224.

²³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21.

²⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 101. Spiritualization and individualization are, we recall, the two central criticisms made in the twentieth century of Calvin's eschatology.

cross or death in general, with the help of ideas of a life after death in some shape or form.²⁵

For Moltmann, believing the soul to be immortal leads to conceiving eschatology as life after death, a life which does not overcome death, but has made its peace with it, denying its fatality. By contrast, Moltmann's own eschatological vision of the new creation of all things allows death to be fatal for each human being, but holds that death itself will be annihilated at the Eschaton. He condemns the traditional view as idolatrous, for it encourages us either to tolerate suffering or imagine that it will be made up for in heaven. Suffering cannot be compensated for, he argues; it can only be overcome.²⁶

Hope and its Alternatives

In *Theology of Hope* and other earlier works, Moltmann expresses his dissatisfaction with traditional individual eschatology for the following reasons. First, it follows from a mistaken doctrine of God, which fails to understand that the biblical God is a God of promise who comes to God's creation from the future: we should see "the future as the mode of God's existence with us."²⁷ The resurrection of Christ anticipates God's coming again in creation, specifically and finally at the Eschaton. This has the consequence that the Christian life is a matter of hope now within history, rather than a hope for life beyond history, only at the end of time. Christian theology is *hope* seeking understanding; traditional eschatology has not accorded hope this central place.²⁸ Second, related to the mistaken understanding of God, Moltmann considers that belief in the soul's escape from the body at death and subsequent life in heaven leads necessarily to resignation in the Christian's life. This life before death, and the material conditions of the body and society, simply do not matter for traditional eschatology. History is unaffected by hope for the soul. Third, traditional eschatology does not answer the question of God's justification in the face of pain and suffering in bodily and societal existence. The soul's escape to heaven is at best a partial theodicy, leaving too much suffering unanswered. The

²⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 170.

²⁶ See Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 225.

²⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope*, trans. and ed. M. Douglas Meeks (London: SCM, 1975), 50.

only understanding of salvation which Moltmann is able to countenance is one in which all creation is redeemed, in which the death and suffering to which all creation is subject are recognized as true death and true suffering, but which are annihilated in the coming righteous kingdom of God. Salvation, therefore, cannot only be the escape of a few souls from this earth to a world beyond.

It should be noted, however, that while Moltmann develops his doctrine of God as coming from the future in distinction from Barth and Bultmann, the second two difficulties he cites in regard to traditional eschatology are not straightforwardly present in either theologian. The distinction from Barth's and Bultmann's understanding of God is clear when Moltmann writes, "'God' appears within the horizon of the crucified one, not as the 'totally other', but as the one who changes things; he appears not only in the infinite qualitative difference but also in the surprising newness of the qualitative change."²⁹ However, Moltmann also shows continuity with Bultmann and Barth, in that, as we saw in chapters 3 and 4, neither believes in eschatology as the soul's escape from the body any more than Moltmann does. It is possible that Bultmann's understanding of eschatology as realized is vulnerable to the charge that it does not envisage the transformation of history through hope in God. However, the criticisms Moltmann makes of the traditional doctrine – as leading to resignation, and not answering the world's suffering – could well have been made in similar terms by Barth, for whom the hope of the soul's immortality amounts to no more than a pagan dream.³⁰ The pattern, then, is more complicated than Moltmann makes it appear. Although he criticizes Barth's and Bultmann's doctrines of God, Moltmann accepts with little questioning the anthropology which had become, partly under their influence, standard in Protestant theology. (We shall see in greater detail in chapter 7 how the position that Moltmann takes with regard to what he sees as a dualistic anthropology and traditional eschatology is one largely shared by Bultmann and Barth.) Moltmann's eventual criticism of traditional individual eschatology, while owing something to his understanding of God as acting from the future on history in contradistinction to

²⁸ See Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 33.

²⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, trans. Margaret Clarkson (London: SCM, 1971), 36.

³⁰ See Barth, *CD III/2*, 625.

Bultmann and Barth, conversely owes as much to the pattern of Protestant anthropology developed by Bultmann and Barth earlier in the century.

3. Criticism: The Need for Life After Death

Criticism of *Theology of Hope* and Moltmann's other earlier works takes a number of forms.³¹ Our interest, however, is in objections raised about Moltmann's views on individual eschatology, the best expression of which is found in Stephen Sykes' essay "Life After Death: the Christian Doctrine of Heaven."³² Sykes makes two objections to the eschatological vision put forward by Moltmann in his earlier works, especially *The Crucified God*, which shall be dealt with in turn. (A final evaluation of Moltmann's vision and Sykes' critique will be given in section 5.)

First, Sykes objects to Moltmann's contention that belief in the immortality of the soul and life after death leads inevitably to an attitude of resignation towards the world. Undoubtedly Moltmann's characterization of the effect of belief in immortality is true for certain Christian believers. But equally undoubtedly, there have been many Christians who have both maintained a belief in the immortality of the soul and sought to relieve the world of as much suffering as possible.

Furthermore, a resigned attitude to the world may arise from other sources than a belief in life after death alone. Sykes writes: "Moltmann's criticism of 'life after death' leaves ample room for the initial reply that such belief and an active opposition to the evils of man's existence, or a realistic attitude towards the 'deadliness' of death, are by no means alternatives to each other."³³

As we have seen, the importance of Moltmann's consideration that belief in life after death leads to resignation vis-à-vis the world is that it underpins his argument that a belief in life after death is unable to form part of a successful theodicy. But

³¹ See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 23-26; John J. O'Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 147-56; and Rosino Gibellini, *La Teologia di Jürgen Moltmann* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1975), 128-41 for useful summaries of critical positions.

³² Stephen W. Sykes, "Life After Death: the Christian Doctrine of Heaven," in *Creation, Christ and Culture*, ed. R. McKinney (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 250-71.

³³ Sykes, "Life After Death," 258.

Sykes' second criticism turns Moltmann's attack on the traditional picture of salvation back on himself by criticising Moltmann's theodicy for not having room for life after death for the individual. According to Sykes, it is only in the possibility of life after death that the inequalities of worldly existence may be justified: "The ancient pressures of theodicy which derives from a perceptive observation of the sheer undeserved hell suffered by some upon earth, cannot be set on one side by the disparaging observation that hope for life after death occurs in more than one religion."³⁴ Without the hope of life after death, Moltmann's eschatology offers no true redemption. Sykes goes on to argue that in denying any oxygen to ideas of immortality and life after death, Moltmann seems to deny himself the resources with which he might describe the redemption of those who will have suffered and died. The scheme of the Eschaton as outlined above – the end of death and suffering, the coming of justice and peace, and the human being's humanization and socialization – offers a vision of the Eschaton of great attractiveness, but the question remains as to who will participate in this state? The human person is not immortal, and there is no life after death. Moltmann talks of resurrection, but it is entirely obscure who is resurrected, and what sort of life they are resurrected to.

Sykes' criticism of Moltmann reveals but one area of problems thrown up by his theology. As Richard Bauckham points out, "Anglo-Saxon" theologians tend to find Moltmann's work to be lacking in philosophical analysis and logical rigour.³⁵ Certainly, Sykes' criticism is part of this aspect of the reception of Moltmann's thought. At times it seems as if theologians working with concepts such as immortality, the soul and life after death are simply speaking a different language from Moltmann. It is tempting to believe that the criticisms raised by Sykes are merely the result of a language-barrier, and that Moltmann's earlier vision of the new creation is not fundamentally at odds with Sykes' view, or indeed, with Luther's and Calvin's. Yet a careful reading of Moltmann shows that there are genuine fault-lines between the eschatologies of Moltmann and an "Anglo-Saxon" critic like Sykes which have emerged. The ultimate difficulty with Moltmann for this sort of critic is how he deals with the individual person. What does it mean for the individual to be

³⁴ Sykes, "Life After Death," 259.

³⁵ Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 25.

related to God? What is the effect of death upon the individual? Does the individual (in any way) survive death? What does it mean for the person to be resurrected? What will the redemption of the individual be like? *Moltmann's eschatology, at least in his earlier works, answered different questions from these.*³⁶ His focus was history; his impetus was suffering and death; his response was the new creation. To him those other questions – about the individual – could be swept aside as rising from the improper belief in the salvation of the immortal soul. That salvation is not to be conceived in such narrow terms, either merely individualistically, or merely other-worldly, or merely historically, is the meaning of *Theology of Hope*. The real question is: *given* this broader, more cosmic eschatology, what hopes for the individual? No answer was yet forthcoming, and this is the force of Sykes' criticism. Moltmann's turning of Christianity into eschatology, "from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue,"³⁷ appeared to abandon the old epilogue, the hope for individual fulfilment. However, this is not Moltmann's last word on eschatology, and in his contributions to systematic theology, he has begun to answer the question of hope for the individual beyond death. The next section comprises an investigation of this more recent eschatological thought.

4. The Completed History of Human Lives

Moltmann has developed his theology along a number of different avenues since he first became known as a theologian of hope, but eschatology never retreats too far from the front line of his thought. Indeed, he revisits eschatology extensively in a recent work devoted to the subject, *The Coming of God* (1996), part of his contributions to systematic theology. At the outset he makes it clear that the new book, "written thirty years after the *Theology of Hope*... is entirely in line with that doctrine of hope."³⁸ This is not to be a radical revision then of the eschatological

³⁶ As he acknowledges in a letter to Barth about *Theologie der Hoffnung*: "You are perfectly right in thinking that we have here only prolegomena to eschatology." Barth, *Letters*, 348.

³⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), xii.

ideas discussed above, and indeed, it certainly has many familiar elements. He is still adamant that eschatology does not refer only to the last things but is the doctrine of the God who is related to the world now. And as before, Moltmann's eschatology has a genuinely futurist emphasis – God is the *coming* God – and an emphasis on the action of God in the Eschaton – it is the coming *God*. As before the Eschaton is described as the new creation of all things,³⁹ but Moltmann also elaborates his vision using concepts developed throughout his later theology, the Sabbath and the Shekinah. As the sabbath is the end of creation in the account in Genesis, so God's Sabbath is the new creation. The Sabbath is “the promise of future consummation built into the initial creation.”⁴⁰ And as God dwells in God's creation by the Shekinah, so in the new creation, God's Shekinah will find its home. God will be completely present, dwelling in creation: “Creation is destined to be the dwelling space for God.”⁴¹

A further development of Moltmann's eschatological thought is his fourfold structure of eschatological hope. First there is personal eschatology which is symbolized by eternal life. But this personal eschatology is part of a larger conception – the kingdom of God, which symbolizes historical eschatology. This in turn is only part of a yet broader image – the new creation of all things, which Moltmann calls cosmic eschatology.⁴² And finally, all eschatology is contained within divine eschatology which is the glorification of God, “the ultimate purpose of creation.”⁴³ By this structure, Moltmann is able to categorize much of the relatively undifferentiated eschatological material which peppers his works as a whole. What

³⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, ix.

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 264. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1985), 282: “The resting place it [i.e. the whole creation] looks for is not the world beyond, or heaven, or God himself, as the gnostics and the mystics have always maintained. It is God's sabbath. In the resting, and hence direct, unmediated presence of God, all created beings find their dwelling.”

⁴¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 307. Long reviews of *The Coming of God* can be found in Stephen Paulson, “The Place of Eschatology in Modern Theology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (1998), 327-53, especially 332-41; John E. Stanley, “Jürgen Moltmann's Eschatology and Revelation's Apocalyptic,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 53:2 (1988), 37-48; and Richard Bauckham, “Eschatology in *The Coming of God*,” in *God Will Be All in All*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 1-34.

⁴² See Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 131-2.

⁴³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 323.

is of particular interest to us is his discussion of personal eschatology under the symbol of eternal life.⁴⁴

Conventionally, Moltmann discusses the symbol of eternal life primarily by means of the image of resurrection. To believe in resurrection is to believe in God as the one who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and who will raise us. It is not easy to gain precision regarding Moltmann's understanding of Jesus' resurrection.⁴⁵ He tends to side-step the question of its historicity by saying that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not open to proof within any system of historical investigation. It is the miraculous event of God, something categorically new within the events of history. It should be understood from the other end as it were: Jesus' resurrection brings about a new understanding of history. History as the account of transience, finitude, suffering and death must be understood anew in the light of Jesus' resurrection. Space does not allow greater concentration on Moltmann's treatment of Jesus' resurrection, but it should be noticed in passing how similar Moltmann's attitude to its historicity is to the later Barth's: as an event which occurred, but which is not verifiable as a historical event.

Resurrection is, of course, from death. Moltmann sees death as a self-emptying into non-identity, the final sting of life's transience,⁴⁶ from which human beings will be raised and gathered by God. In the resurrection, the human being will eternally be himself or herself. The resurrection is not a return to this mortal life but "entry into a life that is eternal."⁴⁷ What is the character of this eternal life? Moltmann writes as follows:

To be raised to eternal life means that nothing has ever been lost for God – not the pains of this life, and not its moments of happiness. Men and women will find again with God not only the final moment, but their whole history – but as

⁴⁴ Many of Moltmann's ideas on eternal life in *The Coming of God* can be found in outline in the earlier "Love, Death, Eternal Life: Theology of Hope – the Personal Side," in *Love: The Foundation of Hope – The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham, Charles S. McCoy and M. Douglas Meeks (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 3-22.

⁴⁵ Among his discussions of the subject are *Theology of Hope*, 172-82, "Resurrection as Hope," 49-55, *The Crucified God*, 166-78, "Hope," *Experiences of God*, 28-31, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1994), 73-82.

⁴⁶ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1990), 222: "The hope of resurrection is a hope against death, and a contradiction in the name of the living God of this most intransigent confutation of life."

⁴⁷ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 69.

the reconciled, the rectified and healed and completed history of their own lives. What is experienced in this life as grace will be consummated in glory.⁴⁸

It seems that Moltmann's vision of eternal life is of the life the person has lived, healed, forgiven and completed. But how are we to understand "completed"? Is life over? What understanding of time does Moltmann have for eternal life? He writes: "The raising to eternal life... is the power to unite – in time, as the gathering of all temporal moments into the eternal present."⁴⁹ How should this be understood?

First, let us recall the importance of *future* for Moltmann. Against any understanding of future which sees it as the product of the past, either deterministically and/or as the consequence of God's plan, Moltmann sees the future as "constructive potentialities"⁵⁰ – as the possible. This future has two forms: future time, which follows from the past, though not deterministically; and the future as the source of time, which is transcendent future, or *advent*. It is this transcendent future which makes history open to the future, and which he finds lacking in Bultmann's and Barth's understanding of time.

The Eschaton, for Moltmann, belongs to this second understanding of future, as something which does not occur *in* or *at* the end of time, but which is itself the end of time – time's transformation: "Christ surely does not come 'in time'; he comes to transform time."⁵¹ In the final moment, temporality will be transformed into eternity, not "the absolute eternity of God" but "the relative eternity of the new creation, which participates in God's absolute eternity."⁵² In this relative eternity, "there will be no more time... neither the time of transience nor the time of

⁴⁸ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 71.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 71.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 286.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 13. But note that for Moltmann, the Eschaton as future is also simultaneous with all times. "The 'final day' which is awaited at the end of history is also 'the Lord's day', and as such eternal and simultaneous with all past times." (Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 239; see also 317, 327) There is a resemblance between this emphasis of Moltmann's and the early Barth's understanding of eschatology, despite Moltmann's criticism of it. See Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," in *God Will Be All in All*, 176.

⁵² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 280. Note that for Moltmann, the participation of temporality and eternity is mutual. Not only will creation participate in God, but "God also participates in the attributes of those he has created – in their finitude, their vulnerability and their mortality." Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 23-4.

futurity.”⁵³ Instead, all times will return, transformed, transfigured, and be taken up into this relative eternity. Moltmann advises that “if we have to think of it as the time of eternal life, then we have to imagine it as the time of eternal livingness.”⁵⁴ Moltmann considers this relative eternity to be analogous to cyclical rhythms, and so reversible rather than irreversible.⁵⁵ In a final image, Moltmann describes the relationship between time and eternity in relative eternity as one of the perichoresis, or mutual interpenetration, of time and eternity.⁵⁶

We are now in a better position to see what Moltmann means in *The Coming of God* by the completion of human lives. In the new creation, all the times of human lives will return into a relative eternity, without transience, transformed and transfigured. Their existence will be somehow cyclical rather than linear, indicating that they will not do or experience anything new. Indeed, Moltmann’s understanding of “eternal” seems to preclude any possibility of successiveness or experience – there will be no going on in eternity.⁵⁷

This leads to a further question: How does Moltmann account for the identity of the person in the new creation? He answers as follows: God must identify the dead to raise them, because “it is their own life that is raised. Raising is not a new creation; it is a new creating of this same mortal life for the life that is eternal, since it is the assumption of human life into the divine life.”⁵⁸ This marks a progression from *Theology of Hope*, where the resurrection was discussed as a *creatio ex nihilo*,

⁵³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 294. Note that Moltmann, like Barth, translates Rev. 10:6 as “time shall be no more,” despite the context indicating that the meaning is closer to “there shall be no more delay.” See Bauckham, “Time and Eternity,” 179. In a response to Bauckham, Moltmann maintains his interpretation. He argues that since the verse’s context is the fulfilment of the mystery of God, the idea of no more delay before that fulfilment occurs must surely imply the end of time. This is, however, the point at issue, and we should be clear that the text of Revelation does not necessarily equate, as Moltmann does, the lack of delay before God’s mystery being fulfilled, and the end of time therein. Jürgen Moltmann, “The Bible, The Exegete and the Theologian: Response to Richard Bauckham,” in *God Will Be All in All*, 231-2.

⁵⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 295.

⁵⁵ Bauckham points out, however, that “properly speaking, a cyclical movement does not reverse; it repeats.” Bauckham, “Time and Eternity,” 184, n. 60. One earlier intimation of this image is found in *Theology of Joy*, in which the end of history is described as “an ever-varying round dance of the redeemed in the trinitarian fullness of God.” Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Joy*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (London: SCM, 1973), 55.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 295.

⁵⁷ Nevertheless, we read in Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 213: “It is also even permissible to assume that in the kingdom of glory there will be time and history, future and possibility, and those to an unimpeded degree, and in a way that is no longer ambivalent.”

⁵⁸ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 75.

without any explicit discussion of the preservation of identity.⁵⁹ In *The Coming of God* however, although the person's parts disintegrate at death, the person's lived Gestalt – character, history, relationships – will remain, although transformed into eternal life.⁶⁰

Thus far, we have been considering Moltmann's account of individual eschatology at the Eschaton, characterized as the new creation of all things, when God shall indwell creation. But he also asks the question: Where are the dead? That is, where are the dead *before* the Eschaton? They are not raised straightaway at death; for Moltmann the resurrection of the person can only take place in the resurrection of the whole of creation when God shall dwell in the world – any partial resurrection somehow before the end would imply Gnostic tendencies. Moltmann follows a line more similar to Calvin than Luther at this point, denying the adequacy of conceiving of the soul as sleeping between death and resurrection.⁶¹ Instead, he says that there must be an interim state for the dead, part of what he calls an "intermediate time,"⁶² between Christ's resurrection and the general resurrection at the end. His argument as to the preservation of people in this interim state is similar to that for the preservation of personal identity in the new creation – it is faith in God which allows us to speak of the existence of the person after death. "All finite beings are eternally present before the eternal God, and hence God's history with human beings can continue even after their death."⁶³ The dead are in Christ, on the way with him to his future.⁶⁴

Although Moltmann does not affirm the traditional doctrine of Purgatory in detail, he does see the possibility of development in this intermediate state, as a chance for the person to become what God means him or her to be: "Must we not think the thought of an on-going history of God's with this life [that is, after death] if – in this world of disappointed, impaired, sick, murdered and destroyed life – we

⁵⁹ See Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 179-80.

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 76. See Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 259-63, for a slightly earlier expression of similar ideas regarding identity in resurrection.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 101-2.

⁶² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 104.

⁶³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 101.

⁶⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 105.

are able to affirm life and go on loving it notwithstanding?"⁶⁵ After all, since Moltmann's vision of the new creation seems to have no room for new experiences, the interim state allows Moltmann to posit the possibility of the healing and completion of human lives after death, "room to live, room to expand and develop, and room to love," as another recent work suggests.⁶⁶ Whether this healing in the interim state is extended to the rest of creation is unclear. Logically, one would think it must be. Non-human creation, as much as human beings, suffers the effects of transience and death, and presumably requires healing before being raised in the new creation of all things. But Moltmann is silent on this question.⁶⁷

Now there is something a bit odd about Moltmann's ideas about the interim state, which becomes apparent when we ask the question: Who is there? For Moltmann the human being is inseparably body and soul, and the bodiless soul could have no existence. Whatever else it is, Moltmann's personal eschatology is not a doctrine of the immortal soul. He rehearses similar arguments to those of the earlier works against any view of the human person as containing an immortal soul, and condemns traditional Christian anthropology for being too "Platonic." First, the concept of a bodiless soul is inconceivable, given that we are bodily creatures.⁶⁸ Second, the Bible teaches resurrection of the body and not immortality of the soul.⁶⁹ Third, a narrow view of the salvation of such a soul leads inevitably to quietism: "if the Christian hope is reduced to the salvation of the soul in a heaven beyond death, it loses its power to renew life and change the world, and its flame is quenched; it dies away into no more than a gnostic yearning for redemption from this world's vale of tears."⁷⁰ We are led to resignation, to apathy, squandering the treasures of this life, selling them off cheap to heaven.⁷¹ In belief in the immortal soul, there is an acceptance of death, whereas in Christianity, we wait for the conquest of death: "The immortal soul may welcome death as a friend, because death releases it from

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 118.

⁶⁶ Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 134.

⁶⁷ See Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," 186. In the same volume, Moltmann responds to Bauckham's article in "The Bible, The Exegete and the Theologian," (227-32) but does not mention the issue.

⁶⁸ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 53, 100.

⁶⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 65-71.

⁷⁰ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, xv. See also Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 181: "Anyone who confuses the kingdom of God with heaven transforms his hope into resignation."

the earthly body; but for the resurrection hope, death is 'the last enemy'... of the living God and the creations of his love."⁷²

Moltmann frames his discussion of death and eternal life not in terms of the soul, but in terms of the whole of life: "it is not just one part of life (whether it be the soul or the ego) that is already immortal here and now; it is the whole of this mortal life."⁷³ If we do speak of "soul" it means "where our love is." He goes on: "Our question about life, consequently, is not whether our existence might possibly be immortal, and if so which part of it; the question is: will love endure, the love out of which we receive ourselves, and which makes us living when we ourselves offer it."⁷⁴ But who endures to love? Can love endure shorn of a subject? Whose life is it that experiences the on-going history of God after death but before the resurrection? Presumably the sort of answer Moltmann would offer would be along these lines – that the person, even though dead, is eternally present to God, and though awaiting resurrection is still the object of God's action. In fact, despite Moltmann's opposition to the immortality of the soul, this sort of answer is close to the classical Christian understanding of the doctrine of the immortal soul, which, at least in careful theological thought, was never an alternative to Christian hope for resurrection, nor an assertion of the natural deathlessness of human beings. Rather, the immortal soul and its associated doctrines of life after death and Purgatory were developed to support the Christian hope of resurrection, providing philosophical resources with which to answer the questions of identity, continuity and justice after death. (The relationship between resurrection and immortality will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter 8.)

Interestingly, in *God in Creation* (1985) there is a passage where Moltmann assumes the existence of the soul in the interim state after death. The context is a discussion of heaven as a part of God's created reality, but itself unredeemed until the Eschaton. Heaven requires a new creation too. Moltmann exemplifies his contention as follows:

⁷¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 50.

⁷² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 65-6.

⁷³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 71.

⁷⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 53.

If, in accord with the general Christian conception, the soul goes to heaven after death, it is not already redeemed there. It waits in its own way for the redemption which will bring the new heaven and the new earth and, in that earth, the resurrection of the body also.⁷⁵

Moltmann clearly does hold in this passage that at death the soul is separated from the body, and awaits the resurrection of the body. This is the traditional Christian understanding of the immortal soul, and helpfully supplies a subject for God's ongoing history with the individual beyond death. Nevertheless, this passage sits uneasily alongside the disdain with which Moltmann usually treats the immortal soul.

5. *The Coming of God: Answers and Questions*

The Coming of God, along with Moltmann's other contributions to systematic theology, provides a content to the programmatic theological vision sketched out in broad brush in his earlier works. Where *Theology of Hope* described why theology had to be futurist, *The Coming of God* describes what that future might be. It will be instructive therefore to return in this section to the objections raised by Stephen Sykes in 1976 and discussed above in section 3, and consider whether Moltmann's more recent, filled-out eschatology can meet them. In this way, an evaluation and critique of Moltmann's later individual eschatology will be made.

Resignation: a Fair Characterization?

First, consider Sykes' objection to Moltmann's polemic against belief in immortality because it inevitably leads to a resigned attitude to the world. The position of Moltmann is unchanged in his recent thought. Belief in life after death cheats this life before death of its happiness and pain. "The notion that this life is no more than a preparation for a life beyond, is the theory of a refusal to live, and a religious fraud. It is inconsistent with the living God, who is 'a lover of life.' In that sense it is religious atheism."⁷⁶ Moltmann is echoing here the typical humanist criticism of

⁷⁵ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 183.

⁷⁶ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 50.

eschatology as pie in the sky: as Christoph Schönborn points out, “The charge that Christianity is a contempt for the earth that transposes consolation into a life beyond death runs like a red thread through the history of anti-Christian polemics, from Celsus to Nietzsche.”⁷⁷ In adopting the humanist critique of eschatology, Moltmann is siding with humanism against traditional forms of eschatology, but such an alliance only has force if Moltmann’s eschatology can be shown to be significantly different from the traditional picture. Moltmann is vulnerable on two fronts here. First, is his characterization of traditional Christian eschatology as resignation accurate? And second, does his own eschatological vision escape the humanist critique? In other words, is his eschatological project, precisely on the issue of resignation, any different from those descriptions of life after death he is so quick to criticize?

A little thought suggests that Moltmann’s depiction of traditional eschatology as leading to resignation is not a fair one. It is simply not the case that the church, imbued with a quietistic attitude on account of its heavenly hopes, consistently made its peace with secular society. By contrast, the periods of quietistic resignation are the exception rather than the rule. As Christoph Schönborn makes clear, Christianity has almost always been in conflict with society, and this conflict is the result of its eschatological vision.⁷⁸ But let it be granted that there is a tendency to resignation within a Christian faith which looks forward to heaven: is that the only tendency which follows from such hopes? Is the position not much more balanced than Moltmann allows? The arguments of John Baillie in this regard are instructive, writing as he did before the polemic against immortality and in favour of resurrection became deeply rooted in twentieth century theology. Baillie cites four balancing factors countering the tendency “that those whose hopes are in eternity must always be lacking in zeal for earthly progress and betterment.”⁷⁹ (1) A consequence of traditional hope for heaven was a desire to root out evil, although principally the interior evils in oneself. There was no resignation towards one’s own morality, for the hope of being found in heaven depended on being found ready;

⁷⁷ Christoph Schönborn, *From Death to Life: The Christian Journey*, trans. B. McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 11.

⁷⁸ Schönborn, *From Death to Life*, 99-124.

⁷⁹ John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 27.

furthermore there was a missionary zeal to see good prevail in others. These attitudes fostered their own problems, of course, but not the sin of resignation. (2) Christianity, when it followed the life and teaching of Jesus, was explicitly concerned to alleviate suffering. The pattern of that help tended in the past to be piecemeal and reactive; and more recently to involve changing social structures such that the causes of suffering might be attacked at their source. Either way, the hope of immortality did not prevent the helping of the poor and oppressed. (3) It is within Christianity that agitation for better lives in the western world originated, whether it be the end of slavery or poverty or warfare. These movements obtain their impetus from the New Testament. (4) Quietism did not emerge first in Christianity, but is a feature of many older religions and philosophies of India, China and Greece. Baillie concludes:

the authentic Christian view is undoubtedly one which leaves room both for the mood of submission and for the mood of reforming zeal, holding the two in constant tension one against the other and neither minimizing nor on the other hand exaggerating man's power to alter and improve his own earthly lot.⁸⁰

Baillie's account of zeal for earthly progress on account of eternal hopes shows that Moltmann's assertion that belief in life after death causes a resigned attitude to go along with it is at best a partial truth, and ultimately a simplistic and therefore inaccurate description of both the historical manifestations of faith and the inner logic to the doctrine.

Resignation and the New Creation of All Things

The second area in which Moltmann is vulnerable is whether his own eschatological vision escapes the humanist critique that he so readily applies to traditional eschatology. What is it about eschatological hope according to Moltmann's vision which inspires the Christian not to be resigned? This at first sight seems an easy question for Moltmann to answer. *Theology of Hope* after all often reads as a tract for revolutionary action in the here and now. Surely it is clear that the hope of God's future is a contradiction of the world as it is with its subjection to suffering and

⁸⁰ Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting*, 45.

death, and that the resurrection of Jesus is a protest against the deathliness of death. Hope for the coming of God beyond history inspires hope within history. The best expression of this is found in *The Spirit of Life*: "Just because I believe in 'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come' I must already resist the forces of death and annihilation here and now, and must love life here on earth so much that I try with everything I have to free it from exploitation, oppression and alienation."⁸¹ And in *The Coming of God*, Moltmann writes: "The resurrection hope makes people ready to live their lives wholly, and to say a full and entire Yes to a life that leads to death."⁸²

The problem with this concerns the relation, for Moltmann, between this-worldly action and the coming kingdom of God. There can be no doubt that a central feature of Moltmann's theology is his attempt to draw together human action in the world and the coming kingdom of God. In *Theology of Hope*, he places a strong emphasis on human activity arising from hope in God, whose future is anticipated by the resurrection of Jesus. In later works, the connection between God's kingdom and this-worldly action is drawn as ever-closer overlapping circles. The world is God's environment. Jesus' death on the cross manifests God's suffering presence in the world; indeed, creaturely experience of suffering, oppression and injustice generally manifests God's presence.⁸³ This is a presence, moreover, of a God who is constituted by the interpenetrating relationships between the three divine persons. The cross constitutes death in God: the Son suffers his dying and the Father suffers the death of the Son, "a trinitarian event between the Son and the Father."⁸⁴ It follows, Moltmann believes, that God can take up into Godself creaturely experience of suffering and glory.⁸⁵ The kingdom of God, then, is approached by the world, as

⁸¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1992), 112. See Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 40-1.

⁸² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 66.

⁸³ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1981), 80-3.

⁸⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 245. It should be noted in passing that Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross has been subject to extensive criticism, generally along the lines that it implies a plurality of consciousnesses in God: see e.g., G. Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 136-8, Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 197, and Grace Jantzen, "Christian Hope and Jesus' Despair," *King's Theological Review* 5 (1982), 5.

⁸⁵ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1977), 55-6: "The life of God within the Trinity cannot be conceived

the God open to history indwells it. Indeed, it is true to say that for Moltmann, God approaches *Godself* in the open relationships between the divine persons and creation. It seems, therefore, that Moltmann's understanding of God encourages human beings to foster characteristics of the kingdom – love, justice and peace – since God is involved in this-worldly events, and indeed, enters into perfect glory through them. Human responsibility is great.

There are two dangers for Moltmann here, one that is commonly noticed, one less so. The first danger is that God is enveloped in historical process, and becomes completely immanent within it.⁸⁶ One of many difficulties then would be how to envisage the Eschaton. The most plausible vision of the end following from an understanding of God indistinguishable from historical process is of a utopia, the consequence of historical progress. Indeed, such visions have been developed in various forms from Rationalism to process theology. But Moltmann is at pains to deny that his eschatology is of such a form: "A Christian theology of history does not teach that everything is going to get better and better."⁸⁷ Neither progress nor process can lead to a new creation.

The reason Moltmann believes he is not vulnerable to the charge of holding to a God entirely subsumed in history is that, ultimately, he distinguishes between the immanent and economic Trinities.⁸⁸ He is critical of what he sees as the ordinary distinction between the two, in which historical events belong only to the economic Trinity: by contrast, he argues that Christ's death on the cross belongs to God in *Godself* as much as God for us. (This leads him to suggest alternative phrases for the concepts: "God in origin" and "God in sending."⁸⁹) The distinction Moltmann makes between the concepts is encapsulated as follows: "The economic Trinity completes and perfects itself to immanent Trinity when the history and experience of salvation are completed and perfected. When everything is 'in God' and 'God is all in all', then the economic Trinity is raised into and transcended in the immanent

of as a closed circle – the symbol of perfection and self-sufficiency... The triune God is the God who is open to man, open to the world and open to time."

⁸⁶ This danger is often put as the "Hegelian" tendency in Moltmann's thought. See, e.g., Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 24-5, Sykes, "Life After Death," 264-66, Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* V, 227-9.

⁸⁷ Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 141.

⁸⁸ As Fiddes suggests, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 136.

Trinity.”⁹⁰ The immanent Trinity is a sort of eschatological Trinity approached by the (economic) Trinity’s interactions in history.

However, Moltmann’s distinction of immanent from economic Trinities in this way brings its own problems. It is far from clear how the economic Trinity would be perfected into the immanent Trinity. Is it a process of growth until perfection is reached? Such an understanding of God seems inadequate however, because it would appear to suggest that God’s being is a full stature gained only in the temporal process. This fails to safeguard divine transcendence over creation. Furthermore, if God could “stop” being perfected at a particular stage in development, there is a suspicion that an even greater God could be conceived, which subverts the traditional Christian belief (famously used by Anselm in *Proslogion*) that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

So, is the perfection of economic into immanent Trinity not the last stage in a process of development but an entirely novel self-willed action on the part of God? This safeguards God’s transcendence, and removes the fear that God is somehow second-best. Furthermore, it accords better with the emphasis Moltmann places on God as the coming God in the sense of advent, rather than future in the sense of following from the past. However, this interpretation has one large drawback: it seems to undercut the importance Moltmann places on historical events for God’s being. For God may choose to be perfected in immanence regardless of the stage of God’s development. Roger Olson summarizes Moltmann’s dilemma as follows:

What [Moltmann] lacks is a concrete conceptualisation of how the immanent Trinity, ‘God-in-himself’, determines the economic, functional process of the divine life in the worldly history of the kingdom without destroying the historical reality of that process.⁹¹

This middle path is one Moltmann seems unable not to fall off, into a Trinity which is either too economic or too immanent. One feels that Olson is probably right when he suggests that Moltmann’s understanding of God as linear, developing in

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 55.

⁹⁰ Moltmann, *The Trinity*, 161.

⁹¹ Roger Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983), 222.

one direction from past to future, leads inevitably to difficulties which may prove insurmountable for the doctrine of God.⁹²

The other danger in Moltmann's development of God's relationship with the world is the opposite – not that God is enveloped in the world's history, but that the world's history ultimately has no effect upon God.⁹³ This is a danger implied in the second interpretation above of the immanent Trinity as understood by Moltmann – as not being the consequence of the historical process. For all Moltmann's concern to establish the influence of worldly events on the divine nature, it is not altogether clear that the world *does* act on God. At times, at least, Moltmann seems to say that in worldly events, it is *God* who acts on God. In the event of the cross, the Son suffers specifically the abandonment of the Father, and the Father suffers specifically the death of the Son.⁹⁴ This seems true in eschatological statements also: it is “the incarnate Son” who “glorifies the Father in his world and perfects humanity's creation.”⁹⁵ And it is through the Holy Spirit that “the world will be transfigured, transformed into God's world, which means into God's home.”⁹⁶ There is evidence then that, according to Moltmann, the coming Eschaton will happen regardless of its anticipations in history. The content of this eschatological hope – the complete indwelling of God in creation, the healing, reconciliation and completion of all created things including all human beings – will come with the future of God as immanent Trinity regardless of the stage of development which the transient world has reached. Human beings might as well resign themselves to the suffering of this world, awaiting the new creation which comes entirely from God's future.

John J. O'Donnell suggests that Moltmann can sketch a response to this argument by emphasizing (as he does) that the Eschaton is the new creation of *this* world.⁹⁷ It is then something of a false dichotomy to oppose hope for the coming of God beyond history and hope for the coming of God within historical action. History is in God, which means that God's being is not a being-without-the-world. To say that God's kingdom comes from God's future and not from history is to reinstate a

⁹² Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology,” 221.

⁹³ This interpretation of Moltmann can be found in Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, 80-6, 135-41.

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 245, and *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 173.

⁹⁵ Moltmann, *The Trinity*, 118.

⁹⁶ Moltmann, *The Trinity*, 104.

⁹⁷ O'Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality*, 152-3.

distinction which Moltmann believes to be too strong. It is the same world which God created, is continuously creating, and which will be subject to a new creating at the end. Yet whether or not the Eschaton is the new creation of *this* world, its very novelty – and a creation comprised of healing, reconciliation and completion without their opposites will be very novel – is enough to show that Moltmann's doctrine is marked in this area with an implicit emphasis on the sovereignty of God to redeem the world regardless of the world's obedience to the resurrection hope. Even if God is always God-with-the-world, Moltmann is not saying that the historical becomes so near to the perfection of the kingdom that God is borne along with history's direction. God is not determined by history for Moltmann: there is an immanent Trinity. And as long as God is not determined by history, and Moltmann considers God's being to be perfectly expressed in God's indwelling of a new creation, the new creation itself is fundamentally God's work.

The outcome of these reflections is that Moltmann's understanding of history and God does not absolve him from the humanist critique. Moltmann's eschatology does not escape the claims from Celsus to Nietzsche of pie in the sky which Moltmann turns on traditional eschatology. What is shown here is that, for all his protestations that a theology of hope is markedly different from traditional eschatology (and that assertion is not disputed in this thesis), there is a fundamental common denominator in Moltmann's account of the new creation and traditional eschatology. Both envisage, in the end, a God who freely brings the world to its fulfilment. If Moltmann's critique against traditional eschatology for encouraging quietism is valid (itself a debatable hypothesis as we saw above), then his critique may be applied with equal force against his own account of the new creation of all things.

Theodicy

Sykes' second point, about theodicy, followed from his suspicions about Moltmann's association of belief in life after death with quietism. Moltmann's earlier theology, particularly in *The Crucified God*, is an attempt to justify the righteousness of God, but given his antipathy to life after death, Moltmann's own theology seems to lack the resources to offer hope to the suffering or the dead individual. However,

Moltmann's more mature thought in *The Coming of God* goes some distance in responding to Sykes' criticism.

As outlined above, Moltmann offers much more detail in the way of a personal eschatology in the later work. As part of the new creation of all things, and as part of a social resurrection, the individual will enter into eternal life, as a whole person, coming to be the person God means him or her to be. In the relatively eternal new creation, the person will find healing, reconciliation and completion. Indeed, following death but before the Eschaton, the individual person, upheld in being by God's ongoing involvement, will have the chance to have a time for living, allowing growth and completion, in the Spirit of eternal life. Moltmann's reason for proposing this aspect of hope is theodicy:

I would think that eternal life gives the broken and the impaired and those whose lives have been destroyed space and time and strength to live the life which they were intended for, and for which they were born. I think this, not for selfish reasons, for the sake of my personal completion, and not morally, for the sake of some kind of purification; I think it for the sake of the justice which I believe is God's concern and his first option.⁹⁸

In answer to Sykes' objection, then, Moltmann does offer a theodicy, and one which is not unattractive.

However, the question arises as to whether he has not done so at the expense of his overarching eschatological argument against the immortality of the soul and life after death. Elsewhere in *The Coming of God*, he opposes resurrection to immortality. But here we are offered an interim state in which the yet-to-be resurrected individual, in an unredeemed heaven, is granted the possibility of growth and completion. One may warm to Moltmann's vision of life after death, but it does not seem as if he has let that vision affect the rest of his eschatological vision as thoroughly as it should. Indeed, given his adoption of an intermediate state, and use of it in theodicy, his polemic against life after death seems to be almost entirely misplaced. His real difficulty is an inability to distinguish between sub-Christian ideas of a pre-existent soul in Platonism, and the traditional Christian conception of the human being as a unity of body and soul. The latter conception is far richer and

⁹⁸ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 118.

more subtle than Moltmann allows, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. In chapter 7, Moltmann's view of immortality of the soul will be shown to be part of a much broader polemic in twentieth century Protestant theology against so-called "Greek" thought. Furthermore, in chapter 8, an account of the human being as a unity of soul and body, and the possibility of immortality of the soul will be outlined, suggesting a way to get beyond the somewhat crude accusations levelled by Moltmann against "dualism."

6. Conclusion

To summarize our findings – as in the case of Barth, difficulties with Moltmann's account of individual eschatology centre on two areas: his understandings of the human person and the nature of time in the new creation. Following Bultmann and Barth he abandons traditional conceptions of the human person as being granted an immortal soul by God, as developed for example by Luther and Calvin. Throughout his theology he criticizes traditional eschatology's use of immortality of the soul for being unbiblical, for being an inadequate account of human experience of the self, and for promoting quietism and a false theodicy. The first two difficulties will be discussed in chapters 7 and 8, and possible answers suggested. Significant doubts regarding the second two difficulties (quietism and theodicy) have been aired in this chapter. A further misgiving regarding Moltmann's polemic against immortality of the soul is the very nearness he comes to a reliance on the traditional doctrine when he develops his account of an intermediate state, which appears to involve temporality. As soon as Moltmann describes the on-going history of God's with the individual person beyond death, he has envisaged a state which involves some form of temporality, and some form of personal continuity. He may not like to think so, but his account echoes traditional uses of immortality of the soul.

As for the Eschaton itself, Moltmann's account of time in the new creation, as part of a relative eternity enjoyed by creation which participates in God's eternity as God indwells creation, is developed in contradistinction from Barth and Bultmann. Here too, however, Moltmann's approach is markedly different from that of Luther

and Calvin. Moltmann denies that the time of this relative eternity involves successiveness, new experiences, or creativity on the part of human beings. By contrast, it is described as the eternal present of all times, "eternal livingness," or in cyclical terms. It is not clear whether such eternal livingness is imaginable. Can there be any experience of God in eternal livingness? Can there be any love flowing from subject to subject? For Luther and Calvin, heavenly existence involves the experience by human subjects of love, joy, peace, righteousness and bliss, demanding some sense of temporality, however transfigured.

Moltmann's name has nearly been synonymous with eschatology in the last forty years of the twentieth century: along with Pannenberg, he has been most responsible for the renewed belief in theological circles that God's action in the future is of central importance for understanding God's relationship to creation in the present. Nevertheless, Barth may have seen with great prescience that Moltmann was not to be the child of peace and promise he hoped for. If that accolade was to be accorded to any theologian of this century, then perhaps it would fall on Eberhard Jüngel, both the greatest Protestant interpreter of Barth, and a major theologian in his own right. To Jüngel's thought we now turn.

CHAPTER SIX

EBERHARD JÜNGEL: HISTORY MADE ARTICULATE

1. Introduction

Of all the major Protestant theologians since Karl Barth, it is Eberhard Jüngel (b. 1934) whose theology is most closely associated with Barth's. Jüngel's published work includes a number of studies of Barth, one of which notes that the proposed fifth volume of the *Church Dogmatics* on eschatology was never written. "However," Jüngel adds, "there are several starting points for the missing eschatology, and they call into question the sometimes proffered interpretation that his theology makes any doctrine of the *eschatos/ eschaton* impossible."¹ Indeed, as we shall see, it could be argued that Jüngel, in his attempt to develop an understanding of death and eternal life, has written something akin to Barth's missing eschatology. In a study of Protestant eschatology of the twentieth century, shaped by the figure of Karl Barth, the thought of Eberhard Jüngel cannot be ignored. A further reason to dwell at some length on Jüngel's thinking about eschatology is the influence of his books *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery* and *God as the Mystery of the World*, both of which develop his thinking on death and eternal life. In these and other works, Jüngel established himself as a theologian of power and originality in his own right.²

To understand Jüngel's interpretation of death and eternal life, we will first look briefly at his approach to the nature and task of theology (section 2). As has been

¹ Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, trans. G. E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 52.

² For general introductions to Jüngel's thought, see G. Wainwright, "Today's Word for Today: III. Eberhard Jüngel," *The Expository Times* 92 (1981), 131-5; John Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to his Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986).

clear from chapters 2 to 5, a theologian's substantive account of eternal life is almost always interwoven with the understanding of the possibility and nature of theology as a whole. Section 3 will examine his conception of what makes a human person human: as we have seen already, individual eschatology is part of the theology of the individual human being in relation to God. Then we shall be in a position to look more closely in section 4 at Jüngel's reflection on the Bible's understandings of death, which closely informs his own comprehension of individual destiny. We shall discover that his account of the meaning of death is developed in the light of Jesus' death as he interprets it, which has significant consequences for his understanding of eternal life (drawn out in section 5). In section 6, some analysis of the central areas of difficulty in Jüngel's eschatology will follow, and section 7 will briefly point out the relationships between Jüngel's individual eschatology and that of the other subjects of this thesis. A final section will comprise a brief conclusion.

2. God's Self-Disclosure as the Origin of Theology

The following remarks on Jüngel's methodological approach to theology will of necessity be brief, to allow as much space as possible for discussion of his substantive individual eschatology, and will be expanded in chapter 7 as part of a discussion on twentieth century Protestant theology's attitude towards natural theology. Jüngel believes that theology must begin from the one place where God has disclosed Godself uniquely, not within human nature as a whole. So, in *God as the Mystery of the World* (originally published in German in 1977), Jüngel distances himself from Wolfhart Pannenberg's anthropological approach (and one might add, from Karl Rahner and other theologians working in the "transcendental" tradition): "The goal of the intellectual route adopted in this book is not to demonstrate the thinkability of God on the basis of general anthropological definitions, but rather to think God and also man on the basis of the event of God's self-disclosure which leads to the experience of God."³ Indeed, all approaches to God which begin from the work of

³ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darren L. Guder (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), viii.

human reason are mistaken, passing God by: "To think God cannot mean that human reason could, so to speak, prescribe for God how he is to reveal himself to it."⁴ Reason must "let itself be led on to the path of thought by the God who comes to the world."⁵

God's revelation is like a light penetrating darkness, although the light is borne in a hidden form, in space and time.⁶ This self-disclosure happens pre-eminently and uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ. "In the person Jesus is revealed what God as the one who speaks is all about... Christian theology is therefore fundamentally the theology of the Crucified One."⁷ It is then not only the person of Jesus which reveals God but principally the event of Jesus' death: "What happened on the cross of Jesus is an event which in its uniqueness discloses the depths of deity."⁸ The Johannine statement "No one comes to the Father, but by me," (John 14:6) "must stand as a fundamental proposition of evangelical theology, also with regard to the *knowledge* of God."⁹ Here Jüngel's approach to theology is at its clearest. Of course the cross has for theologians since the earliest times been the place where God's nature is best seen as love, grace, forgiveness and judgment. The cross, one might say, is the heart of theology's attempt to understand God's being. But for Jüngel, the cross is more – it is the *only* place where God may truly be known.

God, in fact, identifies Godself with the crucified man Jesus and defines Godself in the cross of Jesus, as we shall see in more detail in section 4. "*God defines himself* when he identifies himself with the dead Jesus. At the same time he defines the man Jesus as the Son of God."¹⁰ For Jüngel there is no difference between the place where God defines Godself and the place where God is to be known. Indeed, there could not be any such difference. Given that, for Jüngel, God defines Godself in identity with the crucified Jesus, it could not be that we could know God other than in the crucified

⁴ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 158.

⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, "My Theology" – A Short Summary," in *Theological Essays II*, trans. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast and John Webster, ed. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 9

⁶ See Jüngel, "My Theology," 8.

⁷ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 13.

⁸ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 220.

⁹ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 157.

¹⁰ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 363-4. See also Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming*, trans. Horton Harris (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976), 87.

Jesus. All other sources of theology would be dealing with a false understanding of God.

Eschatology, as part of Christian doctrine about God, must for Jüngel begin from the revelation of God in the identification with Jesus on the cross: the revelation of God in humanity. Consequently, when it comes to individual eschatology, Jüngel approaches the individual's destiny by way of the fate of the man Jesus, who died on the cross, and in whose death God identifies Godself. Anthropology (and individual eschatology is the doctrine of Christian anthropology with particular reference to the end of human life), follows from Christology.¹¹ God identifies Godself in the cross with Jesus Christ *for human beings* as love. "The actual meaning of theological talk about the death of God is revealed as the most original self-determination of God for love... From all eternity, God *is in and of himself* in such a way that he is *for man*."¹² God is for others, for human beings: Jüngel's understanding of individual eschatology is based on this insight. Human destiny is inconceivable without the prior recognition that human beings are the recipients of God's love, a love disclosed in the death of God's Son. We must remember, then, as we turn to Jüngel's explicit remarks on anthropology, that they presuppose his doctrine of the God who reveals Godself in the death of the man Jesus Christ.

3. The Definition of Human Being

For Jüngel, God's self-disclosure entails that the human being is an addressable being, a being which is open to claims beyond itself, a being which is free. The human being's true humanity is found in being addressed by God. It is the fact that God speaks to the human person, that God has a word for the human being, that makes the human being truly human. Rather than any inner possession of the human being, or any achievement or independent status, it is the human being's dependence on God's word which makes the human being truly human. That is the meaning of being human. "The fact that man is addressed by God makes him a fundamentally

¹¹ See his comments on Barth in this regard, Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 128.

¹² Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 220-1.

addressable being. Addressed by God, man is by no means only addressable by and for God. He is free to allow himself to be addressed by everything and everyone. In this freedom of addressability he is man.”¹³ Jüngel expands this insight as follows: “man is truly human in that he is able to place himself in dependence on someone other than himself. That entails his ability to be dependent. To be human means to be able to depend, to trust.”¹⁴ So it is not merely in being open to the influence of outside agency, an agency which may be obeyed or rejected, which makes the human person human – it is the conscious placing of the self in dependence that makes for true humanity. Being a fully human being, being fulfilled, follows not from becoming fully independent, self-subsistent, but in becoming completely aware of the impossibility of independence, the complete necessity of trust. It is not trust in anybody that makes for true humanity, but trust in the God who has promised Godself to us. This is faith.¹⁵ Faith arises from the encounter with this God, an experience which is related to all human experience, which Jüngel calls “experience with experience.”¹⁶

Another way Jüngel puts this is to say that human being does not exist fully in wanting to have oneself, but in the freedom to be oneself. Through the mystery of love, which is God, “man moves from the fixation of wanting to have into the freedom of being able to be. In the love which God merits being called, we are made those who are out of those who have.”¹⁷ The justified human being, the saved person, is therefore the one who does not seek to possess him or herself, but accepts him or herself as a being dependent on God. Justification is attainment of one’s true being.

In more concrete terms, Jüngel believes that being limited is of the essence of humanity: “The human being is only a human being within limits.”¹⁸ The human creature is finite, and inevitably comes up against the boundary of death, a boundary

¹³ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 155.

¹⁴ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 179.

¹⁵ See Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 180.

¹⁶ See e.g. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 32; “‘My Theology,’” 5.

¹⁷ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, x. Jüngel does not expand outside the preface on this vocabulary of having and being, which as he acknowledges is borrowed from the psychologist Erich Fromm. Gabriel Marcel also develops the dialectic, in *Being and Having* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

¹⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, “Recht auf Leben – Recht auf Sterben: Theologische Bemerkungen,” in *Entsprechungen: Gott – Wahrheit – Mensch, Theologische Erörterungen* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1980), 323.

placed before the human being by God. The Old Testament's understanding of human life is that it does not belong to the human being: "Man's life is not at his own disposal. Even though he has dominion over the earth... he is not his own lord."¹⁹ The human being, according to scripture, is a being limited by God who gives life and takes it away again. We shall see later in our discussion of Jüngel's theology of death in the New Testament what this boundary ultimately means in a Christian theology which understands God through the death of Jesus.

It follows that the false definition of human being is self-possession – the attempt to transcend the limits of humanity. Jüngel considers those people who desire to transcend their humanity, wishing to be a lord among others without serving, as wanting to be a lord without limits. But "such a person is without relations."²⁰ (As we shall see later, relationlessness is both a cause and mark of death as a curse.) According to Jüngel, "When we cease to set ourselves limits and to affirm the limits imposed upon us by our societary ontological structure, we deny our humanness de facto. One who wishes to be a lord without limits is incapable of lordship over him or herself. As lord over our fellows, we assume the role of God."²¹ In writing about Barth, Jüngel advances his own position: "An 'independent' human existence is an existence as a prisoner of sin. When we exist independently, we lose our humanity and ensure our own death."²² By contrast, the acceptance of one's finitude is part of one's proper relatedness to God: "To man's affirmation of his good limitation by God belongs the affirmation of his finitude."²³

Jüngel spells out some of the specific ways in which the human being mistakenly attempts to possess him or herself. Much of *God as the Mystery of the World* is an extended meditation on modern Western philosophy's attempt to ground humanity in the self, as exemplified in the Cartesian *cogito*, "I think, therefore I am." No matter that for Descartes, this affirmation of the indubitable was grounded in the security of God's existence; according to Jüngel, the eventual consequence of the *cogito* is atheism.

¹⁹ Eberhard Jüngel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery*, trans. Iain and Ute Nicol (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 63.

²⁰ Eberhard Jüngel, "Humanity in correspondence to God," in *Theological Essays*, trans. and ed. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 142.

²¹ Jüngel, "Humanity in correspondence to God," 142.

²² Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 134.

²³ Jüngel, "Recht auf Leben," 323.

Even to attempt to ground humanity in the self is to be working with a false understanding both of God and the human person. For thinking associated with the *cogito* considers God to be the God of transcendent perfections such as immutability, impassibility and omnipotence, which, according to Jüngel, are incompatible with the self-revelation of God as identifying Godself with Jesus who suffered and died. Objections from those who resist the ascription of passibility to God “ignore the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ – that God in Jesus Christ suffered and died.”²⁴ (Here Jüngel is defending his interpretation of Barth’s theology, but it describes his own view too.) Further, the *cogito* conceives of the human person as self-sufficient, as the philosophical heirs of the *cogito* make clear – Kant, Fichte, Nietzsche and Feuerbach, who, in their different ways, assert the independence of the human being over against God.²⁵

Jüngel encapsulates this wrong-headed approach to anthropology as self-deification. Inasmuch as the human being considers him or herself to be independent of a creator, and even more so, of the one who justifies, then the human being makes the self into a god. Indeed, any eschatological scheme which sees humanity on the path of deification is similarly guilty of this false understanding of human being’s status: “every possibility is ruled out that the believer will be removed from the perishable world through the connection of faith with God, in the process of which removal from the world the believer is even ‘deified.’”²⁶

A further consequence of Jüngel’s insistence that the human being does not exist fully in *possession* but rather in *being* is his disavowal of the immortality of the soul.²⁷ This doctrine of the human person Jüngel believes to belong principally to Platonism, and its integration in traditional Christian thought to be an infection. It holds, according to Jüngel, that at death, the essence of the human person does not really

²⁴ Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 131. See also Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 83–7.

²⁵ See Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 105–225. Fergus Kerr doubts, however, whether Jüngel has successfully divested his own theology of the Cartesian dualism he attacks. Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1997), 7–9.

²⁶ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 202. See also Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 134, where Jüngel describes Barth’s disavowal of understanding the exaltation of humanity as deification. It is far from clear, however, that the theological tradition which understands human destiny in terms of deification is vulnerable to Jüngel’s attack. Deification, according to the Orthodox tradition, is not a removal from perishability, but the highest possibility of creaturely humanity, attainable only in the resurrection of the body. See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (London: James Clarke, 1957), chaps. 5 and 10.

die. The human being is really the soul which is affected by death in a positive way, as release from the confines of an inhibiting body. Hence Socrates is happy to go to his death since he understands his humanity as equivalent to the possession of immortality. By contrast, for Jüngel, the Christian understanding of the person must see that death is a limit to the human person. Compare Socrates with Jesus, Jüngel suggests. Jesus does not go to his death happily, for death is not a friend but the enemy to Jesus. Death is something to be fought and overcome. In the death of Jesus rather than Socrates we have the clue to the true being of human persons, to the destiny of the human person in death and the meaning of eternal life. In the death of Jesus, humanity is defined as other than God, but addressable by God. The one man Jesus, with whom God identified Godself, corresponds to God. On this basis, "the humanity of all persons consists in corresponding to God."²⁸ True humanity is justification. Yet even though death is Christ's enemy, for Christian theology, death is within the power of God. And this is the heart of Jüngel's criticism of Platonism as he represents it. Given that the human being is defined by dependence on God, any assertion that the human being is really impervious to death amounts to a rejection of that dependence on God, *because God is the one who limits the human being by death*. Platonism, according to Jüngel, denies this limitation by God, and so in practical terms is atheistic. (In the following chapter, there will be a more detailed examination of the negative view of Greek influence on Christian doctrine according to Barth and post-Barthian theology. In particular, Jüngel's impression that traditional Christian eschatology is a version of a Platonic view will be questioned, as will his understanding of Plato's *Phaedo*. Furthermore, the possibility will be explored that the New Testament does not distance itself from immortality of the soul as radically as Jüngel believes.)

This account of Jüngel's theological understanding of what it is to be a human being has led us to see the way in which he distinguishes between a theology which considers humanity having removed humanity's creator, as it were, and a theology which begins from the belief that the human being stands in a relationship of dependence to that creator. This is significant in that it lays the groundwork for

²⁷ See Jüngel, *Death*, chap. 3.

²⁸ Jüngel, "Humanity in correspondence to God," 133.

Jüngel's understanding of the individual's relation to death and to fulfilment within the life of God. For Jüngel, the Christian understanding of death and the life to come can only proceed once ideas of the independence of the person, which he considers to be erroneous, indeed blasphemous, (e.g., immortality of the soul) have been banished as untheological thoughts. (In chapter 8, by contrast with Jüngel, it will be suggested that the idea of the soul's immortality is perfectly compatible with its being created.) In search of what he believes to be *theological* thought on death and eternal life, Jüngel turns to scripture: "As Christians we will think about eternal life by thinking about the Word of God; by examining the Scriptures we will say what sort of life we imagine – rightly imagine – that life to be."²⁹ To his treatment of scripture, found principally in his book *Death*, we also must turn.

4. Death in the Bible

Old Testament

Jüngel paraphrases the variety of Old Testament attitudes to death in the following terms. For the people of the Old Testament life is defined by relationship to God. Life is the highest good of the world, God's best gift: the longer the life, the better. Life is understood as the possibility of relationship to God. Therefore, death – as the negation of life – is the state of complete relationlessness in which God and the human being are estranged, alienated from one another. In death, "relation-filled life comes to an end and all of life's relationships desist."³⁰ There is a further sense in which death involves estrangement, however, as Jüngel writes:

In reality death is unnatural. In reality it is a curse – a curse which man of course invites from God. In the Old Testament, death's real misery can be understood only against the background of Israel's relationship to God. It is a relationship grounded in the distinction between God's holiness and man's utter lack of

²⁹ Eberhard Jüngel, "Life after Death? A Response to Theology's Silence about Eternal Life," trans. F. G. Gaiser, *Word and World* 9 (1991), 8.

³⁰ Eberhard Jüngel, "The Christian Understanding of Suffering," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 65 (1988), 4-5.

holiness. In itself this can be a deadly contrast. Whoever sees the holy God may die... Death is the result once the relationship to God is broken.³¹

That is, at times the Old Testament sees this alienation as the judgment of God upon sinful humanity: “throughout the entire Old Testament, death is specifically related to man’s guilt, the guilt which he must bear throughout his life and which he cannot explain.”³² Sin, according to the Old Testament, “exerts a pressure which issues in the absence of relationships. It renders man relationless... Sin, then, is the godless pressure which effects relationlessness.”³³ But for Jüngel, the note of judgment in the Old Testament is less important than that of alienation, of relationlessness – death makes God and human beings strangers.

A further distinction is to be made, Jüngel adds, between the Old Testament understanding of timely and untimely death. Death can interrupt life, cutting it short, or it can come as life’s fulfilment, at the end of a long and faithful life, as naturally occurring when the person reaches the natural limits of old age. The patriarchs’ deaths furnish examples of this latter sort of death. In that case, death “does not have to be a threat, for it can be a peaceful end. It does not have to be contrary to nature, for it could be natural. It does not mean that it must come prematurely, in an untimely way, or at an evil time; it could occur at a time which is fitting. It does not necessarily have to imply a sudden break with everything, for in the true sense it can be a genuine ending.”³⁴

Jüngel points out that the Old Testament has little to say on the possibility of life beyond death. Hope for the dead is only “on the periphery of the Old Testament.”³⁵ Hence he argues that while it is possible according to the Old Testament to die, in some sense, a good and natural death, there is little of substance regarding anything beyond such a natural death.

³¹ Jüngel, *Death*, 74.

³² Jüngel, *Death*, 74.

³³ Jüngel, *Death*, 78.

³⁴ Jüngel, *Death*, 75.

³⁵ Jüngel, *Death*, 79.

New Testament: the Death of Jesus

It is Jüngel's contention that the New Testament understands death in a crucially different way from the Old Testament, by arguing that death itself undergoes a change in the events of the New Testament. Despite sharing a broadly similar outlook on death, the central difference between the testaments is found in the New Testament treatment of the death of Jesus Christ: "what death is all about is something which is decided in the death of Jesus Christ."³⁶ And for Jüngel, the real clue to the meaning of Jesus Christ's death, and hence all human death, is the resurrection: "Faith in the resurrection is the confession that with the death of Jesus Christ death is no longer the same. It implies that something has changed with regard to the fact that man must die."³⁷ It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ which reveals that God has waged a battle with death in the event of Jesus Christ, and it is the resurrection which reveals that that is a battle which God has won. It is the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus which allows us to say that God has involved Godself with nothingness in the life and death of Jesus, and overcome it.³⁸

Without the resurrection, Jüngel goes on to argue, we would not know the meaning of the cross: "what was decided in the death of Jesus Christ is disclosed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."³⁹ Christ's resurrection then is something like a lens which makes visible the reality of the cross, which is God's *identifying* with Jesus: "The resurrection of Jesus from the dead means that God has identified himself with this dead man."⁴⁰ In other words, God must be thought and proclaimed as the God who is the same one as the Crucified. "It was by identifying himself with a dead man that God defined himself to faith first and foremost as the true God... This means that the living God and this dead man are identical."⁴¹ Jüngel goes as far as to say that in the "existence of God with the man Jesus, the divine *being* is realized."⁴² Consequently, Jüngel can say that the heart of the Christian gospel is that in the cross,

³⁶ Jüngel, *Death*, 81.

³⁷ Jüngel, *Death*, 60.

³⁸ See Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 219.

³⁹ Jüngel, *Death*, 81.

⁴⁰ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 363.

⁴¹ Jüngel, *Death*, 108.

⁴² Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 191.

“God shares the death of human beings,”⁴³ or even stronger, that it involves “the death of the living God,” as the title of one of his essays states.⁴⁴

That death was *overcome* in the death of Jesus is a theme Jüngel emphasizes at length. God is brought into contact with death in God’s identity with the crucified Jesus Christ such that we can talk of the death of God, but in the meeting of God with death, God did not die.⁴⁵ Rather, God overcame death: “The victory over death is one which is already won.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless this victory over death is not one without consequences for God. Jüngel expresses this by asserting that the one who was raised remains the crucified one: “it is crucial that the risen one is not understood as a man who has left behind the life he has lived as an abandoned past. For the risen one is proclaimed precisely as the crucified.”⁴⁷ The victory God gains over death involves God “bearing the contradiction of death in himself.”⁴⁸ The victory consists in God’s not being destroyed by the encounter with death, but rather defining Godself by it.⁴⁹

Jüngel’s interpretation of this overcoming takes on a mythological hue at times. Death, we are told, is a simile of nothingness which encounters human beings in the context of life.⁵⁰ In the death of God, God encounters nothingness and locates it within God’s own life:

Does not a concept of revelation understood Christologically compel us so to speak of God’s being, that the supremely real, in no way merely dialectical, menace of the nothing which threatens God’s existence becomes a real theme in the discussion? Is it not precisely a criterion of the Christian understanding of revelation that God’s being is exposed to the nothing and only then on the basis of this... the nothing is also exposed to the being of God?⁵¹

⁴³ Eberhard Jüngel, “Der Tod als Geheimnis des Lebens,” in *Entsprechungen*, 348.

⁴⁴ Eberhard Jüngel, “Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes. Ein Plakat,” in *Unternwegs zur Sache* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1972), 105-25.

⁴⁵ Jüngel, *Death*, 108.

⁴⁶ Jüngel, *Death*, 109.

⁴⁷ Jüngel, “Humanity in correspondence to God,” 139.

⁴⁸ Jüngel, *Death*, 112.

⁴⁹ See Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 261-7, for a clear discussion of what overcoming nothingness might mean in passibilist theology, including Jüngel.

⁵⁰ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 211. Reflection may perhaps suggest that nothingness is a simile of death.

⁵¹ Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, xiv-xv. These words come from his book on Barth’s understanding of the Trinity, and are clearly related to Barth’s discussion of *das Nichtige*. See also Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 219.

Life and death both are within God's being. In the event of the cross, God takes what is alien to Godself – nothingness, suffering, death – struggles with it, and overcomes it by taking it within Godself, becoming the unity of life and death for the sake of life. “As the victor over death, God discloses himself as God. In that the living God in his deity bears the death of Jesus, in that he burdens the eternity of his being with the crucifixion of Jesus, he demonstrates his divine being as a living unity of life and death.”⁵² It follows then that death is transformed in the encounter with God: death is now subservient to God, and its power is limited by God: “in dying, God plucks out the sting of death. And so in death he overcomes death. And so in death he remains highest God. And so Jesus Christ is the death of death.”⁵³

New Testament: the Nature of Death

This treatment of Jüngel's theology of the cross enables us to see more clearly how he interprets the New Testament attitude towards death. Jüngel finds in the New Testament, like Barth, a twofold delineation of human death. First, the New Testament understands the death of human beings as the result of sin, and therefore a curse. This death is:

the consequence of that pressure exerted towards relationlessness which corresponds to the break in man's relationship with God. As the consequence of alienation from God it is also the expression of the truth about this alienation. This death reveals what happens when man merely seeks to realise himself in all that he does and in all that he refuses to do: he loses his life and forfeits the right to live

So understood, death is thus not the result of some special act of God due to the nature of man's sin. Nor is it an arbitrary divine interference in the sense that on account of the nature of sin itself God must punish the sinner. It is rather the case that this is an event demanded by the very nature of sin itself. To this extent it constitutes a punishment.⁵⁴

The parallel with the Old Testament understanding of death is clear. In both cases, sin is both relation-destroying in its source and outcome. Sin is the desire to be lord,

⁵² Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 344. See also p. x, and Eberhard Jüngel, “The Last Judgment as an Act of Grace,” trans. Terrence Merrigan, *Louvain Studies* 15 (1990), 404-5.

⁵³ Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 137. See also David Kelsey, “Two Theologies of Death: Anthropological Gleanings,” *Modern Theology* 13 (1997), 348: for Jüngel, “death itself is transformed in the quite *particular* death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

⁵⁴ Jüngel, *Death*, 87-8.

and its outcome is that one is one's own lord, cut off from the true Lord. The consequence is death, "the cursed end of human life."⁵⁵

But for Jüngel, the New Testament's chief insight into death, and that which takes it beyond the revelation of the Old, is the possibility of the believer's death. Jüngel understands Paul as arguing that the believer is set free from the former view of death as curse: "man is set free from the consequences of his own drive toward relationlessness."⁵⁶ Given the identification of God with the dead man Jesus Christ, given the encounter of God with death in the event of the cross, given the death of the living God – it is possible to understand human death anew. In encountering death, and taking both life and death into Godself, God is able to establish new relationships in the face of death itself: this is the new insight provided by the New Testament. These new relationships – unlike typical human relationships – are unbreakable. "As the end of man's life, death therefore does not involve an abrupt break with life."⁵⁷ God's relationship to the person can remain unbroken. This is a possibility open to the person who has faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Such faith is grounded in the death of Jesus, and enables the believer to participate in that which took place in Jesus' death, namely the overcoming of death.⁵⁸

Jüngel expresses this New Testament account of natural death in the light of the death of Jesus Christ in terms of the limit or the beyond of the human being. Who or what is beyond the death of the human being? As we have seen, Jüngel denies the validity of any version of the soul's immortality. It is not our soul which is beyond our death. There is no temporal continuation. Were the human being naturally immortal, it would make a mockery of the death of Jesus Christ and identification of God with him, *for us*. There would be no need for the *for us*. It is not even that in the death of God, the natural human constitution is changed such that the human being becomes immortal. No – the human being remains mortal; the human being must die. In the death of God it is not the human being but death which is transformed.⁵⁹ So we remain bounded therefore, but by what? For Jüngel, we are bounded by God:

⁵⁵ Jüngel, "The Christian Understanding of Suffering," 10.

⁵⁶ Jüngel, *Death*, 89.

⁵⁷ Jüngel, *Death*, 90.

⁵⁸ See Jüngel, *Death*, 103.

⁵⁹ See Kelsey, "Two Theologies of Death," 348.

“Theologically speaking, an end is to be distinguished from a breaking-off in the sense that as far as the latter is concerned, nothing follows. Beyond this hiatus there is nothing, only the total absence of relation. Whereas on the other side of the end there is God.”⁶⁰ Humanity is not limited by death but by God.⁶¹ And – in a sentence which could be an epigrammatic summary of Jüngel’s individual eschatology – “It makes all the difference whether it is nothingness that sets the limit to man in death or God.”⁶² For Jüngel (as for Barth) it is God, and a gracious, loving, death-encountering, crucified God.

Is Death Natural?

Jüngel’s account of death in the Bible turns on the question of the naturalness of death. Until the nineteenth century, theology tended to follow Paul in seeing death primarily as the wages of sin, sin’s consequence and punishment, and hence unnatural.⁶³ However, since Schleiermacher a distinction has been common in Protestant theology between human death as a curse as it *appears* to human beings, and as a natural part of the world’s processes. We have already seen Barth’s version of this distinction: like him, Jüngel also sees death in a twofold guise in both Old and New Testaments.

In discussion of the Old Testament, Jüngel holds that death is “a curse which man of course invites from God.”⁶⁴ But he adds that death experienced at the end of a long life is how death “was intended by God.”⁶⁵ It seems that God’s intention for human beings is that they die peacefully, at the end of a long life. So Jüngel presumably believes that for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, death is the natural fulfilment of God’s good intention. Their deaths are not the consequence of sin. And they stand as examples of the possibility of a good, peaceful death.

According to the New Testament too, death is a curse, the wages of sin according to Paul, yet it is also possible for the human being to enjoy a natural death, death “as

⁶⁰ Jüngel, *Death*, 90.

⁶¹ Jüngel, “Humanity in correspondence to God,” 139.

⁶² Jüngel, *Death*, 132.

⁶³ Romans 6:23; see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-8), 2:267-8.

⁶⁴ Jüngel, *Death*, 74.

⁶⁵ Jüngel, *Death*, 73.

the end of that existence which he is by nature.⁶⁶ This is possible because God, in the encounter with death on the cross, removes the curse from death, and enables it to be undergone merely as a natural phenomenon.

It seems clear, then, that Jüngel, like Barth, envisages God's creation of human beings as the creation of beings whose natural end is death. Sin and guilt affect the way death casts its shadow over life, but do not cause death itself. It is simply part of human finitude, as discussed above in section 3, that human beings die. God's encounter with death in Jesus Christ enables the naturalness of death to re-appear from beneath its curse-like shroud.

What remains uncertain is the relation the New Testament understanding of natural death has with the Old Testament's portrayal of certain deaths, such as the Patriarchs', as natural. Jüngel does not argue that Christ's death has a salvific effect backwards as well as forwards, as it were: Jüngel's account of the possibility of natural death in the Old Testament is conducted without reference to the events of the New. Hence Jüngel appears to imply that, before Christ's death changed the character of death, it was possible in principle for the individual to die a good, natural death. Such a position is at least a curiosity for a Lutheran theologian whose theology is grounded on a Christological understanding of justification. It is far from clear that this possibility of natural death in the Old Testament is consistent with Jüngel's often-stated conviction that outside Christ there is no salvation.⁶⁷

To evade the charge of inconsistency, the relationship between the two conceptions of natural death are perhaps better seen as being loosely parallel. The possibility of dying at the end of a long, faithful life in the Old Testament is *akin to* the human possibility of dying a natural death because of the action of God in Christ. The idea that death need not be a curse is present in the Old Testament, although the theological source for natural death is found only in the New. Jüngel does not say it, but it follows from his overall understanding of death that the Old Testament Patriarchs could only really die a natural death because of God's encounter with death in Christ.

⁶⁶ Jüngel, *Death*, 92.

5. Judgment and Eternal life

Judgment and Forgiveness

In some ways, eschatology is the doctrine of God's relationship to creation's past. Eschatology is the attempt to understand how God relates to things which have happened – the events of history, its joy and suffering, and the sins and righteousness of God's creatures. How does Jüngel understand God's relationship to the past? His fundamental answer is that human beings are not saved out of their lives, but it is their lives which are saved. It is this finite historical life which is made eternal. Nothing is lost in death. The incomplete will be made complete. The unrealized possibility will be realized:

The past which is redeemed is no mere past. The past which is redeemed is a past in the presence of God. It is he who makes it present to itself, and in so doing – here at least the word is appropriate – glorifies it. The past in the presence of God cannot in any sense be a dead past. It is rather a history made *articulate*, a history brought to expression before God and by God. Then, along with those aspects of our lives which have remained hidden to ourselves and to others, we ourselves shall stand revealed. The person who in his earthly life once claimed to have really known himself will then have cause to be ashamed of himself... Then we shall know even as we are now known by God... What we are now is what God now knows us to be. *This is how we have been, and it is as we have been that we shall inherit eternity.*⁶⁸

Redemption is the making articulate of history, the public revelation of God's perception of it.

In a more recent article published in 1990 called "The Last Judgement as an Act of Grace," Jüngel deals in greater detail than elsewhere with the subject of judgment. As the title suggests, Jüngel believes the Last Judgment to be "the gracious act of a graceful God."⁶⁹ Despite the threatening aspect of judgment, for example as found in the Old Testament, the Christian concept of God's judgment is part of the doctrine of God's justification of the sinner. So the Last Judgment "cannot, under any

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Eberhard Jüngel, "Extra Christum Nulla Salus – A Principle of Natural Theology," in *Theological Essays*, 173-88.

⁶⁸ Jüngel, *Death*, 121 (my emphasis).

⁶⁹ Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 391.

circumstances, be perceived as interfering with or rendering problematic the judgement which leads to justification.⁷⁰

Jüngel enumerates the ways in which the Last Judgment is significant. First, it is an honour to be judged by God. It is God's judgment which ensures that the world does not remain in "the twilight of falsehood."⁷¹ The Last Judgment will reveal the truth of life's events, illuminating all that has been done and left undone.⁷² Second, it is Christ who will judge, which involves the establishing of an order of peace. So the eschatological order of peace will be established by the one in whom such peace has already been established. Jesus is the Kingdom, and so the judgment will be just.⁷³ Third, in the Last Judgment, human beings will be liberated from the sinful task of judging each other. Fourth, best expressed in Jüngel's own words: "The fact that Jesus Christ is the judge who executes the last judgement means, in particular, that this amounts to a universal and direct revelation and illumination of what each person and humanity as a whole has made of themselves and of the world entrusted to them."⁷⁴ In so doing Jesus will reveal our sin and guilt, which will be made public, "so that they can be disposed of forever and regarded as such."⁷⁵ It is the revelation of our guilt which brings us closer to salvation: "The last judgement is the therapeutic event."⁷⁶ Fifth, in the Last Judgment, human beings are redeemed. They are acquitted by God, and given the freedom to accept such acquittal. Jüngel hints that although it must be possible that some will, at this stage, reject God's acquittal, our faith in God suggests that God will turn even this "death" into life.⁷⁷

In this article, then, the Last Judgment is considered by Jüngel to be of supreme importance in the event of salvation: "The last judgement uncovers the trauma [of wounds which time cannot heal] and brings both the perpetrators and their victims

⁷⁰ Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 395.

⁷¹ Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 396.

⁷² See also Eberhard Jüngel, *Christ, Justice and Peace: Towards a Theology of the State in Dialogue with the Barmen Declaration*, trans. D. Bruce Hamill and Alan J. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 70: "It is only God's coming kingdom that is distinguished by unambiguity, for in it life will be formed and ordered in accordance with the measure of *divine* insight and *divine* ability."

⁷³ See also Eberhard Jüngel, "The Emergence of the New," in *Theological Essays II*, 52-3, in which he emphasizes that eschatological hope awaits none other than Jesus Christ.

⁷⁴ Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 399.

⁷⁵ Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 401.

⁷⁶ Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 401.

⁷⁷ Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 404-5.

closer to salvation, precisely by revealing the shame they so justly deserve.”⁷⁸ This affirms the sketchy remarks in *Death* on the nature of redemption. The central image for judgment (or indeed, redemption) is revelation. What has been concealed will be revealed. What was unknown will be known. Light will be cast into dark corners of our past. What was false will be shown as being false – and this revelation will shame the sinner into salvation. Knowledge of one’s self, complete and undisguised for the first time, is salvation. This is what forgiveness is for Jüngel – the naming and shaming of sin and guilt.

Eternal Life

To summarize: for Jüngel, the human being is limited temporally. Life begins at birth and ends with death. These limits are God-given. Death as a curse is the consequence of that tendency towards relationlessness at the core of sin. But death can also be natural for the human being who has faith in the God who took death into God’s own inner being. God then is our beyond, and not nothingness. In the Last Judgment, the past’s sin and guilt are made public and healed. But what does that actually mean for the individual?

According to *Death*, it does not mean that the human being’s temporal life continues in any shape or form. Our life ends and does not restart. Our possibilities are within, not outwith the boundaries of birth and death. However, Jüngel goes on, “this life is lived in relation to the history of God. This means that this this-worldly life has an *eternal* past and an *eternal* future. As God’s creation, life enters and is received into the resurrection of the dead.”⁷⁹ What understanding of resurrection is this? Hope in God is resurrection hope, Jüngel writes, and is hope in salvation. Salvation, he goes on to say:

can only mean that it is *the life man has lived* that is saved, not that man is saved *out* of this life. The meaning of salvation is that God saves this life which we live. It involves the participation of this earthly, limited life in the life of God; the sharing of this temporally limited life in God’s eternity; the participation of a life which has incurred guilt in the glory of God... It is as finite that man’s finite life is *made eternal*. Not by endless extension – there is no immortality of the soul – but

⁷⁸ Jüngel, “The Last Judgement,” 401.

⁷⁹ Jüngel, *Death*, 119.

through participation in the very life of God. Our life is *hidden* in his life. In this sense the briefest form of the hope of resurrection is the statement: "God is my eternity". He will make everything whole; everything, including what we have been. Our *person* will then be our *manifest history*.⁸⁰

Jüngel's vision of eternal life is the eternalization of the life that has been, meaning the articulation or manifestation of everything that life was, redeemed in and by the presence of God, who identified with the crucified one Jesus Christ out of love for us.

God as the Mystery of the World expands slightly on the vision of eternal life proposed in the earlier book. Eternal life is, he argues, primarily related to the past. What is essential in eternal life – in the overcoming of death – is that the past does not disappear into nothingness. Although it may lose reality, the past does not lose its possibility. And so eternal life is "the revelation and implementation of all those possibilities into which our life constantly moves without ever having realized them. Then all of the possibilities, the missed ones and the concealed ones, all of which define us, will as such reveal the truth of our life, to each individual as the subject of the life he is living."⁸¹ Note here that by "the life he is living," Jüngel does not mean the life a person might live beyond death: one can only be the subject of life between birth and death. So Jüngel is not offering here a vision of heaven as compensation for this-worldly suffering, making up for missed chances. As he notes elsewhere, "It is not the case... that the experience of the deficiencies of the present give rise to the creation of a compensatory anti-world."⁸² Yet it does seem that in death, when all that one could have been but was not is revealed, that which one was not will be implemented. The question which cannot be avoided is this – how can missed opportunities between birth and death be implemented in death, if there is no continuity of subjectivity? What can implementation mean for a past? Jüngel offers no examples to help his readers. As we shall see in chapter 8, an individual eschatology has to develop an understanding of the forgiveness of sins and the fulfilment of the person, since eschatology and soteriology are in some ways different aspects of theology's articulation of the love and purpose of God. Jüngel's instincts, therefore, in hoping for the implementation of missed chances, are correct. However,

⁸⁰ Jüngel, *Death*, 120.

⁸¹ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 215.

⁸² Jüngel, "The Last Judgement," 390.

his own reticence in developing how and in whom such implementation could occur indicates the profound difficulty he faces in envisaging such implementation within his broader eschatology.⁸³

Later, in *God as the Mystery of the World*, he repeats the familiar argument that the human being, in coming up against boundaries such as death, is limited by God alone. But that is a good thing, and here Jüngel hints at the quality of eternal life:

That means that the end is not followed by nothingness but rather the transformation of that earthly existence, so limited and now ended, by the God who has limited and ended us with himself. . . . God, as the end of being and time, is their absolute identity and thus also the transformation of human existence, limited by being and time, into an eternal life, a life in unsurpassable fellowship with God.⁸⁴

Jüngel adds that God “makes a place for us to live within his own being.”⁸⁵ These remarks remain sketchy, however, and it is not clear how they dovetail with his remarks in *Death* on the eternalization of the lived life. The eternalized life may be the same thing as life in unsurpassable fellowship with God, but given Jüngel’s insistence that with death, human life is at an end, it is not clear what the reader should make of “life in unsurpassable fellowship with God.” Whose life? In what sort of time? And of what quality?

6. Critical Issues

This section will outline the major areas of Jüngel’s eschatological thought which have given rise to criticism, and discuss the issues involved. It will be seen that the problems tend to crystallize around Jüngel’s insistence on human passivity before God in death.

⁸³ With reference to eternal life, Davidson claims rightly that “Jüngel’s effort to ground all theology in the cross seems to lack immediacy for the human situation.” Ivor J. Davidson, “*Crux Probat Omnia*: Eberhard Jüngel and the Theology of the Crucified One,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997), 188.

⁸⁴ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 394-5.

Epistemology

If any contemporary theologian is the natural successor to the dialectical theologians of the early part of the twentieth century it is Eberhard Jüngel. As we have seen, he resolutely defends the central dialectical insight that knowledge of God is found only in God's self-revelation. However, this adherence to the fundamental position of Bultmann and Barth opens Jüngel to similar sorts of criticism as that received by the former two. Just as Barth's founding of anthropology on Jesus' humanity seems unnecessarily to ignore the ordinary understanding of humanity, so Jüngel's insistence that God is found only on the cross seems unnecessarily to ignore the ordinary understanding of what is meant by "God." Indeed, how could God be discovered in identification with Jesus unless "God" was a relatively clearly established concept? As Davidson puts it, "The faith which sees God's presence in his apparent absence and his power in his evident weakness surely has learnt something about this God elsewhere, otherwise Calvary would appear to be merely a human tragedy."⁸⁶ Jüngel may point to Christ's resurrection as the revelation that God remains God in the encounter with death, but the question remains as to how one could know the resurrection to be the act of God? Clearly, understanding God's being to be revealed by the cross must be part of a far broader understanding of the world and its creator.

Indeed, Jüngel seems to accept this, at least implicitly, in his discussion of death. Despite the centrality of Christ's death for understanding the meaning of human death, and the possibility of death being natural, Jüngel finds that the possibility of natural death is present in the Old Testament, applied to the Patriarchs. This Old Testament conception of natural death appears to function for Jüngel as a precursor or model for the possibility of natural death brought about in the death of Jesus. It seems that Jüngel's understanding of Christ's death on the cross is aided by the perception of the Old Testament that natural death is a possibility for human beings. Of course, it could be argued by a defender of Jüngel that the Old Testament is simply another facet of God's self-revelation which relates in some way to God's definitive self-revelation in Christ, perhaps as its foreshadowing. But then one must

⁸⁵ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 389. A similar idea is expressed in Jüngel, "The Emergence of the New," 55: "The Holy Spirit of God is the *creative power of renewal* which *reverses* the movement from life to death by which earthly existence is defined, and leads from death into life, from non-being into being."

⁸⁶ Davidson, "*Cruce Probat Omnia*," 176.

ask how the Old Testament writers came to their understanding of death as, in principle, natural. Presumably, this came about as the result of reflection on the circumstances of life, its pain, joy, shortness, unpredictability and end – all in the context of the people's relationship to God. In other words, natural death, as described in the Old Testament, is a finding of something very like the natural theology which Jüngel dismisses as proceeding from the wrong starting-point.

The upshot is that Jüngel's theological epistemology is somewhat hampered when he seeks to develop an account of eternal life. His concentration on the event of Christ's death as God's self-revelation to the exclusion of experience generally, prevents the development of certain lines of enquiry crucial for an adequate account of eternal life. There is no place, in particular, for human subjectivity or temporality beyond death. The following chapter will develop in greater depth these consequences of the twentieth century Protestant delineation of revelation, both in Jüngel and the other subjects of this thesis.

Resurrection

We have seen that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to Jüngel's proposals regarding death and eternal life. It discloses the truth of the cross to us, enabling us to say that in the event of the cross, God identifies with the man Jesus Christ. The resurrection thus enables us to talk of the death of God, and understand the character of the God who overcomes nothingness. It must be noticed, however, that this is a somewhat one-sided understanding of the resurrection. Jüngel interprets the resurrection almost exclusively as a lens for focussing on the cross, and says little of the meaning of the resurrection either in itself, or as the cross casts light on it. It is not clear, for example, whether Jüngel believes that the man Jesus Christ was raised bodily: what is clear is that Jüngel's theology of the resurrection as verification of the cross hardly seems to demand any real resurrection of Jesus Christ at all.⁸⁷ It is enough that faith can say that God raised Jesus from the dead. One notices here strong parallels with each of the other twentieth century theologians of this study. Ignoring for the moment the subtleties of their individual approaches, none of

⁸⁷ According to Davidson, Jüngel is "remarkably vague on what the fact of the resurrection consists of." Davidson, "*Cruce Probat Omnia*," 174, n. 66.

Bultmann, Barth or Moltmann is prepared to say that the resurrection of Jesus is a historical event, verifiable in the same way as, for example, his crucifixion.⁸⁸ For all three, the resurrection can be apprehended only in faith. Jüngel shares this general approach to Jesus' resurrection, continually stressing its meaning for God as opposed to its meaning for the man Jesus.

What Jüngel therefore loses is the sense that the resurrection follows the cross, that Jesus' risen life follows his death. According to Jüngel, then, the resurrection interprets Jesus' death but it need not be subsequent to it.⁸⁹ Naturally, this has consequences for Jüngel's understanding of eternal life. He does not have a model of life following death in the case of Jesus, and so does not develop the Pauline theme of Jesus as the first-fruits, offering his resurrection life to believers (1 Cor. 15:20). Indeed, Jüngel makes very little of the New Testament material regarding the resurrection of the dead. For him the central discussion of individual eschatology is not individual resurrection, but the death which each individual must face. That God's relationship to us is not broken in death is the essence of eternal life; resurrection of the dead (or body) is merely an expression for this truth. It is not insignificant that Jüngel's principal foray into eschatology is entitled *Death*. Traditional (and even much twentieth century) eschatology developed a much keener understanding of the resurrection of the dead as the central image of eternal life, in contrast to sub-Platonic accounts of the release of the soul. For Moltmann, for example, not to stress the resurrection of the body is the mistake of a spiritualizing, gnostic account of Christianity. Jüngel's curious reluctance to describe eternal life in terms of resurrection makes him seem vulnerable to this charge, despite his avowed opposition to Platonism in Christian anthropology.

Jüngel's approach to Jesus' resurrection relates to his understanding of time. As far as is clear, Jüngel's understanding of temporality follows largely from Barth. Human beings experience life temporally as finite creatures. The essence of their humanity, in

⁸⁸ Once again, alone amongst major theologians in the post-Barthian tradition, Pannenberg stands out as a defender of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

⁸⁹ See Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel*, 89. See also S. D. Wigley, "Karl Barth on St Anselm: The Influence of Anselm's 'Theological Scheme' on T. F. Torrance and Eberhard Jüngel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993), 92-94. Significantly, Wigley believes that when Jüngel is compared with T. F. Torrance in terms of their relation to Barth, Torrance's Christology begins from the resurrection, while Jüngel's starts at the cross.

fact, consists in their being finite, limited not by nothingness but by God. This makes their finitude good, and so makes affirmation of their finitude the right attitude to God and themselves. God, by contrast, is eternal. Even though God is defined by the historical event of the cross, the death and nothingness encountered there are overcome by God, taking them within God's own being. God's freedom is not compromised by this encounter, and so God remains eternal, not subject to the contingencies of history. God can be present to all moments of history, while remaining eternal.⁹⁰ This contrast, however, between the essentially temporal nature of human life, and God's eternity, makes Jesus' resurrection awkward for Jüngel. What experience of time does the risen Jesus have? A possible answer must somehow comprehend Jesus' finitude continuing, yet sharing in the eternity of God as raised from the dead. We saw in chapter 5 Moltmann's attempt to describe this concept of resurrection time as "relative eternity," but Jüngel, like Barth, does not develop any understanding of a form of temporality beyond the limits of birth and death. In the same way that this makes Jesus' resurrection awkward, it makes the conception of the resurrection of human beings very difficult indeed. Jüngel suggests in one place that that which exists in time may have "an eternal future," based on a Barthian notion of "an eternal interpenetration of the modes of time."⁹¹ As we saw in chapter 4, however, understanding God's eternity in this way does not make it any easier to conceptualize the maintenance of some form of temporality, however transformed, in the resurrection itself.

Passivity in Death

The most basic difficulty with Jüngel's eschatology, however, is human passivity in death. How does the believer relate to God in his or her death? Jüngel is silent. After all, there is no continuation of the person beyond death for Jüngel: temporal life is bounded by birth and death, and these limits remain human limits in God's identification with Jesus Christ in his death. It seems therefore that when Jüngel asserts that God is our beyond he means that in death God continues to relate to the person, but that the person cannot be said to relate to God, or to other people. As he

⁹⁰ See Eberhard Jüngel, "Thesen zur Ewigkeit des ewigen Lebens," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 97 (2000), 80-7, for a recent trinitarian account of the meaning of God's eternity.

says, "As the end of man's life, death therefore does not involve an abrupt break with life. God's creative relationship to man excludes the possibility that this relationship can be broken, but it does not exclude the fact that human life comes to its end."⁹²

This is a curious understanding of relationship, reminiscent of Barth's remarks about participation in God. We might believe that one-sided relationships can exist, for example, when someone continues to think intensively and passionately of a former lover, though the former lover has all but forgotten the person in question. But that sort of relationship is fraudulent because it is not reciprocated. We say that the person who cannot move on from the finished relationship is living in the past. One person does not make a relationship. It might be argued that God loves many people who do not reciprocate that relationship. This is true – though it is also true that according to Paul, none relate to God in perfect response to God's love (Rom. 3:23). Nevertheless, the person loved by God can potentially respond to God's love, and enter more fully into relationship with God. That, however, cannot be said of any person who has died, according to Jüngel's eschatology. God relates to a redeemed past, drawing it, warts and all, into fellowship with God. But, as John Webster points out, although "God does not cease to relate to us in death... there is little sense in which we might be said to relate to him."⁹³

Let us probe a little more deeply into Jüngel's emphasis on creaturely passivity by considering an article by David Kelsey entitled "Two Theologies of Death: Anthropological Gleanings" in which the author compares Jüngel's eschatology with that of Karl Rahner.⁹⁴ Kelsey focuses on Jüngel's proposition that "in death, understood as the end of human life as willed by God, man is brought to a final passivity."⁹⁵ Kelsey points out that for Jüngel, the finitude of the human being amounts to the same thing as this final passivity. To be finite means "that being a creaturely patient is the *ontological* condition of the possibility of being a creaturely

⁹¹ Jüngel, "The Emergence of the New," 54.

⁹² Jüngel, *Death*, 90.

⁹³ Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel*, 92.

⁹⁴ Jüngel compares his own theology with one aspect of Rahner's in Jüngel, "Extra Christum Nulla Salus," namely the concept of anonymous Christians. In the same article, his insistence on creaturely passivity is evident: "Whilst we can deny that our being is determined by a fundamental passivity, we cannot annul the fact." (186-7)

⁹⁵ Jüngel, *Death*, 91.

agent.”⁹⁶ According to Kelsey, Jüngel understands redemption entirely as the changing of death effected by the identification of God with the dead man Jesus Christ, a change which “is not effected by anything Jesus does... nor by anything we do in response to Jesus... Rather, the change is effected by what God does in the life and death of Jesus.”⁹⁷ This ensures that redemption is achieved by grace alone, in accordance with traditional Protestant emphasis. Kelsey sees the problem of this understanding of redemption as follows:

Do not Jüngel’s anthropological strategies to secure *sola gratia* end up undercutting another theological claim, which Jüngel also avows, that the radically transformed “new creation” is the self-same “old creature” bound in sin?...

Consider: does Jüngel not end up making the “new” person far too undialectically new? Does not the identity of “old” and “new” creature require that the one drawn into the relation constituted by God’s redeeming have an actual reality – albeit, a creaturely reality – other than and over-against God? Is it an accident that Jüngel comes close to construing “resurrection” as a non-transferable deposit in God’s memory bank?⁹⁸

Kelsey clearly believes that Jüngel’s concentration on human passivity has evacuated the redeemed person of being. The redeemed person is either a different person from the sinner, or no one at all. In opposition to Jüngel, he argues that it is possible to understand human finitude in ways other than final passivity. The finite human person may – despite all limits – enjoy a significant (though not determinative) agency in the event of redemption, without thereby denying the theological axiom that the person is saved by grace alone. For Kelsey, a proper theological anthropology must preserve the truth that human beings be “accountable for ourselves and able to respond aptly to God and to our neighbours.”⁹⁹

Indeed, the passivity of the person in death is the area of Jüngel’s eschatology which has drawn the sharpest criticism. One further example is John Hick who considers Jüngel to be putting forward a “recapitulation” theory of eternal life, in which each human life is remembered eternally by God. For Hick, such a theory lacks what he considers essential to individual eschatology – the capacity for change and

⁹⁶ Kelsey, “Two Theologies of Death,” 357.

⁹⁷ Kelsey, “Two Theologies of Death,” 359.

⁹⁸ Kelsey, “Two Theologies of Death,” 362. The image of the non-transferable memory bank is parallel to the image of a video playback suggested in chapter 4 in relation to Barth’s eschatology.

growth. Life is frozen in its earthly form, despite eternalization. And life's sinfulness remains unresolved.¹⁰⁰

7. Comparison with Bultmann, Barth and Moltmann

Formal comparison of the individual eschatologies of Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel follows immediately in chapter 7, in which a distinct pattern in Protestant eschatology of the twentieth century will be drawn out. The final section of this chapter will point instead to particular points of similarity and difference between Jüngel and the other subjects of this study, with particular attention given to the relationship between Jüngel and Barth.

Bultmann

Eberhard Jüngel is by no means a disciple of Rudolf Bultmann. Nevertheless, a shared commitment to the restatement of many Lutheran themes can be found throughout their theology.¹⁰¹ Not least is the dilemma each man faced when aware of the great responsibility faced in the attempt to think and write theologically. Jüngel puts it as follows: "What sense is there in speaking of God? is the question which runs through the whole of Bultmann's writings."¹⁰² One feels that Jüngel's name could be substituted for Bultmann's in that sentence with no loss of truth. Finding a way around idolatrous speech about God, and locating the place in which revelation occurs – these are the common concerns of both thinkers, concerns which go back at least as far to Luther's opposition in the Heidelberg Disputation to a theology of glory. Of course, Jüngel and Bultmann take quite separate paths thereafter, Bultmann believing that God can be spoken of in God's relationship with one's own existing self, Jüngel following Luther more closely in disputing that "He deserves to be called a theologian... who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through

⁹⁹ Kelsey, "Two Theologies of Death," 370.

¹⁰⁰ Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976), 221-7. As we shall see in chapter 8, Hick levels this accusation principally against Pannenberg, only including Jüngel within its scope in a footnote. In fact, it is a much better criticism of Jüngel (and of Barth) than it is of Pannenberg.

¹⁰¹ For Luther's influence on Jüngel, see Davidson, "*Crux Probat Omnia*."

¹⁰² Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, xi.

suffering and the cross.”¹⁰³ Nevertheless, as we have seen, both Bultmann and Jüngel emphasize that death is the end of the whole person, and neither is prepared to endorse a view of eternal life as involving the continuation of the subject. The following chapter will argue that the similar motivations for the two Lutherans’ theological epistemologies are closely connected with their similar unwillingness to develop a doctrine of the individual subject beyond death.

Barth

It is clear that in their approaches to the possibility and activity of theology, Barth and Jüngel share a common starting-point. For both, knowledge of God is found uniquely in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We saw that Barth opposes the Christologically-formed knowledge of God to any “independent” ontology, believing that the latter is unable to develop theological statements without idolatry. Eschatological doctrine then, must, as with all other branches of Christian theology, follow from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Jüngel is firmly in the same epistemological tradition as Barth. For Jüngel, the crucial battle in contemporary theology is over the starting-point for theological thinking. Is it with a God “over us,” defined in Anselmian terms as that than which nothing greater can be thought, and in Cartesian terms as the ground of the world’s and the ego’s existence? Or is it with a God defined in the identification with the one man Jesus Christ crucified for us? This is a dichotomy which, for Jüngel, must be decided in favour of the crucified God. And so knowledge of God is found in and only in Jesus Christ. For Jüngel, the Johannine Christ’s statement “No one comes to the Father but by me” stands as a fundamental proposition of evangelical theology with regard to the knowledge of God.¹⁰⁴ Hence in both Barth’s and Jüngel’s case, doctrines of eschatology are developed out of Christological foundations. The truth about human destiny is revealed by God in and only in the man Jesus Christ, his birth, life, death and resurrection.

¹⁰³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, American edition, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 31:40.

¹⁰⁴ See Jüngel, *God as the Mystery*, 157.

There is furthermore a similarity in Barth's and Jüngel's treatment of scripture. In their eschatological thought, both proceed by way of an exegesis of scripture. Yet in both cases, certain central scriptural passages, which traditionally have been interpreted as describing (or at least hinting at) the existence of the individual with Christ in heaven, are unexamined. For example, in neither Barth's *Church Dogmatics* or in Jüngel's *Death* is there a discussion of the meaning of the spiritual body as referred to in 1 Corinthians 15. When Jüngel sketches his ideas of eternal life based on his understanding of death in culture, Greek and scriptural tradition, he refers to Pauline texts just twice: to 1 Cor. 15:28 ("that God may be all in all"), and 1 Cor. 13:12 ("I will know fully, even as I have been fully known"). Significantly, Jüngel believes that "Pauline theology as a whole is a theology of the cross and nothing else."¹⁰⁵ His reading of Pauline texts as being about the cross accords neatly with his Lutheran approach to theology as beginning from the cross, but it makes the significant Pauline theology devoted to the resurrection awkward. Inasmuch as Jüngel does treat of it, he understands the New Testament reference to resurrection as making it possible to speak meaningfully of the death of God in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Both Barth and Jüngel, then, fail to engage with the scriptural witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the individual, and hence their eschatology leans heavily towards interpretation of the death of Jesus Christ for us.

The correspondences between Barth and Jüngel in theological anthropology are even more striking. For both theologians, the human being is defined as human not on account of anything that belongs to the person, such as a soul or a set of physical characteristics, but in terms of being addressed by God. As we saw earlier, for Barth, the human being is human inasmuch as she or he is a rational being called and claimed by God. For Jüngel too, it is in being addressed by the Word that the human being is properly human. Hence, both see the so-called Platonic understanding of the human being as mortal body and immortal soul as inimical to Christianity. There is nothing within the human person which survives death: death is the end of the whole person. (The twentieth century Protestant opposition to anthropological dualism, and immortality of the soul will be dealt with at greater length in chapter 7.)

¹⁰⁵ Jüngel, *Death*, 97.

Furthermore for both Barth and Jüngel, the temporal life enjoyed by the person is allotted by God. Our beginning and end are God-given; these are the boundaries to created life, and as such are part of creation and are good. There is to be no chafing then against the brevity of allotted time because these boundaries are part of God's gracious gift to creation, creating order for the living of earthly life. It is sinful to oppose the limitations placed upon us for these limitations are Godly. Instead, the proper human response according to both Barth and Jüngel should be one of thankfulness. Jüngel writes: "the limits which are set to man belong to the good ordering of being; to speak theologically, they are a blessing of the Creator."¹⁰⁶

It follows that for both Barth and Jüngel, there is no temporal life for creation outside the boundaries granted by the gracious Creator. Time belongs to the space of life. In death alone is the end of life, as both cessation and goal, and not life after death. Beyond life, in death, there is no after, only beyond. And the question then is what is beyond? For both theologians that question is to be answered as follows: God is our beyond; in death all we can say with certainty is that God will exist. Indeed at the end of Jüngel's meditation on eternal life, he quotes the following words of Barth's: "Man *as such* therefore, has no beyond. Nor does he need one, for God is his beyond."¹⁰⁷ It is no surprise then that Jüngel's depiction of eternal life follows closely that of Barth, given the correspondence of their accounts of theological starting-point, anthropology, mortality, and the nature of death. For both Barth and Jüngel, eternal life is described as the eternalizing of this earthly life.

Clearly Jüngel's thought on matters of individual eschatology is heavily influenced by Barth. Not all his emphases are the same, however. For example, Barth makes more of death as the sign of God's judgment. For Barth, there is a clear sense that death is something sinister, as a deserved punishment for human sin: "Can we doubt that for this reason death must inevitably seem to be negative and have only the character of an unqualified evil? What else can its onset mean but the approach and execution of God's judgment upon us?"¹⁰⁸ Jüngel describes this negative aspect of death in different language, as the forfeiting of the right to live. Death constitutes a

¹⁰⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, "Lob der Grenz," in *Entsprechungen*, 375.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *CD*, III/2, 632, quoted in Jüngel, *Death*, 121-2. It is a favourite of Jüngel's: he also quotes it in Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *CD*, III/2, 596.

punishment, but only in the sense that it "is an event demanded by the very nature of sin itself."¹⁰⁹ This death is the curse of death. Where Jüngel differs from Barth in their characterization of the negative death is that Barth explicitly refers to it as God's judgment; to my knowledge, Jüngel never does. This is consistent with the subdued note of judgment throughout Jüngel's eschatology, in which death is less the occasion of the person's judgment than the realization of the person's missed opportunities – a view of life and death which perhaps sees an ended life as half-full of champagne and needing to be filled to the brim, rather than half-full of stale beer and needing to be emptied. Nevertheless, Jüngel's avoidance of the language of judgment in the appearance of death to the sinner does not constitute a break with Barth in any significant way. For both, it is not death as judgment or curse which has the final say over the person, but death as suffered by the Son of God. For both Barth and Jüngel, it is Christ's death which enables all persons, in their deaths, to fall into the arms of the gracious God.

A second part of Barth's theology of death which Jüngel does not explicitly adopt is the source for our conviction that death can be natural. For Barth, this is found in the fact that Jesus, a sinless man, died. In his death in its sinlessness is the proof and example that it is possible for human beings to die a natural death. Jüngel, by contrast, does not cite the example of Jesus, the sinless one, as evidence for the possibility of natural death. True – it is the death of Jesus which provides for Jüngel compelling evidence for the possibility of natural death, but it is the death of Jesus *inasmuch as God identified with the crucified one*. It is God's act in the cross which establishes the possibility of human dying being a deliverance from relationlessness. God's act in the cross means that human beings can receive God's new relation to them. This is consistent with the emphasis on human passivity found throughout Jüngel's eschatology. That Jesus dies a sinless death is not of huge significance for Jüngel. What matters is God's attitude towards this man. In this slight change of emphasis from Barth, the defining characteristic of Jüngel's doctrine of individual eschatology is laid bare – human passivity.

¹⁰⁹ Jüngel, *Death*, 88.

Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann, particularly from *The Crucified God* onwards, shares with Jüngel the fundamental belief that God's being is discovered uniquely in the cross. The death of Jesus is not merely the revelation of God's being, but in some way, constitutes God's being. God's being is in becoming, according to Jüngel; for Moltmann, the trinitarian history of God is established definitively in the death of Jesus. Both theologians draw explicitly on their Lutheran heritage in this conviction, in Luther's assertion that God can be found only in suffering and the cross. Both draw on Hegel's understanding of the historical being of God, albeit with reservations. Both are associated with the rejection of a so-called metaphysical approach to the doctrine of God, variously called metaphysical theism, or natural theology, exemplified by their rejection of God's impassibility. Yet despite their similarity of approach, and physical proximity in Tübingen, they make few references to each other's work.

Of the differences they exhibit in developing theology from the cross, the following is of particular significance for individual eschatology.¹¹⁰ Moltmann himself takes issue with Jüngel's assertion that life ends at death, because for Moltmann every life remains before God, so God continues to be related to the person despite the person's death.¹¹¹ However, Jüngel is not susceptible to this criticism: he too states that God continues to relate to each person in death. However, Moltmann makes a further criticism, concerned (as was Hick, as we saw in section 6) with the lack of change and growth in Jüngel's scheme. For Moltmann, the suffering, fear and death of earthly life must not be eternalized, yet he claims that that is exactly what Jüngel's individual eschatology (following Barth) maintains.¹¹² Moltmann puts it like this: "eternalizing without a putting to rights, a transformation, a completion and a transfiguration would be no favourable hope."¹¹³ So, for Moltmann, Jüngel's denial of the possibility of the person's continuing relationship to God beyond death means the petrification of the person's past in its fear, suffering and death, and thereby the

¹¹⁰ Their most obvious difference is their attitude to ethics and politics. Jüngel has shown little interest in the ethical or political ramifications of his theology; for Moltmann theology of necessity has ethical-political implications.

¹¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), 76.

¹¹² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 89.

¹¹³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 352, n. 77.

prevention of the fulfilment of the human person in the life of God. As we saw in chapter 5, Moltmann's later eschatology has envisaged the possibility of healing and restoration in an intermediate state between death and new creation of all things.

However, it is not clear that this difference is as significant as Moltmann believes. Jüngel also hopes that each person in death may find his or her missed opportunities being implemented, and he considers the act of judgment to have a healing, therapeutic effect upon the person. Jüngel certainly does not consider his vision of the end to mean an eternalization without transformation. The very process of eternalization will mean the transformation of each history into a public, redeemed history. The further question, whether Jüngel's vision of a transforming eternalization makes any sense in the absence of continuity of the human subject and any form of temporality, will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

8. Conclusion

Jüngel's theology takes as its watchword the emphasis made by Luther on God found in suffering, on the cross. Supported by Barthian convictions as to the self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ alone, Jüngel develops a theology of God's being *defined* in the death of Jesus, and human being defined as the finite being addressable by God, limited by birth and death. In his individual eschatology, however, Jüngel is unable to follow Luther into a depiction of the resurrection body, or life with God beyond death. Instead, Jüngel emphasizes characteristically Barthian themes of eternalization in death, judgment as the gracious revelation of a person's past, and the impossibility of the subject's continuing in some form of temporal existence. It might be argued that Jüngel has here developed Lutheran principles for theology in a more rigorous direction than Luther himself dared to.

"God is our beyond." These words, written by Barth, and quoted by Jüngel, signify the central trend in twentieth century Protestant eschatology in the Barthian tradition. To see the various elements of the century's pattern, the common presuppositions made, and the problems such an individual eschatology involves, will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TWENTIETH CENTURY PROTESTANT INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY: CONTENT AND METHOD

1. Introduction

The last four chapters have offered detailed discussions of individual eschatology according to a certain tradition of twentieth century Protestant theologians – Bultmann, Barth, and the post-Barthians Moltmann and Jüngel. This chapter shall attempt to discover what patterns have emerged in two principal areas: the shape of these theologians' individual eschatology, and the methodological presuppositions lying behind their dogmatic positions. The first can be done fairly briefly (taking up section 2 of this chapter), since the similarities in these theologians' dogmatic positions regarding eternal life have been evident as each chapter unfolded. The second point – whether or not there is a common thread when it comes to their theological *method* – has been implicit in much of our discussion up until now, but needs further elaboration (section 3). It is argued here that there is a common thread to the methods used in Protestant individual eschatology of the twentieth century, which winds around the core of the rejection of natural theology. Possible reasons for this rejection will be outlined, although for our purposes the causes of natural theology's eclipse are less important than the mere fact of it. A further section will elaborate the implications for individual eschatology of the rejection of natural theology, implications which can be seen to be largely negative (section 4). As a consequence (and this is the heart of the thesis as a whole) it is argued that if an account of individual eschatology is to be adequate, it must draw on the resources of natural theology alongside the response to scriptural revelation so characteristic of Barthian and post-Barthian theology. Indeed, section 5 will argue that the separation

of theology into natural and revealed categories is unsustainable: instead, theological activity is invariably a blend of different sources and reflection, in which neither reason nor revelation can maintain any sense of conceptual purity.

The rejection of natural theology is not of course the only contributory cause of the Protestant withdrawal from traditional understandings of heavenly life. The aim of this chapter is to show only that the exclusive concentration on scriptural revelation in twentieth century Protestant theology is a significant cause. Another thesis could examine different possible contributory causes: for example, the influence of the Feuerbachian and Marxist critique of immortality; or changes in methods of scriptural interpretation. Indeed, reading twentieth century dogmatic theology reveals the profound influence of these two critiques, humanist and historical-critical, which often overlap, and no complete study of a particular doctrine in the twentieth century can afford to ignore these critiques. Yet these causes (if such they be) of the absence of heaven in this period have had to remain, to a greater or lesser extent, minor themes in this thesis. Moreover, and this is something there is space only to assert rather than argue for, a more thorough discussion of individual eschatology in the twentieth century would understand the Protestant rejection of natural theology as in part a reaction to the critiques of humanism and historical-criticism. So, having pointed out the modesty of this chapter's intent, let us discover what patterns have emerged in twentieth century Protestant doctrine of individual eschatology, and at least one reason why.

2. The Shape of Individual Eschatology in Twentieth Century Protestant Theology

This section will identify the common pattern in individual eschatology of the major Protestant theologians from the twentieth century selected for this thesis: Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel. The last four chapters have examined their thought in turn, discussing their approaches to eschatology largely in terms of their own emphases, vocabularies and conceptualities. Exposition has not reduced one individual eschatology to another, and comparisons between the different

approaches have only occasionally been made. Nevertheless, in our study of these theologians, it is clear that a pattern has emerged. A number of common features in their discussion of eternal life recur, which outweigh in significance the differences between their approaches. This section, therefore, attempts to outline the central features in the dominant account of individual eschatology in twentieth century Protestant theology.

Outline of a Common Approach

The first feature common to all four theologians is *the understanding of human death*. Death is natural to the human being, as part of a natural world where organisms come into and go out of being. Human beings are finite: they are limited temporally between their beginning and their end, which invariably is death. Since God is the creator of the world, we must assume that death is part of God's creative will towards human creation. Death then is a God-given limit. Indeed, believing that death is part of God's relationship with creation offers us hope, because it implies that the human being dies not into nothingness but into God, who is the gracious creator of life and death. Yet while death is primarily natural, it appears to Christians in their sinful state to be the punishment for sin. We experience death as a curse, as Jüngel says for example, because of our alienation from God. Nevertheless, this does not remove the primary fact that death is natural, that it is a good part of creation, and that it is God-given.¹

This understanding of death is significantly different from previous theological convention. Traditionally, the relationship between the twofold aspect of death as natural and a curse was as follows. Death is an intrinsic consequence of sin in that it follows by an inner necessity from the nature of sin as self-separation from God. Death, then, is not an extrinsic punishment meted out by God, but an inner fruit of sin. Death is "natural" insofar as all creation is involved in sin, but death is also the curse of sin as its horrific consequence. The point of difference is not then in terms

¹ In addition to references given in chaps 3 to 6, see also Ray S. Anderson, *Theology, Death and Dying* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Josef Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Burns and Oates, 1969); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-8), 2:265-75; Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (Edinburgh: Nelson, and Freiburg: Herder, 1961) for discussions of death in twentieth century theology.

of naturalness: the theological tradition and twentieth century Protestants are at one that death is natural for sinful creatures. The difference lies rather in the following two emphases. First, theological tradition did not associate finitude with death as closely as many twentieth century theologians. Indeed, it was commonly held that Adam, a finite man, would not have died had he not sinned, but would have been translated directly to heaven in a manner perhaps akin to those still living at the parousia who, according to 1 Thess. 4:17, will be “caught up in the clouds.” Second, death’s aspect as a curse is universal according to theological tradition: death is the wages of sin for all human beings. But for twentieth century Protestants, death is only a curse for those who have faith in God. As Pannenberg puts it when writing of this approach, “Only to the consciousness of faith, which includes a sense of sin, is death seen to be God’s judgment on sin.”²

It should be pointed out here that Moltmann describes his own position regarding the nature of human death as an alternative to this twofold understanding developed in modern Protestant theology – as primarily natural but also having the character for believers of the wages of sin. As we saw in chapter 5, Moltmann describes death as “a characteristic of frail, temporal creation which will be overcome through the new creation of all things for eternal life.”³ Yet Moltmann’s understanding of death is really a variant of the same tradition as represented by Bultmann, Barth and Jüngel. For one thing he accepts that “death in general is part of creation in time,”⁴ which is equivalent to the others’ assertion that death is natural. As for the belief that death is also in some sense the consequence of sin, Moltmann accepts that too although with the twist that we can also see that sin is the consequence of death: “Death is only the consequence of sin inasmuch as sin exists because of death: we cannot endure mortality, and by killing we can make other people die.”⁵ Moltmann’s thought here may be psychologically insightful, but theologically it does not affect the underlying conception of death as natural and yet in some sense the consequence of sin. Where Moltmann does differ from Barth and Jüngel in particular is his

² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:269.

³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), 78.

⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 91.

⁵ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 91.

conviction that temporality and death are imperfections from which we must be redeemed: for Barth and Jüngel, the naturalness of death is something which the Christian must accept as part of God's limiting of life.

It might be questioned whether this approach, common to Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel, does justice to the sense of horror with which many, perhaps most, people consider death. The virtue of the traditional emphasis on death as the judgment of God on the sinner, it could be argued, is that it coheres with the revulsion felt by human beings at the prospect of their own death. Josef Pieper, for example, contends that given this horror which itself seems *natural* to the human being, death itself must be an *unnatural* punishment.⁶ Yet this attempted critique tends to work only if a simplistic distinction is made between natural and unnatural death. But both the theological tradition and the twentieth century approach recognize the complexity of death: as somehow both an inevitable part of bodily existence and a consequence of sin. Furthermore, the existence of human horror at death cannot of itself prove in what the origin of death consists.

A further criticism of the contemporary account of death is that it is ambiguous, particularly when it states that the human being does not die into nothingness but into God. What does this mean? It could simply mean that God exists, yet if that is all it means then it offers no more than a rhetorical flourish to our thought about death. That God exists is not necessarily of consequence for consideration of death. It may be quite possible both to believe in God and have no hope in eternal life (however conceived). It seems then that the statement means more than simply that God exists, but that dying into God implies some sort of as yet unstated positive content. If so, then it is an interesting starting-point for a theological enquiry into death. However, statements like it, in Barth and Jüngel particularly, are not the starting-point for thought about death, but the conclusion. Their answer to a question like, "What would it mean to die into God?" remains undeveloped.

The naturalness of death is connected to another common element in Protestant eschatology in the twentieth century – *the rejection of immortality of the soul*. If death is the natural end-limit to human life, that can only mean the end of the whole person: the whole person is mortal. The idea that the human person might in some form

not be subject to death is unsupportable in the face of the belief that we are created mortal. The doctrine of an immortal soul which survives death also falls foul on anthropological grounds. These theologians believe the human person to be a unity which is entirely dependent upon God for being. It is inconceivable to them that a part of the person – the soul – might have some kind of independent existence, detachable from the mortal body. As we have seen in chapters 3 to 6, and will describe in more detail below, all four theologians accuse immortality of the soul of being a Greek, Platonic idea which does not cohere with Christianity, despite its long association with Christian soteriology and eschatology.

Following in part from the understanding of death and the human person is the next common feature: *reserve towards the very project of thinking about individual eschatology*. None of these four thinkers offers substantial writings on individual eschatology: heaven, life beyond death, or the interim state. As we have seen, individual eschatology has been eclipsed in their thought by other forms of eschatology: for instance, realized for Bultmann, the dialectic of eternity and time for Barth, and the cosmic eschatology of the new creation of all things for Moltmann. Much of the material of chapters 3 to 6 in this thesis is not directly drawn from explicit writings about the doctrine of heaven, but rather from topics only related to eternal life: for example, theological anthropology, the doctrine of God, and the nature of theology. In many cases, it is from these correlative discussions that the student of eschatology has to infer the theologians' convictions regarding the possibility and nature of eternal life. By way of contrast, Luther and Calvin, as we saw in chapter 2, provide more substantial material regarding their beliefs about the nature of the life to come, although the reformers did also write with conscious reserve. The reasons for twentieth century reticence are complicated, but include the prevailing understandings of the human person and death outlined immediately above. If human finitude implies that death is the end-limit of human life, and the human person is completely mortal, it is hard to imagine how one could say anything about life beyond death, or an intermediate state. The intermediate state of what? However there is a cause underlying these twentieth century positions, which is the abandonment of the methods and findings of natural theology. (Indeed, this is

⁶ Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, chap. 4.

perhaps what is peculiar to the *Protestant* doctrine of heaven in the twentieth century.) Further discussion of the rejection of natural theology will form the greater part of this chapter below.

At the heart of this reticence regarding individual eschatology is a shared conception of *the relationship between time and eternity*. Temporality is the condition of human existence because it is the mark of finitude. The limitedness of human existence involves being born in time, living in time and dying in time. This life is lived in the present, with a past which is remembered and a future anticipated. Outside the temporal limits of a human life there can be no temporality. God is eternal, and so when a person dies not into nothingness but into God, the person participates in eternal life. In dying, a person is no longer the subject of temporal existence, but becomes part of eternal life. The relationship between this eternity beyond death and the temporality under which a human life takes place is characterized as being one of opposition: time and eternity are understood as two quite distinct modes of being. Temporality is understood essentially as clock-time: the slipping of present into past gauged by the “movement” of heavenly bodies. In eternity, therefore, time shall be no more, support for which is found in Rev. 10:6.⁷ As cosmic eschatology understands time as brought to an end by the Eschaton, so the dialectic and post-Barthian theologians see a person’s time abolished in the death of the individual. Alone of the four, Moltmann searches for a way of understanding eternity which has room for some sense of transformed but not extinguished temporality, and suggests “eternal livingness.”⁸ Yet as we saw, this idea remains ambiguous within his overall eschatological vision: it seems that eternal livingness does not have room for duration, successiveness, novelty, or creativity. (The following chapter will defend a different approach to time and eternity from Bultmann, Barth and the post-Barthians, according to which there is a more fluid

⁷ Yet, to repeat the point made in chapters 4 and 5, the consensus among exegetes is that Rev. 10:6 does not necessarily say that “time shall be no more.” In addition to references above, see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, trans. James Van Oosterom (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), 42: “it is now generally accepted that this passage refers to no more delay rather than to no more time, and that it cannot be used in support of the idea that the Scriptures suddenly confront us with a change in time-structure including a transition from time into eternity.”

⁸ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 295.

relationship between them. In particular, the suggestion that eternity is the transformation of time will be explored.)

Given the Barthian and post-Barthian reticence regarding individual eschatology, conceptuality of eternity opposed to time, understanding of death and denial of the immortal soul, what picture do they draw of eternal life? Here, Bultmann differs to some extent from the other three major figures. For Bultmann, the note of reticence, perhaps agnosticism regarding life beyond death, is stronger than in the other three. As an exegete of the New Testament, Bultmann interprets eschatological texts in a realized manner: references to the coming kingdom and the resurrection refer exclusively to life and faith in the here and now. As a theologian, he refuses to speculate either from natural arguments or from scriptural exegesis as to what might lie beyond death. Bultmann advocates by contrast the taking up of a faith open to the future, but a faith which *as faith* can have no insight into what God's future might be.⁹

The remaining theologians offer slightly more than Bultmann as to the possible nature of death's beyond for the individual, and again their accounts share a strong resemblance. They argue for the following modest account of individual eschatology, on the basis of God's self-disclosure in scripture, and principally in Christ. For Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel, eternal life is essentially *the eternalizing of this mortal life*. The language is Barth's, but both Moltmann and Jüngel use strikingly similar terms to describe the nature of the life to come. What does "eternalizing" mean? For Barth it is the glorification of the life that has been lived, a glorification which is equivalent to the revelation of God's lordship over that life. Time will not exist, and the creature will not be there; rather God will be there, having attained God's ultimate good in all things with the creature. In the absence of time, the only sense in which the creature can be said to be in God's presence is as its own glorified history.¹⁰ For Moltmann, eternal life will be the transformation of restricted to immortal life, from restricted to non-restricted existence.¹¹ God's relationship to the person's Gestalt will not cease, but will in death transform the person's Gestalt into

⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM, 1960), 30, and *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), 100.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Karl Barth, *CD III/3*, 87-88.

¹¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 76-77.

eternal life. This will be for people “the reconciled, the rectified and healed and completed history of their own lives.”¹² It will be “this frail, impaired and mortal life which is transformed into eternal life.”¹³ Jüngel puts it like this: “It is as finite that man’s finite life is *made eternal*.”¹⁴ God’s relationship in eternity is to the life that has been lived, with its beginning and its end. “Our person will then be our manifest history.”¹⁵ Our past shall stand revealed, which is the same as saying that our past will be glorified by God.¹⁶

Despite the slight differences in expression, Barth and the two younger theologians offer an essentially similar picture of eternal life. The fundamental meaning of eternal life is the existence of God. God is, eternally. All other existent things depend on God. So, when asking what lies beyond death, the only sure answer is: God. God, as both Barth and Jüngel say, is our beyond. So eternal life is essentially about God’s existence, and God’s relationship to creation. In the resurrection, that relationship will be revealed as one in which God was good and faithful towards creation. Eternal life is revelation. That revelation may also be understood as glorification: God’s relationship to creation will now be seen as a relationship which participates in God’s glory. This revelation, this glorification, has consequences for creation in eternity. It will be the making good of all that is imperfect in created, including human, life. So it will be the revelation of human beings’ righteousness in Christ. It will be the redemption of the past, including the making good of human sufferings, the healing and completing of our lives, themes particularly emphasized but not explained in any detail by Moltmann. In short, it appears that eternalization means something like the making whole – morally, spiritually, physically (in some sense: it will be a resurrection) – of that fragmented thing known as human life. Of course, this making whole essentially means that God is with the person’s history in a way unimaginable to us now, and certainly not as a form of compensation for the sufferings of this life.

¹² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 71.

¹³ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 84.

¹⁴ Eberhard Jüngel, *Death: the Riddle and the Mystery*, trans Iain and Ute Nicol (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 120.

¹⁵ Jüngel, *Death*, 120.

¹⁶ Jüngel, *Death*, 121.

This account gives rise to as many questions as it seems to settle. The ambiguity of God and not nothing being our beyond has already been pointed out. Does it imply that there will still be an "I" beyond death? The account of eternal life as revelation is also unclear. Presumably God reveals God's understanding of the human life from a divine perspective unimaginable to temporal beings here and now. But to whom is it revealed? In what sense could revelation take place in the absence of creatures to receive it? How is a revelation in a non-temporal eternity to be understood? Does not revelation – which enables the passing from ignorance to knowledge – imply a form of temporality?

Evaluation: the Loss of the Subject

The clear strengths of such an individual eschatology are twofold. It takes death seriously, treating it as the natural end of human life. Death is not illusory, partial, or a mere doorway according to Bultmann, Barth and the post-Barthians. It is real, total and closes the door on each human life. Beyond death is no resumption of life. This is undoubtedly superior to a shallow understanding of death as somehow insignificant for the human person because he or she is going to heaven, an understanding that has been prevalent in theology and popular piety. The second strength is related to this: their approach takes human life seriously. Given the comprehensiveness of death for the human person, it is incumbent on us to treat each life with the utmost seriousness. The cliché "You only live once" captures the meaning of this view of eternal life. Since eternal life will not be a further temporal life, we must do everything we can to make this one life as good as it can be (define the good as you will). Furthermore, this one life will not be forgotten. It is this life which will be completed, made eternal and glorified. Nothing, says Moltmann, will be lost. Again, this is an improvement on a certain form of Christian discourse. Some theologians have denigrated the worth of life from birth to death, describing it as shadowy and of little importance compared to the glory to come.¹⁷

¹⁷ "That human life is like smoke or shadow is not only obvious to the learned, but even ordinary folk have no proverb more commonplace than this." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeil, Library of Christian Classics, vols 20 and 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III, 9, 2.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that many theologians who advocate a more traditional understanding of eternal life neither minimize the significance of death, nor denigrate the worth of human life. As we saw in the chapter on Jürgen Moltmann, John Baillie offers three grounds for connecting a traditional eschatology, which understood human destiny in terms of immortality and heaven, with a vigorous emphasis on caring for life before death. These are the importance of the moral life for the attainment of eternal life, the importance of alleviating suffering according to the New Testament, and the historical significance of Christians in agitation for better living conditions. A fourth pointed out the prevalence of quietistic attitudes in other religions and philosophies.¹⁸ There is no reason why the attitude of Bultmann, Barth and the post-Barthians to life before death need belong to their approach alone.

These strengths belonging to the account of eternal life as the eternalizing of the lived life are connected however with a major difficulty: the question of human subjectivity. We should not be shy of asking some apparently simple-minded questions: Will we know ourselves and others as healed, completed, restored? Will we know and love God who has eternalized our histories? It is tantalizingly difficult to establish a firm answer to these questions in Barthian and post-Barthian eschatology, which perhaps suggests that the only answer to these questions is: no. And so, lurking beneath the twentieth century Protestant account of eternal life as this life's eternalization is the final element to the pattern as a whole: *the loss of the subject*.

This can be made clearer as follows. If we compare the individual eschatology of Luther and Calvin with that of twentieth century theologians, there is striking continuity. The theologians of both periods stress the revelation of our righteousness in Christ, understand heaven as the presence of God, and emphasize the dependence of the person on God for life and the beyond. But there is one crucial area where the recent thinkers have moved away from the Reformers: the presence of knowing, loving subjects in heaven. Neither Bultmann nor Barth, neither Moltmann nor Jüngel develop any account of subjects in heaven who know and love God and others (although they do not declare the contrary to be the case).

¹⁸ John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 27.

It seems that the dominant description of eternal life as eternalization of the lived life offers no scope for subjectivity beyond death. Eternalization involves the individual being healed, rectified, redeemed and glorified as the object of God's action, but seems to prevent the possibility of subjective knowledge of this action, and love for other subjects and God.

There are hints in all four of our principal subjects that they sense this absence. Bultmann recognizes that the New Testament writers believe that after death, we will be found in Christ or with Christ, and that this is not entirely reducible to realized eschatology.¹⁹ Barth repeatedly expresses his belief that the reconciled will participate in fellowship with God, a belief which sits, unreconciled, alongside his account of the end in which the creature will not be.²⁰ Moltmann attempts to allow for the possibility of subjectivity in eternal life, but, as was argued in chapter 5, this attempt is fraught with difficulties thrown up by the rest of his system. Jüngel intimates that eternal life might involve the implementation of our missed opportunities.²¹ But these hints in the four theologians remain at the level of footnotes and unreconciled tensions alongside the more strongly asserted repudiation of the continuation of human subjects beyond death in the presence of God. At best they discuss the possibility of perfecting the life that has been lived, but remain silent as to a life yet to be lived. The dominant motif of eternalizing of the lived life implies loss of subjectivity.

3. The Rejection of Natural Theology

Why have so many Protestant theologians since and including Bultmann and Barth developed accounts of eternal life without the presence of knowing, loving subjects? At least one reason may lie in the presuppositions these theologians have about the nature of theology itself. In their choice of sources for theology, and in their

¹⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, "Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*," in *Faith and Understanding*, ed. R. W. Funk, trans. L. P. Smith (London: SCM, 1969), 93.

²⁰ See e.g., Barth, *CD* III/3, 90.

²¹ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darren L. Guder (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 215.

method for reflection on these sources, these theologians set up the framework out of which their understanding of heaven must necessarily come. What then is their presupposition, their method, their criterion for the sources of theology?

Broadly speaking the answer to this is as follows: the theologians of this study have as their central presupposition the belief that theology is the response to the self-revelation of God, a self-revelation which is discoverable only in Jesus Christ. This means that the only place where God is knowable is in God's union with humanity in Jesus Christ. All Christian understanding of God follows from that which is perceived in faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This presupposition is closely related to their belief that theology can be of two basic varieties – natural and revealed. Revealed theology, they claim, is that which proceeds in response to and as reflection on the self-revelation of God in the incarnation. Natural theology, by contrast, is characterized as thinking which attempts to understand God without recourse to the scriptural revelation in Christ. Typically, so this categorization goes, natural theology depends on unaided reason to discover whether or not God exists, what the divine attributes are, how the existence of God can be justified in the face of evils moral and natural, whether human beings have immortal souls, and so on. A further belief which forms part of this presupposition is that natural theology is disabled. It is only the *attempt* to gain knowledge of God; it is only the *mistaken* efforts of unaided reason to comprehend God. By comparison with revealed theology, natural theology produces findings about a false god.

At this point the question as to whether or not it is right to distinguish between revealed and natural theology, and to do so in the preceding terms, will be laid to one side. A quite different understanding of what theology as natural and revealed is will be offered in due course. What matters here is the *perception* of natural theology – caricature or not – in dialectical theology and its heirs. Why was there such a furious polemic against it? Answers will emerge from more detailed examination of the theologians of this study, but the basic positions have been laid out elegantly by Gary Badcock, whose account will prove a clear guide to our discussion. Badcock outlines three main reasons for the rejection of natural theology in Barthian theology. First, as a result of the fall human reason is corrupted, and so we are

“incapable of discerning theological truth.”²² Second, natural theology leads to bad consequences, particularly in politics. Third, in Badcock’s words, “since God is literally defined by who he is in the Christ-event, there being no case for any distinction of content between God as he is in himself and as he is in his revelation, it is necessary for us to look to revelation rather than to reason to find out who God is, or even if he exists, since he is who he is nowhere else than in his revelation.”²³ In short: the first reason is the corruption of reason. The second is bad consequences. And third, God’s self-revelation renders natural theology otiose.

We now turn to examples of this polemic in the subjects of the thesis. Obviously the focus of chapters 3 to 6 of this thesis was the doctrine of individual eschatology; nevertheless scattered throughout these chapters is evidence to support the contention that the rejection of natural theology is indeed a presupposition of the main stream of twentieth century Protestant theology. Badcock’s reasons for the rejection of natural theology are not all present in every theologian occupying us here, but all four appeal to at least one of these reasons. The rest of this section will now draw together this material from chapters 3 to 6, discussing Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel in turn, adding, where necessary, accounts of the theologians’ explicit remarks on the relationship between natural and revealed theology.

Bultmann and Barth

Rudolf Bultmann, as we saw in chapter 3, develops his projects of demythologizing and the existential understanding of faith from his belief that natural theology fails to respect the uniqueness of theology’s object – God. His antipathy to natural theology is clear from an essay entitled “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology’.”²⁴ The crux of the problem for Bultmann is the dichotomy between natural theology and faith. Natural theology “ignores the truth that the only possible access to God is faith.”²⁵ By contrast with Catholic theology, Protestant theology does not regard God as an existent entity. Instead, “faith speaks of God as other than the world. Faith knows

²² Gary Badcock, “The Theology of John McIntyre: A Critical Introduction,” in John McIntyre, *Theology After the Storm: Reflections on the Upheavals in Modern Theology and Culture*, ed. Gary Badcock (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 8.

²³ Badcock, “The Theology of John McIntyre,” 9.

²⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” in *Faith and Understanding*, 313-31.

²⁵ Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” 313.

that God becomes manifest only through his revelation and that in the light of that revelation everything which was previously called God is not God.”²⁶ Natural theology is something which characterizes Roman Catholic theology according to Bultmann. His argument continues: “Against every open or veiled affirmation that ‘there is a God within us’... Protestant theology must insist that God is visible only for faith and that faith is obedient submission to God’s revelation in the word of the Christian proclamation.”²⁷ There are consequences for non-Christian religions: “Faith rejects the idea that God is revealed everywhere in religions and in religious people.”²⁸ Perhaps the clearest expression of his objection to natural theology is as follows: “Knowledge of God cannot be extracted from the world!”²⁹ Bultmann’s argument is fairly simple. In faith, the Christian encounters God’s revelation, a revelation contained in the Christian proclamation, that is, in Jesus Christ. This is the basis of true theology. All other so-called theology, which does not proceed on the basis that God is only encountered in obedient submission to revelation in the form of Jesus Christ, is sinful: “all human speaking of God, outside faith, speaks not of God but of the devil.”³⁰ Thus none of the following – Roman Catholic theology, other religions, philosophy of religion – qualifies as true theology.

Bultmann’s analysis of natural theology vis-à-vis faith cannot pass without a brief comment regarding his characterization of Roman Catholic theology as regarding God as “an existent entity, of the same kind as the world, an entity which like the phenomena of the world can be an object of knowledge.”³¹ This is a travesty. It is hard to think of a single Catholic theologian who would recognize him or herself in that account of Catholic belief about God. Only an uncharitable and probably mistaken reading of scholasticism would lead the student of Catholic theology to such a view. Certainly it does not refer to Thomas Aquinas, for whom God, as creator and sustainer of the world, could not be counted as a member of the world.³²

²⁶ Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” 313-4.

²⁷ Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” 314.

²⁸ Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” 318.

²⁹ Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” 322.

³⁰ Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” 322.

³¹ Bultmann, “The Problem of ‘Natural Theology,’” 313.

³² See Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) for the best recent account of Aquinas’ understanding of the nature of theology.

Bultmann, in the essay "The Question of Natural Revelation,"³³ (also discussed in chapter 3) reiterates his opposition to natural theology. Only in Jesus Christ is God's grace made manifest. Only in this word are the usual postulates of natural theology – God's omnipotence, holiness and eternity – taken seriously. The only revelation of God is found therefore in Christ. Nevertheless, Bultmann does allow a certain, limited role for "natural revelation." Nature and history do speak to us, revealing ironically the way that humanity obstructs the revelation of God. "This, then, is the constant revelation of God in nature and history – that it teaches us that we do not, in fact, possess the revelation, and that in what we are and have we are of no account in God's sight."³⁴ Natural revelation has a preliminary role to the revelation to faith, functioning as a sort of pin pricking the balloon of our inflated and mistaken natural knowledge of God. Revelation in nature and history "constantly refers us to the revelation of the forgiving grace of God in Christ."³⁵ The oddness of this account of natural revelation becomes clear when it is realized that for Bultmann, revelation in nature and history says only to the thinker: "My message to you is that: 'I have no message for you.'" The content of natural revelation is the very absence of content. For Bultmann then it is clear that faith and natural theology are at odds, with access to God obtained only by means of faith.

It is Karl Barth, however, who gained notoriety for his rejection of natural theology. As we saw in chapter 4, the later Barth develops his theological anthropology on the sole foundation of the humanity of the man Jesus Christ. This might lead us to consider that natural theology would be important for Barth, since Jesus was obviously, as a human being, a part of nature. But Barth takes a quite different approach, arguing that since our understanding of humanity is derived from Jesus' humanity, of death from Jesus' death, and of eternal life from Jesus' resurrection, theological anthropology is developed in response to revelation rather than by reason. We should expect his remarks on the nature of the theological enterprise to confirm in *theory* his *practice* of deriving doctrine from the person of

³³ Rudolf Bultmann, "The Question of Natural Revelation," in *Essays: Philosophical and Theological*, trans. James C. G. Smith (London: SCM, 1955), 90-118.

³⁴ Bultmann, "The Question of Natural Revelation," 118.

³⁵ Bultmann, "The Question of Natural Revelation," 118.

Jesus Christ. And his writing on natural theology does in fact make clear his antipathy towards it.

The classic place for understanding Barth's attitude to natural theology is *No! Answer to Emil Brunner*.³⁶ This is a response to Brunner's tentative recovery of natural theology for Protestant thought in the short *Nature and Grace*. Despite this debate's fame and great influence, it has been argued, for example by Thiselton, that it is not the best place for understanding Barth's real position regarding natural theology since it represents only a specific stage in Barth's thinking.³⁷ Clearly, Barth changed his mind on a number of issues throughout his career, and he does find some kind of limited role for natural theology in his later thought, as we shall see below.³⁸ Nevertheless, a comparison of *No!* with the theological anthropology of *Church Dogmatics* III/2 discussed in chapter 4 reveals a great affinity.

So what does Barth say in the tract? He stakes out his ground in the field of grace. Brunner's piece claims that a natural theology can be maintained alongside the Reformation principle of *sola gratia* (grace alone). For Barth this is nonsensical: the very meaning of grace belies the possibility of a theology dependent on *nature*. He claims that this generation's theological task is "to understand revelation as grace and grace as revelation and therefore turn away from all 'true' or 'false' *theologia naturalis* by ever making new decisions and being ever controverted anew."³⁹ Natural theology has nothing to do with God's grace, and nothing to do with the incarnation. It seems that for Barth, grace, revelation and Christ are synonymous insofar as the nature of theology is concerned, a questionable equation. Barth defines the enemy as follows: "By 'natural theology' I mean every (positive or negative) *formulation of a system* which claims to be theological, *i.e.* to interpret divine revelation, whose *subject* however, differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ and whose *method* therefore differs equally from the exposition of Holy Scripture."⁴⁰ The only revelation which calls forth real theology is the revelation in

³⁶ Karl Barth, *No! Answer to Emil Brunner*, in *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel with an introduction by John Baillie (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 65-128.

³⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, "Barr on Barth and Natural Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1994), 521.

³⁸ See Thiselton, "Barr on Barth and Natural Theology," 525.

³⁹ Barth, *No!*, 71.

⁴⁰ Barth, *No!*, 74-5.

Jesus Christ. As part of his rebuttal of Brunner, Barth takes issue with the possibility that there is some point of contact in the human being for revelation. He asks, "What is the meaning of 'sovereign, freely electing grace of God' if without it there is a 'capacity for revelation' in man, which is merely supported by grace?"⁴¹ For Barth, the answer is none – grace is meaningless if we can already receive revelation without it. He comes back again and again to the centrality of grace. God has revealed Godself to humanity; humanity is reconciled to God in Jesus Christ. All theology which does not begin from this truth is "natural" and worthless. There is no place for natural theology because "man is a being that has to be overcome by the Word and the Spirit of God, that has to be reconciled to God, justified and sanctified, comforted and ruled and finally saved by God. Is that not enough? Is not every addition to that really a subtraction from it?"⁴² In other words, a natural revelation would take away from the uniqueness and exclusivity of the revelation in Jesus Christ. This is no theoretical irritation for Barth: it is at the centre of what he is trying to achieve. His final verdict on natural theology is passionate: "Only the theology and the church of the antichrist can profit from it."⁴³

Barth's interpreters echo the importance of his polemical stand. T. F. Torrance makes the case with clarity:

If we... take the Incarnation seriously... how can we avoid the implication that, whatever happened before the Incarnation, now that it has taken place, God is nowhere to be known apart from or behind the back of Jesus Christ?... And if once we have come to know God in his own living Reality in Jesus Christ, how can we go on maintaining the validity of natural knowledge reached independently of revelation without driving a deep wedge between the God whom we claim to know by nature and God's own living Reality in the Incarnation.⁴⁴

For Torrance, natural theology must be rejected because of the existence of revelation in Jesus Christ. Given the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, any so-called revelation in nature would point to a different god. Torrance believes that

⁴¹ Barth, *No!*, 79.

⁴² Barth, *No!*, 126.

⁴³ Barth, *No!*, 128.

⁴⁴ T. F. Torrance, "The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth," *Religious Studies* 6 (1970), 124.

Barth rejects natural theology principally for the third reason enumerated by Badcock above: given God's self-revelation, all natural theology is "irrelevant and an inevitable source of confusion."⁴⁵ Ingolf Dalferth similarly argues that it is Barth's understanding of the centrality of revelation that leads to his denigration of natural theology. For Barth, God is "the true or real reality utterly beyond anything accessible to us by experience or reflection."⁴⁶ This explains "why Barth rejects every theology whose main concern is to answer problems posed by natural reality and our shared human experience instead of expounding the reality of God's revelation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."⁴⁷ Again, Badcock's third reason. Andrew Louth makes the same point, arguing that for Barth, natural theology seeks to show the necessity of Christian theism, whereas there is nothing necessary about God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ The often-made accusation that Barth's later theology is Christomonist arises from this sort of concentration on Christ as the only source of knowledge of God. It is an audacious claim, whose attempted refutation comprises section 5 of this chapter.

Mention must be made here of tentative remarks made late in the *Church Dogmatics* which have been thought to comprise a natural theology. They follow Calvin's theme that the world is the theatre of God's glory, and centre on the notion of lights. Jesus Christ is for Barth the one Word of God, and the one light. Nevertheless, there are other words and lights, other revelations even, of which we should take note. Barth's account is separated into two: words and lights. The other *words* are contained in the Bible, in the history of the church and outside the walls of the church.⁴⁹ Jesus' parables are examples of words alongside Christ himself, the one Word of God. Their source is God: God's authority is exercised through Christ in the entire world, and so God is free to "cause Himself to be attested in it."⁵⁰ Those who speak such words are commissioned to do so by God: "it must have pleased the Word of God to allow itself to be in some sense reflected and

⁴⁵ Torrance, "The Problem of Natural Theology," 127.

⁴⁶ Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 117.

⁴⁷ Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy*, 117.

⁴⁸ Andrew Louth, "Barth and the Problem of Natural Theology," *The Downside Review* 87 (1969), 268-77.

⁴⁹ See James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 188-95, for a discussion of Barth's understanding of "other words."

reproduced in the words of these men.”⁵¹ Their relationship with the Word itself is as follows: if true, they “must be in the closest material and substantial conformity and agreement with the one Word of God Himself.”⁵² But this understanding of words alongside the one Word is essentially another form of Barth’s Christocentric account of revelation. He claims it is not a natural theology. Rather, words are “attestations of the self-impartment of the God who acts as Father in the Son by the Holy Ghost.”⁵³ There is not enough scope for human freedom in this account of words for it to be anything other than a fairly crude explanation of God’s self-revelation in contexts which do not seem to be identical with Jesus Christ. As Barth says, “If there are true words of God, it is all miraculous.”⁵⁴

As for *lights*, this is Barth’s term for the features of creation which witness to its own being.⁵⁵ They point to what endures in creation. Barth enumerates six: existence, the rhythm of being, contrarities in being, regularity, freedom and the mystery of the cosmos. These lights, perceptible by common sense, are received from the Creator. However, these lights are only relatively true, unified and final. They make nothing known definitively. Their truths are only integrated into the one truth of God’s Word when the Light of Jesus Christ shines on them. The key question to ask of this account of lights is whether they offer any potential for going beyond them – to some source of order, or a creator. If so, would that not be a form of natural theology? Barth is uncharacteristically unpolemical at this point. He writes of the sixth light, the mystery of the cosmos, as follows:

We do not speak of the mystery of God, but of that immanent in the created world as such. We say too much if we even try to describe this as the mask of God, let alone if we call it His revelation... Basically, the point is that it is creature, but nothing more; that it is grounded, but not in and of itself. But we see this as we listen to the Word of God, not as we listen to that spoken by the creature.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Karl Barth, *CD IV/3*, 97.

⁵¹ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 111.

⁵² Barth, *CD IV/3*, 111.

⁵³ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 117.

⁵⁴ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 118.

⁵⁵ See John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and his Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 69-80, for a discussion of lights and natural theology.

⁵⁶ Barth, *CD IV/3*, 149.

The lights do imply that creation is not self-subsistent, but they only imply this in the light of God's Word, Jesus Christ. Fundamentally, the lights of the world reveal on their own the nature of the world, and offer no guidance regarding anything that is not created. This account of lights maintains the strict dichotomy between what reason ("common sense") can achieve, and that which is revealed to faith. It cannot be understood as a fundamental shift from Barth's position articulated in *No!*

Some commentators take Barth's attack on natural theology one stage further, arguing that the *Church Dogmatics* is a natural theology. Robert Jenson, for example, claims that when Barth writes the *Dogmatics*, he locates the earlier dialectic between time and eternity, the controlling image of his commentary on Romans, in Christology. Time and eternity no longer mark an unbreachable chasm between God and creation, but are brought together in the man Jesus Christ. Consequently, the impossibility of natural theology dissolves. Indeed, according to Jenson's interpretation of Barth, "all theology is natural theology, in that our theological thoughts are necessarily 'natural' to us, necessarily emerge from our religious attempt to benefit from God."⁵⁷ This is a bold and potentially fruitful interpretation of Barth's work as a whole, yet when his dogmatics are studied in detail, it does not seem accurate. A truly natural theology, as we shall see below, must genuinely reckon with all human experience being divine revelation, and yet in the example we looked at closely in chapter 4, anthropology, Barth consistently declares that the only source for anthropology is the man Jesus Christ, denying the opposite (and intuitive) view that the natural understanding we have of human beings is of help in comprehending Jesus. The only way to understand Barth as holding that all theology is natural theology is to say something like: for Barth, God reveals Godself in Jesus Christ such that all our natural understanding must be conformed to this most fundamental reality. But it seems to be playing with words to call this natural theology: this is from top to bottom a theology of christocentric (or perhaps "christic") revelation, to which the only proper response is faith. Barth may say that this faith is to be expressed rationally, but that really means that reason may only play a subservient role to faith and the revelation to which faith responds.

⁵⁷ Robert Jenson, "Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 1:34.

Furthermore, as pointed out in chapter 4, it seems evident that the *Church Dogmatics* still relies on a dialectic between time and eternity as Jenson himself notes. God exists eternally; creation exists temporally. Indeed it is the crudity of this dialectic and the concept of time it employs that is partly responsible for the difficulty Barth has in developing the tentative remarks he makes about participation in God beyond death.

Those commentators who are not persuaded by Barth's rejection of natural theology tend to argue that Barth dispenses with it because of Badcock's first or second reasons – the corruption of reason, or dangerous consequences. John Baillie, for example, in the introduction to the volume containing Brunner's *Nature and Grace* and Barth's *No!*, states that the debate turns on whether the total corruption of human nature was now to apply to human reason so as "to render men incapable of reaching any knowledge of God by the exercise of their own powers of thought."⁵⁸ As we shall see later in this chapter, Baillie himself offers good reasons why we should not be so pessimistic about the powers of human reason. James Barr believes, on the other hand, that the principal (though not the only) reason for Barth's rejection of natural theology was the association it held for him with the German Christian movement, which apologized for Hitler during his rise to power in 1930s Germany. Barth certainly did hold that nationalist, even racist German Christian ideas were "the logical result of the long compromise with natural theology."⁵⁹ Brunner's attempted rehabilitation of natural theology, after all, had proved popular in German Christian circles, as Barth notes.⁶⁰ Whether or not Barth is correct that these racist ideas followed from natural theology is not of great significance for our argument. After all, it is one thing to say that a discipline produces objectionable conclusions, but quite another to say that the entire discipline is therefore harmful. One can reject many Freudian conclusions, but still maintain the worth of psychology. One can reject logical positivism, but still believe in the importance of linguistic philosophy. As it happens, it is not entirely clear in the case in question whether the German Christians developed their racist

⁵⁸ John Baillie, Introduction to *Natural Theology*, 6. See also John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 20.

⁵⁹ Barr, *Biblical Faith*, 11.

⁶⁰ Barth, *No!*, 72.

ideas using arguments from natural theology. In fact, a strong case can be made for their dependence on so-called special revelation regarding the German people.⁶¹

Moltmann and Jüngel

When we move forward to the younger generation of theologian studied here, we find that the sharpness of Bultmann's and Barth's polemic against natural theology has been slightly blunted. This should not surprise us: it is part of the argument that Moltmann and Jüngel are working within the framework for theology laid down by the dominant tradition in twentieth century Protestant tradition and take it somewhat for granted. All the same, a closer look will show their antipathy to any theology not derived primarily from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Jürgen Moltmann recasts the terms of the debate Bultmann and Barth have with natural theology. According to Moltmann in *Theology of Hope* (1964),⁶² dialectical theology misunderstands *revelation*. The polarization of the debate between revealed and natural theology is based on the different answers the participants give to the question of knowledge of God. But Moltmann does not believe that God's revelation is essentially about knowledge of God but the promises of God: "God reveals himself in the form of promise and in the history that is marked by promise."⁶³ Moltmann thus wants to move beyond what he calls the formalism of revelation theology to a more filled-out understanding of the content of revelation – of God as faithful to promise. Natural theology is similarly recast as theology on the way: fragmentary sketches for the future glory, "not the presupposition of Christian faith, but the future goal of Christian hope."⁶⁴ What then for the sources for theology? Moltmann thinks the dualism of revelation and reason unhelpful, and writes:

Our task is to set the subject of divine revelation no longer in antithesis to man's momentary understanding of the world and of himself, but to take this very

⁶¹ See Barr, *Biblical Faith*, 113.

⁶² This and further dates in brackets for Moltmann's works refer to the first German publication.

⁶³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967), 42.

⁶⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 282.

understanding of self and the world up into, and open its eyes for, the eschatological outlook in which revelation is seen as promise of the truth.⁶⁵

Although Moltmann's statement here is not unambiguous, he seems to be espousing an openness to other sources for theological reflection besides the Bible.

Nevertheless, any such sources have only a secondary role alongside scripture. As Jenson points out, the movement known as "the theology of hope," developing around Moltmann and others, was a reaction to modern theology, particularly nineteenth century Protestant liberalism. This, of course, gives it at least a common enemy with Barth. Jenson writes:

Theology of hope is a biblical theology in the sense that, against the practice of modern theology, it does not think the deliverances of Enlightened religion or of ideological interpretations of scientific procedures or results must always trump, that it does not suppose that truth taught by Aristotle or Newton is more foundational or comprehensive or natural than truth taught by Isaiah or John. And it chooses eschatology as a specific ground to hold, in part because this locus was a chief victim of mediation in the period just behind us.⁶⁶

Jenson is right to emphasize the roots of the theology of hope, associated with Moltmann, as the restatement of the revelational power of scripture over philosophical thought. Consequently, despite the openness Moltmann has towards experience as a source for theological reflection, it can only play a minor part in Moltmann's early theology.

In *The Crucified God* (1972), Moltmann develops the theology of hope's emphasis on the primacy of revelation in scripture. Drawing heavily on Paul, Luther and dialectical theology, Moltmann develops a theology of the cross. As its name suggests, this is theology which begins from the revelation of God in the event of Good Friday. It is about "the radical orientation of theology and the church on Christ... The more the 'cross of reality' is taken seriously, the more the crucified Christ becomes the general criterion of theology."⁶⁷ The cross "refutes everything,

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 44.

⁶⁶ Robert Jenson, "Second Thoughts about Theologies of Hope," an unpublished paper delivered at the conference "The Biblical Theology of Hope," Aberdeen University, August 1999.

⁶⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974), 4.

and excludes the syncretistic elements in Christianity.”⁶⁸ Moltmann argues that the traditional approach of natural theology which argues by means of analogy cannot alone recognize God. Rather, God can only be revealed in what is opposite, not what is similar. It is only in the godforsakenness of the cross that God is revealed. And this has “far-reaching critical consequences for the conventional religious theism which is found in Christianity.”⁶⁹ Any theology which does not see “its problem and its task in knowing God in the crucified Christ” tends to be “pure theory.”⁷⁰ Moltmann comes close here to the Barthian division of theology into that which reflects on the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and every other approach. This rejection of natural theology falls under Badcock’s third reason: God defines Godself in self-revelation in Jesus Christ. And, despite his earlier criticism of the Barthian emphasis on knowledge of God, by *The Crucified God*, Moltmann characterizes Christianity’s problem and task as knowing God in the crucified Christ. His earlier openness to other sources for theology seems to have evaporated.

Later works continue to contain a polemic against natural theology. In *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (1980), Moltmann claims that natural theology is responsible for the primacy of God’s *unity* in theology. The finding of revelation theology, that God is a *unity of three*, is forced out by the logically prior understanding of God’s oneness. Moltmann frames his accusation as follows: “Natural theology’s definitions of the nature of the deity quite obviously become a prison for the statements made by the theology of revelation.”⁷¹ Clearly, Moltmann draws a fundamental distinction between natural and revealed theology, believing natural theology to be an impediment for the proper development of theology as a response to revelation.

But more recently Moltmann has advocated an approach with some affinity to natural theology. *The Spirit of Life* (1991) in particular criticizes theology which stresses a dichotomy between revelation and *experience*. Moltmann points out that when dialectical theology made revelation and experience mutually exclusive alternatives for the basis for theology, choosing the former rather than the latter,

⁶⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 7.

⁶⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 28.

⁷⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 68.

⁷¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1981), 17.

they made “natural human theology” impossible.⁷² But Moltmann believes this to be a false dichotomy, writing that he cannot see “any fundamental alternative between God’s revelation to human beings, and human experience of God.”⁷³ This is grounded for Moltmann on his understanding of the Holy Spirit as God’s immanence in human experience, as indeed, the basis of all forms of vitality. Human experience of God is not then some entirely human response to the revelation of the transcendent God: it is the self-transcendence of the Spirit-indwelling human person. We can lay to one side the difficulties in Moltmann’s understanding of the Holy Spirit here, but should recognize the congeniality this understanding of revelation and experience as interdependent has for certain kinds of natural theology. Moltmann seems to have veered away from Barthian strictures on the sources of theology.⁷⁴

So where does that leave us with regard to Moltmann’s attitude to natural theology? A brief survey of Moltmann’s career has shown us that he does not retain a consistent position towards it. At times he echoes the dialectical movement’s insistence on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ alone. At others he wishes to find God’s revelation in a wide variety of ordinary human experience. Nor is there a definite progression in his thought: by contrast, his approach to natural theology seems rather to see-saw from openness towards it to the denial of its usefulness and back again. What drives Moltmann’s theological presuppositions seems to be the dogmatic positions he thinks to be right – in which case we can hardly call his presuppositions presuppositions. An unsystematic thinker, then, Moltmann nevertheless uses polemic against natural theology in certain central areas of relevance for eschatology, particularly (as we saw in chapter 5) the immortality of the soul. Belief in the soul’s immortality as a finding of natural theology Moltmann considers to be responsible for Christian theology’s negative attitude towards the body, towards society and towards the importance of improving the conditions of life before death. Here, Moltmann’s rejection of natural theology seems to follow

⁷² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1992), 5.

⁷³ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 6.

⁷⁴ A recent article similarly describes natural theology in positive terms as “based on the presence of God in what he has created.” Jürgen Moltmann, “What is a Theologian?” trans. Margaret Kohl, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999), 196.

from what he perceives as its bad consequences – Badcock’s second reason. The relationship between Moltmann’s individual eschatology and his attitude to the methods of good theology may have an ad hoc flavour, as opposed to the other theologians of this study, but they are present nonetheless.

Eberhard Jüngel, as we discovered in chapter 6, draws a sharp distinction between theology which begins from the work of human reason and that which thinks God on the basis of God’s self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ, and even more specifically, in the event of Jesus’ death. Theology should be the latter – the attempt to think God, equivalent to listening to the God who comes to speech in a human way, and so is “the exposition of the Holy Scriptures.”⁷⁵ By contrast, the former approach, which works as it were by removing Christ from our thought to enable some general concept of God, produces not Christian theology but Christian theism, a substitute for faith.⁷⁶ The consequence of theism, according to Jüngel, is the rise of the autonomous individual, and in its train humanism. Theism leads to atheism. Only the crucified God as the foundation for theology leads us out of the theism-atheism blind alley. Jüngel could not be clearer about the disastrous consequences of natural theology.

It is clear that Jüngel rejects any natural theology principally on Badcock’s third ground – that God’s revelation of who God is is found in the event of Jesus Christ, thus relegating all other so-called natural revelation of God to irrelevance: “God’s revelation is only really comprehended as the crisis of all that is naturally and historically self-evident.”⁷⁷ If traditional natural theology were to be successful, it would be because the truth of God is self-evident in nature and history; but because “natural theology attempts to *demonstrate* that which ought to be *self-evident*,”⁷⁸ natural theology cannot be successful.⁷⁹ But Badcock’s second reason for the twentieth

⁷⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, “‘My Theology’ – A Short Summary,” in *Theological Essays II*, trans. A. Neufeldt-Fast and John Webster, ed. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 7.

⁷⁶ See Jüngel, “My Theology,” 9.

⁷⁷ Jüngel, “My Theology,” 14.

⁷⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, “Extra Christum Nulla Salus – A Principle of Natural Theology?” in *Theological Essays*, ed. and trans. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 182.

⁷⁹ Various commentators make this point. See, for example, Colin Gunton, “The Being and Attributes of God: Eberhard Jüngel’s Dispute with the Classical Philosophical Tradition,” in *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel in his Sixtieth Year*, ed. J. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 12; and Paul DeHart, “Eberhard Jüngel on the Structure of Theology,” *Theological Studies* 47 (1996), 62.

century rejection of natural theology is also present in Jüngel: natural theology leads to the bad (and related) consequences of classical theism and Western atheism.

Nevertheless, Jüngel does not reject natural theology completely but attempts instead to develop his own account of a “true” natural theology. This builds on Barth’s later account of words and lights in creation:

It is not at all impossible, coming from the one Word of God (to which alone the church has to listen, and which alone the church has to recognise as the source of its proclamation), to outline a *more natural* theology than so-called natural theology, a *natural theology* which knows Jesus Christ as the one who has reconciled both human beings and the world.⁸⁰

This “more natural theology” enables us “to see the one and only light of life reflecting in the manifold lights of creation and thus, in its light, being able to see with astonishment creation’s own peculiar light.”⁸¹ Yet John Webster’s judgment is sound when he characterizes Jüngel’s “more natural theology” as “a theology of nature... a theological account of the natural order.”⁸² This is not, ultimately, about the sources of theological reflection, but the practice of theological reflection based on revelation in scripture on the natural order including human reason. Jüngel remains in his theological methodology a student and follower of Karl Barth.

This brief look at the attitudes of Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel to natural theology has shown their shared presuppositions regarding the correct method of theology. All of them distinguish, more or less sharply, between revealed and natural theology; all consider natural theology to be inadequate for the task of thinking about God for one or more of the reasons outlined by Badcock; all consider the true task of theology to be reflection on God’s self-revelation, principally in Christ, and even more specifically, in his death. The next section will establish how this theological presupposition against natural theology has affected the major doctrines associated with individual eschatology.

⁸⁰ Eberhard Jüngel, *Christ, Justice and Peace: Towards a Theology of the State in Dialogue with the Barmen Declaration*, trans. D. Bruce Hamill and Alan J. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992) 26-7.

⁸¹ Jüngel, *Christ, Justice and Peace*, 28-9. The same idea is found in Jüngel, “My Theology,” 15.

⁸² John Webster, *Eberhard Jüngel: An Introduction to his Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 122 (my emphasis).

4. Natural Theology and Immortality

The Marginalization of Individual Eschatology

As we shall see, the traditional understanding of individual eschatology is associated in the minds of Barth and the post-Barthians with natural theology. Consequently, when natural theology is rejected as being an inappropriate method of theological enquiry, individual eschatology is marginalized. Wolfhart Pannenberg, in an essay entitled "Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology," draws out the connection as follows. He compares Karl Rahner's approach to eschatology to that of most twentieth century Protestant theologians. Rahner, according to Pannenberg, bases his eschatology of the individual on anthropological considerations. Eschatology, according to Rahner, is theological anthropology in the mode of consummation. Twentieth century Protestant approaches, by contrast, "shy away from this line of thought and prefer to argue from the divine promises laid down in the biblical traditions and culminating in Jesus' message and history."⁸³ (Particularly Jesus' death and resurrection, it might be added.) Indeed, Pannenberg argues that Rahner's anthropological approach is in sharp contrast to the Protestants', locating the nub of the issue in the debate over natural theology:

The argument for the content of eschatological hope on the basis of the biblical promises is related, of course, to a special emphasis on scripture in the Protestant theological tradition. The implications of its use over against an anthropological approach, such as Rahner's, have been spelled out in Karl Barth's criticism of "natural theology." There is the concern that scripture and revelation would be useless if the content of their promise of salvation could be found already in the structures of human existence as such.⁸⁴

Pannenberg connects here the twentieth century Protestant distrust of natural theology with the adoption of particular forms of individual eschatology, "laid down in the biblical traditions." But, as he points out, if the anthropological arguments for and about eternal life (natural theology's arguments) are discounted, as is fashionable in German Protestant theology, "the theologian becomes unable even to account for

⁸³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology," *Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984), 121.

⁸⁴ Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions," 121-2.

the meaning implicit in the word 'promise' itself."⁸⁵ Without a natural theology about the individual and eternal life, revealed theology lacks any way to understand the object of God's promise.

Pannenberg's argument has taken us a little further than the current stage of our own, though the point he is making is correct. At this stage, however, it is enough to establish the marginalization of individual eschatology in the subjects of this thesis because of the association that it has for them with natural theology.

Expanding on Pannenberg's basic point, let us see how this negative association is attacked under a number of different but related guises, as follows.

First, traditional findings of individual eschatology are commonly associated with *Greek conceptuality*. We have seen that Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel all compare the New Testament understanding of the human person with "Greek" or "Platonic" views of the person, and find the latter views to be inadequate. The most famous Protestant exponent of this view in the twentieth century is not one of these four, however, but Oscar Cullmann in his influential 1955 Ingersoll Lecture "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead." In this short work, Cullmann continually compares New Testament anthropology and eschatology with Greek anthropology and eschatology, and finds them to be quite different. The New Testament, he argues, employs a Jewish rather than a Greek understanding of the human person. According to the Jewish anthropology, body and soul belong together as God's good creation; but according to Greek view, the body is bad, and stifles the good soul.⁸⁶ Likewise, immortality of the soul is a pagan Greek idea which has no place in the Hebrew-based New Testament, and ought to have no place in Christian eschatology. The New Testament believes in the resurrection of the whole person, body and soul.⁸⁷ Lest this be thought to be of merely historical interest, a recent example, from Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, shows the continuing persuasiveness of Cullmann's distinction. According to Bauckham and Hart, biblical images "of holistic resurrection presuppose the Jewish and Christian understanding of the body as integral to human personal identity, by contrast with the Greek

⁸⁵ Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions," 122.

⁸⁶ Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead," in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 22-4.

⁸⁷ Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul," 10.

philosophical view that the real person is immaterial spirit.”⁸⁸ Cullmann’s argument, which is typical of Barthian and post-Barthian eschatology, exemplifies one aspect of the rejection of arguments from natural theology: the promotion of Hebrew-Christian conceptuality over against pagan-Greek.

Criticism of this somewhat crude account of Greek thought and the apparent opposition between Hebrew-Christian and Greek thought will follow in discussion of anthropology in the Bible according to James Barr later in this section, and in the following chapter when immortality and resurrection are discussed. However, a few words must be said about the treatment of Greek conceptuality in the Protestants’ polemic. Restricting our discussion to the *Phaedo*, as the twentieth century Protestants do, we find that the dialogue is far more complicated than is commonly supposed. As Simon Tugwell points out, Plato’s real interest is not immortality but the goodness of *death*.⁸⁹ The dialogue does not maintain that the soul is incapable of dying. Rather it holds that in dying well, the soul is able to attain knowledge of “the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless,” itself becoming “constant and invariable, through contact with beings of a similar nature.”⁹⁰ As far as *immortality* of the soul is concerned, Socrates develops the argument not for its own sake but to support his contention that the soul will exist in Hades. Yet with this argument he seems to subvert his principal claim: either the soul exists in Hades because a person dies well, through having practised philosophy and renounced the shifting material world; or the soul is imperishable hence goes to Hades anyway. Plato cannot really have it both ways. Tugwell concludes:

Surely the most engaging and, in a way, the most compelling part of the *Phaedo* is its picture of the drama of the soul, trying even in life to learn how to die, so that at the end it can triumphantly succeed in dying, in becoming separate from the body. This psycho-drama is not illuminated by any ascription to the soul of any life other than the tangled life of the human composite or of any identity other than that of the person who lived for a time in the body.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1999), 124.

⁸⁹ Simon Tugwell, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death* (London: DLT, 1990), 22-37.

⁹⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 131.

⁹¹ Tugwell, *Human Immortality*, 35.

The upshot of this reading of Plato's *Phaedo* is that not only is Greek thought on the nature of the human person much more complicated than is commonly supposed, but even the classical locus for the so-called Platonic doctrine of the immortal soul is ambivalent as to the need and importance of believing the soul to be immortal. The characterization of Greek thought about death and beyond in dialectic and post-Barthian theology is simplistic at best.

Second, individual eschatology's association with natural theology also connects it in the minds of Barth and post-Barthians with *Roman Catholicism*. Bultmann made it clear, as we saw, that natural theology is impermissible for the Protestant theologian partly because of its characteristic use by Catholic theology. Barth, in his debate with Brunner over natural theology, argued that what was at stake was the meaning of the Reformation principle *sola gratia*. Moltmann's and Jüngel's insistence on the centrality of the cross in our understanding of God is opposed by them to a theology of glory, much as Martin Luther had done so in the Heidelberg Disputation. Part of the problem, then, with the traditional understanding of heavenly life for these theologians, is that it seems to belong to traditionally Catholic thought. Hence the twentieth century theologians are embarrassed by certain thoughts on eschatology in Luther and Calvin, which are outlined above in chapter 2. For not only do Luther and Calvin develop relatively detailed accounts of the progress of the human being beyond death, but in the case of Calvin at least, his eschatology is closely related to his belief in the immortality of the soul, in support of which he applies to Cicero and a popular understanding of Platonism. Furthermore, Calvin is by no means completely averse to natural theology, as we saw. This forces Barth and post-Barthians to say that the Reformers were lackadaisical in this area of theology, and that it is time to become even more reformed than Luther and Calvin in the field of eschatology!

A final connection is made in the critique of individual eschatology as natural theology with *rationalism and the Enlightenment*.⁹² The great rationalist thinkers Descartes and Leibniz maintained that the human soul is by nature immortal, and argued against any understanding of human immortality depending upon God's

⁹² In this paragraph, I am largely guided by the survey in Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1984), 93-108.

miraculous intervention. This conviction remains largely unchanged in the German Enlightenment. For Kant, immortality of the soul has the status of postulate of practical reason, to guarantee the eventual coherence of virtue and happiness. Furthermore, Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* interprets Christian eschatology in entirely this-worldly terms as the progress of humankind towards the perfect moral commonwealth. Even Hume's arguments against the immortality of the soul are part of his project of dismantling the received conclusions of *natural theology*.⁹³ The Age of Reason and the Enlightenment which followed developed their understanding of individual eschatology according to the central conclusion that the human soul possessed immortality by nature, and is therefore impervious to death. And this was the conclusion of philosophical argument.

Twentieth century theology, in turning its back on positive rationalist and philosophical conclusions, turns its back on immortality. Bultmann and Barth reject the rationalistic attempt to discover truths about God and the soul by reason alone, and reject the Kantian attempt to posit God and immortality as postulates of practical reason. This rejection entails for them that Christian truth can only be known as part of faith's response to God's revelation, including the truth about human destiny. Moltmann agrees with the dialectic framework, and rejects Enlightenment approaches to religion. As regards immortality of the soul, Moltmann cites Fichte alongside Plato as an exemplar of the idea's development, before rejecting it.⁹⁴ Jüngel, in similar vein, develops his individual eschatology as a reflection on the death of Jesus, the death which is for him the fundamental event of God's self-disclosure. This theology from Jesus' death is put forward by Jüngel as the way out of the atheism which, as he sees it, results from rationalist and Enlightenment philosophy and theology. The path from Descartes leads through Kant and Fichte to Feuerbach and Nietzsche – to atheism. Enlightenment thinking about immortality is part of that whole system of theological thought which Jüngel rejects. For all four of these figures, then, rationalist and Enlightenment eschatology, focused on the articulation of immortality as a conclusion of

⁹³ See David Hume, *Essays on Suicide and the Immortal Soul*, (1783; reprint, London: Thoemmes, 1992), 23-38. Hume's judgment is uncannily similar to that of Barthian and post-Barthian theology: "in reality 'tis the Gospel and the Gospel alone, that has brought *life and immortality to light*." (23)

⁹⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 61-63.

philosophical reflection, is unpalatable, consequent on an illegitimate form of theological reflection.⁹⁵

The rejection of natural theology goes alongside therefore the rejection of a number of traditional contributory sources to individual eschatology. It means the renunciation of “Greek” conceptuality, particularly with regard to the human person. It means the dismissal of Roman Catholic theology regarding the destiny of the human being beyond death. It means the abandonment of the positive findings of rationalism and the Enlightenment (and its development in liberal Protestantism) regarding immortality. And it means the repudiation of individual eschatology from the period of classical Protestantism, both in method and doctrinal formulation.

The Dispatch of Immortality

The crucial rejection, however, and one which is connected with natural theology, Greek conceptuality, Roman Catholic, Enlightenment, liberal and classical Protestant theology, is of immortality of the soul, already mentioned at a number of places above. This requires some attention in detail. Our discussion of Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel has shown the principal approach of twentieth century Protestant anthropology in the face of death. Even if the person is body and soul, it is the whole person which ceases to exist at death. The body clearly dies and begins to decay. But the soul (if there be such a thing) comes to an end too. Death is death for the whole person. The person is mortal, and all of the person is subject to mortality. The finitude of the person applies to the whole person; the limits which bound the human being have no loopholes; the finitude of the human being entails his or her mortality. It is clear, then, that there is a wide discrepancy between traditional and most twentieth century Protestant theological articulations of the human person in the light of death, which focuses on the ascription of finitude and mortality to the person, body and soul.⁹⁶ The modern articulations are, as has been

⁹⁵ See Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, 108, who describes twentieth century Protestant thought on immortality as follows: “It would seem that the crux of the present controversy is still that repudiation of the traditional concept of immortality which first appeared in the philosophical and literary works of the decades before and after the French Revolution.”

⁹⁶ The replacement of dualism by various forms of holistic views of the person in both biblical studies and theology is surveyed in Nancey Murphy, “Human nature: Historical, Scientific, and Religious

shown, variations on an anti-dualist theme, denying that the soul exists independently of the body, denying that there is an immortal soul, and denying that our mortality is an unnatural diminution of the body's natural propensity to deathlessness.

The view that the human being possesses immortality as part of its nature is considered by these theologians to be the mistaken and dangerous finding of natural theology. They argue as they see it from revelation for the abandonment of the view that the human being possesses immortality. Let us look briefly at the theologians in turn. Rudolf Bultmann contrasts his perception of Platonic hope in life after death with Christian eschatology, and finds the fundamental difference in this: that the Platonic hope is for "the freedom of a spirit who is satisfied with perceiving the truth,"⁹⁷ whereas the Christian hope is for "the freedom of man to be himself."⁹⁸ The Greek hope envisages a continuity before and after death; for the Christian hope, "the future after death and beyond this world is a future of the totally new."⁹⁹ No theological reflection on the human person can imagine what such a future given by God would be like.

Karl Barth dispatches immortality of the soul as follows: "The central affirmation in this whole anthropology is that of the immortality of this rational thing, the human soul; and immortality is a property which does not come to it by the special grace of God, but dwells within it by nature, so that it can be proved not only by Holy Scripture but on general rational grounds."¹⁰⁰ Understandably, given its source as he sees it in rationality, Barth cannot accept any account of the immortal soul.

Jürgen Moltmann similarly rejects the idea of the immortal soul because it supposedly belongs to philosophical thought, as opposed to resurrection of the dead, which is biblical:

The history of European thought offers us two images of hope in the face of death: the image of the immortal soul, an image cherished by the ancient world; and the Bible's image of the resurrection of the dead. In the first image we have

Issues," in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy and H. Newton Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 19-24.

⁹⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 29.

⁹⁸ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 29.

⁹⁹ Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 30.

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *CD III/2*, 380.

the self-assurance of the invulnerable soul; in the second faith's assurance that God will create new life out of death.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, "the Christian hope for resurrection is... totally different from knowledge of the immortality of the soul."¹⁰² When Christian theologians talk in the language of immortality of the soul, they are dependent on Plato (in the case of patristic authors) or Descartes (in the moderns). In every case they reject the teaching of the Bible, for "the biblical creation narrative knows nothing about the primacy of the soul."¹⁰³ So a major part of Moltmann's rejection of the idea of the immortal soul is its association with philosophical reflection rather than biblical witness.

Jüngel too considers immortality of the soul to be alien to Christianity. Although he believes it to be the ruling conception which has dominated a platonized Christianity, he recommends that a de-platonized Christianity should break with it. His opposition to the immortal soul is based on revelation: the Old Testament "represents the most rigorous and effective objection to the understanding of death which is rooted in the Platonic conception of the death of Socrates,"¹⁰⁴ because, of course, the Old Testament shows very little belief in the significance of life beyond death at all.

All four of the central figures in this thesis – Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel – reject the immortality of the soul as a possible element in a Christian anthropology. And all four do so at least in part because in their view the traditional arguments for the immortal soul emerge from philosophical reflection. By contrast, the twentieth century Protestants develop their theological anthropologies from scripture, according to which, they believe, the human being does not naturally possess immortality. It should be noticed, however, how simplistic the distinctions are that they make between immortality and resurrection, between Greek and Hebrew thought and between philosophy and theology. In each case, the distinction is presented as a polar opposition, whereas in fact these distinctions are much less profound, as we shall see. Regardless of the superficiality of their critique, the

¹⁰¹ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 58.

¹⁰² Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 71.

¹⁰³ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 240.

Barthian and post-Barthian dismissal of natural theology has at least this one crucial consequence for the development of individual eschatology. It can only develop such doctrine in the absence of the fundamental plank of the previous Christian tradition's eschatology: the immortality of the soul. In turning their backs on this piece of anthropology, Barth and the post-Barthians turn their backs on the central uniting image holding together Christian eschatology throughout the history of theology.

Moreover, it is clear that the rejection of the immortality of the soul is bound up with the loss of the subject in twentieth century accounts of eternal life. The polemic against personal possession of immortality is cast in terms of the continuation of the person beyond death. There is no life *after* death, as Moltmann says. When it comes to the positive account of eternal life Bultmann, Barth and post-Barthian theologians are therefore unable to draw on the language of continuation of the person, of continued identity, or of survival of the person – all concepts traditionally secured by immortality of the soul. Yet they are also unable to conceive of individual subjectivity at all, even if not cast in terms of continuity. In other words, the rejection of immortality of the soul has ramifications beyond the abandonment of life after death as temporal continuity of the person's soul: it also prevents the conceiving of subjects beyond death at all.

What makes the theologians' situation so difficult is that they have so few resources with which to replace the immortality of the soul in their theological anthropology. Their reflection on the human being has to be conducted in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, in his life, death and resurrection. The sort of anthropology which results is one in which the human person is seen primarily in terms of being addressed by God. The sort of eschatology which results is one in which God is glorified in the redeemed history of the person. But such an approach leaves some fundamental questions unanswered: will we know ourselves and others as healed, completed, restored? Will we know and love God who has eternalized our histories? It could be argued that any eschatology which does not attempt to answer these questions is inadequate.

¹⁰⁴ Jüngel, *Death*, 54.

A Distorted Exegesis?

The final implication following from the rejection of natural theology is how it affects the area which Protestant theologians of this century believe to be the heart of their theological task: *reflection on revelation in scripture*. Given the rejection of natural theology, Bultmann, Barth and post-Barthians develop their theology in a close relationship with their exegesis of scripture, but their very rejection of natural theology has implications for the way they read the Bible. For of course they read the Bible according to the same presuppositions which guide their rejection of natural theology. This, however, may have a distorting effect on their exegesis.

This is the argument put forward in a number of works by the Old Testament scholar James Barr, principally his Gifford Lectures published as *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*. Barr's central thesis is that scripture sometimes depends on arguments from natural theology. For example, he argues that the theistic attributes of God, often ascribed to Greek philosophy rather than the Hebrew Bible, can in fact be found in the Old Testament. These include impassibility, omnipotence, omniscience and eternity.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Barr argues elsewhere that even immortality of the soul, the rejected finding of natural theology, may not be absent from the Bible. Barr argues that Hebrew thought does believe in an immortal soul, basing his contention on a close study of the Hebrew "nephesh" in the Old Testament. He finds that Genesis 2:7 ("Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a human being.") is obviously dualistic, with "nephesh" quite possibly meaning soul. Further study of the word leads Barr to conclude that "nephesh" is not

a unity of body and soul, a totality of personality comprising all these elements: it is rather, in these contexts, a superior controlling centre which accompanies, expresses and directs the existence of that totality, and one which, especially, provides the life to the whole.¹⁰⁶

As for the New Testament, Barr takes issue with those (including all the major subjects of this thesis) who believe that Paul did not believe in the immortality of the

¹⁰⁵ Barr, *Biblical Faith*, 139-43.

soul. There is no direct evidence in Paul's writings whether or not he believed in it. But his silence on the matter indicates, according to Barr, that he accepted the prevailing Jewish view, which was that the soul was immortal.¹⁰⁷

Barr's argument for the belief in immortality of the soul in both Old and New Testaments is persuasive, but ultimately it is not of supreme importance for this thesis. What does matter is Barr's central point that the Bible itself contains natural theology. In other words, the biblical writers draw on the natural revelation of creation, of their experiences in history, of their reason, to develop their understanding of God. So when Bultmann, Barth and post-Barthians argue that theology must only be a response to revelation, they argue that theology must only be a response to something which at times is the result of natural theology. This position is incoherent. The truth is that it is impossible to separate revealed from natural theology in the way Barth and post-Barthians wish to, and perhaps impossible to separate them at all.

5. Theology as Both Natural and Revealed

The argument of this chapter has been that a major stream in Protestant theology of the twentieth century, originating in the dialectical theology of Bultmann and Barth, and continuing in the work of the later Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel, distinguishes between natural and revealed theology. This is the fundamental presupposition of their dogmatic theology. Furthermore, these theologians think that natural theology is largely useless in the discovery of truth. By contrast, only by reflecting on God's revelation in Christ can the Christian theologian develop doctrine. This presupposition, perhaps even the hallmark, of Barthian and post-Barthian theology has been discussed in connection with their theology of the individual in and beyond death, and it has been argued that the rejection of natural theology has had a significant impact on the shape of individual eschatology. It is certainly clear that the absence of arguments from natural revelation (or philosophical reflection) is a

¹⁰⁶ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM, 1992), 42-43.

¹⁰⁷ Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 110-11.

contributory cause of the major difference between classical accounts of individual eschatology and those of the main stream of twentieth century Protestant theology – the loss of the knowing, loving subject in the presence of God beyond death. This is the central conclusion of this thesis.

The rest of this chapter will begin to offer an alternative path to that trod by Bultmann, Barth and their heirs by sketching a different understanding of the relation between natural and revealed theology. Based on this different understanding of the nature of theology, the following chapter will offer an attempt to clarify some of the central problems of individual eschatology.

First, we return to the essay of Pannenberg's mentioned above. In it his main point is to integrate two approaches to questions of individual eschatology. The first is the contemporary Protestant approach which focuses on the promise of God "laid down in the biblical traditions and culminating in Jesus' message and history."¹⁰⁸ Now, for Pannenberg a promise can only truly be a promise and not a seduction if it has a positive relation to the recipient's nature, but he argues that this Protestant approach to eschatology fails to relate God's promise to the recipient's nature. Indeed, it seems that the contemporary Protestant emphasis on God's promise is combined with the belief that that promise is *opposed* to the nature of the recipient. This is implied in the Protestants' disdain for arguments from human nature and desires in eschatology. Of course, a Barthian response to Pannenberg could be that God's promise does correspond to human nature but since that nature is obscured by sin the promise has the *appearance* of opposing human desires. But Pannenberg is still right to stress the difficulty at the heart of the Protestant approach. Even if sin does mask true human nature, does that mean there is nothing to be learnt about human fulfilment from human beings themselves? Does the presence of sin alongside human nature not rather imply that any answer a study of humanity affords regarding its fulfilment may be partial, but not necessarily useless thereby? Whether Pannenberg is persuasive here depends on whether one believes that sin obliterates completely human being's created nature. It is a presupposition of this thesis that it does not.

¹⁰⁸ Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions," 121.

By comparison, Pannenberg presents Rahner as arguing that anthropology is “the key for an elucidation of the meaning of eschatological hope.”¹⁰⁹ The content of eschatology consists of what is essential to human nature. Such a purely anthropological approach is as inadequate in eschatology as is a purely biblical one, for Pannenberg. He claims that if such arguments are successful, they only inform us about human nature, and offer nothing regarding the true ground of our hope, which can only be God.

Now, it is not clear here that Pannenberg correctly understands Rahner’s eschatological writings. While it is true that Rahner develops his eschatology from an understanding of the human person, it is the human person as a being who is the recipient of God’s self-communication, “a being who is open to the absolute future of God.”¹¹⁰ The anthropological approach, for Rahner, means an approach which enquires into human beings as recipients of God’s self-communication. Indeed, Pannenberg’s conclusion is more sympathetic to Rahner’s approach than he realizes:

the apparent opposition between an anthropological approach and the strictly theological argument on the basis of divine promises is misleading. The two approaches complement each other, because the argument focusing on the concept of divine promises as basis of eschatological hope requires a positive relation of their content to human nature, while the arguments from the implications of human existence remain in need of an agency that could provide what they postulate.¹¹¹

In the terms used in this chapter, the anthropological approach is a form of natural theology, and the theological approach corresponds to revealed theology.

Pannenberg’s argument is that theology as reflection on either biblical revelation or human nature is impeded in its discovery of eschatological doctrine, but that when the two approaches are combined, the theologian may proceed.

Pannenberg is right in this conclusion so far as it goes. The baneful effects on individual eschatology when natural theology (or the anthropological approach) is cast to one side leaving only biblical revelation as the source for theology have been shown. Indeed, reversing Badcock’s second reason as to why Barthians dispense

¹⁰⁹ Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions,” 121.

¹¹⁰ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978), 431.

¹¹¹ Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions,” 123.

with natural theology, it seems that natural theology must be accepted as legitimate because of the harmful consequences of abandoning it. The possibility of investigating individual eschatology in the absence of biblical revelation has not been considered here – it is hard to imagine that such theological reflection would truly be Christian theology. (This further leads to the conclusion that Pannenberg has presented something of a caricature of Rahner's thought on this point.)

Nevertheless, we can go further than Pannenberg's proposed interaction of theological and anthropological approaches to theology – the interaction of revealed and natural theology – and see that the entire dichotomy between revelational and natural theology to be false.

Let us look at the two seemingly different ways of doing theology in turn. First, consider the possibility that there is a *revealedness to nature, and within nature to humanity in particular*. As an example let us draw on the line of thinking developed by John Baillie in *Our Knowledge of God* (1939), partly in response to the debate between Barth and Brunner. Baillie suggests that nature, including human nature, can be seen as “a more general kind of revelation.”¹¹² The dichotomy between nature and revelation belongs, he argues, to the view of human nature as something static, which continues in a largely unchanging fashion, supplied by God only with a sustaining grace. In the past, then, it was thought that natural knowledge of God proceeded from this static human nature, “while God stood aside from the process.”¹¹³ But Baillie conceives of humanity quite differently. He believes that human nature is not some fixed, static entity, but rather has its own history, and that God is involved in the ongoing shaping of humanity. Elements of “human nature” such as conscience and belief in God may look natural, but in fact have resulted “from the continuing living communion between God's Spirit and the spirit of man.”¹¹⁴ Baillie continues as follows: “The truth is that there is in man no nature apart from revelation. Human nature is constituted by the self-disclosure to this poor dust of the Spirit of the living God.”¹¹⁵ He concludes:

¹¹² Baillie, *Our Knowledge*, 38.

¹¹³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge*, 39.

¹¹⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge*, 41.

¹¹⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge*, 41.

such moral and spiritual knowledge as may in any one period of human history seem to have become an inherent part of human nature, and so to be an 'unaided' natural knowledge, is actually the blessed fruit of God's personal and historical dealings with man's soul, and so in the last resort also a revealed knowledge.¹¹⁶

Baillie's basic argument that natural knowledge of God, the basis for natural theology, is really a species of revealed knowledge goes back at least to Stoic thought, yet is far-reaching in the context of twentieth century theology. Note what Baillie is not saying: the argument does not imply that God has implanted truth into us, nor that we are incapable of error regarding God. Clearly the truth is not implanted in us, and equally clearly we are capable of error. Rather, Baillie claims that what seems to be a purely natural knowledge of God is one that involves an interaction between the free mental and spiritual enquiry of the human being and the free, graceful love and inspiration of God. So-called natural theology proceeds on the basis of divine revelation in nature and particularly in and to the human person. A more recent thinker on natural theology, John Macquarrie, makes the same point in his Gifford Lectures: "There is a sense in which all natural theology is revealed theology, for if God is the source of everything, he must also be the source of knowledge of himself, and there is no 'unaided' knowledge of God, any more than there is unaided knowledge of my neighbour."¹¹⁷

As for theology which appears to be the response to revelation, that too cannot maintain the conceptual purity often ascribed to it. There is a *naturalness to revelation*: there are a number of points at which revelation is mediated by so-called natural considerations. First, revelation is revelation to human beings. If we are to appropriate it as revelation and recognize it as such, it must be comprehensible in the language and concepts with which we are familiar, even if the content itself is new. James Mackey puts it as follows: "Even if God himself, conceived as a 'wholly other' supramundane personal being were to contact the minds of individual men in

¹¹⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge*, 42-3.

¹¹⁷ John Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity* (London: SCM, 1984), 12-13. See also James P. Mackey, *The Problems of Religious Faith* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), part 2, for an extended account of faith as reason: "If I acknowledge God as the Creative Will allowing contingent existents to be, then it follows that the whole universe is communication, language which makes God present as immediately and directly as spoken address and response make human persons present to each other." (89)

what we should call special revelation, he could only reveal himself and his plans in the categories which men had already hewn out of their own direct experience of the reality that is immediately open to their gaze.”¹¹⁸

Second, let us take the central revelation-claim in Christianity, and assume that God does disclose Godself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We have to recognize that Jesus of Nazareth was a human being, and that God’s self-disclosure therefore takes place in human form, a human being like all subsequent interpreters. It is clear to the writers and readers of the gospels that this figure is a human being like them – he acts, speaks, tires, and dies as a human being. Any revelation of God which is found in this man or as this man, is found then in human actions, human passions and human words. Nothing could be more natural (and un-supernatural) than the life of a man. Again the oddness of Barth’s attempt to derive a theological understanding of human being from Jesus Christ alone is clear.

The actions, passions and words of Jesus require interpretation. This is the third point at which revelation necessarily encounters the natural. When doctrine emerges as the result of reflection on God’s self-disclosure as recorded in scripture, the theologian does not merely act as a conduit for God’s teaching. By contrast, the theologian thinks long and hard on the scriptures, bringing reason to bear, relating the events and words of scripture to arguments and knowledge gained outside the limits of biblical revelation. Theologians think through scripture rationally. As Brian Hebblethwaite writes: “The revelation-claims centred on prophets and holy books, and the doctrinal systems that have been built up on them, can also themselves be subjected to rational scrutiny for their success in making comprehensive sense, intellectually and religiously, of all the data that come to us through experience and history.”¹¹⁹ If we are to receive this revelation, we must do more than simply receive it in faith: we must interact, as thinking, more or less rational beings.

It may seem as if this latter claim, for the naturalness of revelation, does little more than restate typical Enlightenment objections to the doctrine of God’s revelation. And certainly the polemic against natural theology in Bultmann, Barth

¹¹⁸ Mackey, *Problems*, 29.

and post-Barthians, and the stress they lay on God's self-disclosure as the ground for all theology do oblige us to examine the coherence of a view which takes the Reformation principle *sola gratia* to such an extreme. But contrary to the rationalist opponents of revelation, no supremacy of reason over revelation is being advocated here (which presumably means a disbelief in revelation, for how could revelation if it were believed in lose in a straight fight with reason). Rather, what is being advocated is the coincidence of revelation with the natural forms by which it is mediated and with the reasoning subject by which it is received.

There may be a suspicion in the reader's mind here that the heart of the Barthian objection to natural theology – which is the supremacy of revelation – has not really been understood. All this coincidence of revelation with reason which is advocated surely takes away from that supremacy. The point of revelation for Barthians is that it is authoritative simply in terms of being revelation. Reason cannot refute it. Therefore, if the use of reason to interpret and, inevitably, evaluate revelation is advocated, that takes away from revelation's independence. But, as Basil Mitchell points out, this Barthian form of response relies on an implied premise, as follows: "reason can be in a position to judge a claim to revelation only if reason could in principle, without the aid of revelation, discover that which is supposed to be revealed."¹²⁰ In other words, for the Barthians it is all or nothing – *all* revelation and therefore reason has *no* competence to judge the object of revelation. However, Mitchell does not accept the necessity of this implied premise. Clearly revelation is the disclosing of something new, and reason cannot have ready-made tools for assessing claims to revelation. Nevertheless, that something has revelatory force has to be recognized. And how else can we recognize the revelatory force of a person, or event, or thought, or expression, without the use of reason? To say that it is possible (and even necessary) for reason to play its part in the reception of revelation does not imply that reason could have thought up the content of the revelation all on its own. So it is not the case that Barth's insistence on the supremacy of revelation has not been grasped; what is disputed is the implication that reason and revelation apply to different worlds.

¹¹⁹ Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Problems of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 87-88.

It follows from the two claims, for the revealedness of nature and the naturalness of revelation, that the distinction between natural and revealed theology is mistaken. There is simply theology, which is thinking about God. So-called natural theology is thinking about God which follows primarily from our experience of the world, an experience which leads us to believe that God is in living communion with us. So-called revealed theology is thinking about God which follows primarily from reflection on the experience of certain human beings who believed that God was in living communion with them. Both these forms of theology are therefore porous: both follow from human perception of God's communion and communication with us, so both are revealed; and both follow from the rational interpretation of human experience, so both are natural.¹²¹

6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a major pattern in Protestant eschatology in the twentieth century, described the common methodological approach to dogmatic theology taken by that tradition, and attempted to make the case that the former, at least in part, depends on the latter. In other words, it has been argued that the absence of subjectivity in formulations of eternal life is a partial consequence of the abandonment of natural theology.

The previous section sketched an approach to theology which removed the traditional distinction made between natural and revealed theology. Based on this understanding of the nature of theology, the following chapter will outline a different approach to that taken by Bultmann, Barth and the post-Barthians in a few key areas of individual eschatology. It will attempt to move beyond certain impasses in individual eschatology, precisely by identifying the oppositions with which the twentieth century Protestants orchestrate the debate, and rejecting them. In particular, the idea that all dualistic approaches to the human being are necessarily

¹²⁰ Basil Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 145.

¹²¹ See Mackey, *Problems*, 203: "The already rejected dichotomy between reason and faith does not crop up again in the form of a dichotomy between 'natural' faith and 'revealed' faith. One and the same faith is always operative."

reducible to the crudest representation of one line in the *Phaedo* will be vigorously rejected. Moreover, the idea that personal immortality must mean the immortality of the soul, and a popular Platonist form of the immortality of the soul at that, will be denied. The opposition between time and eternity will also be scrutinized, and an alternative approach will be suggested. Having seen these oppositions for the false dichotomies they are, it will be apparent that the twentieth century polemic against human subjectivity beyond death rests on shaky foundations. This opens up the prospect of developing individual eschatology anew.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HUMAN PERSONS, IMMORTALITY AND HEAVEN

1. Introduction

The individual eschatologies put forward by Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel – representatives of the main stream of twentieth century Protestant theology – have, as we have seen, certain common features. These are the understanding of death as natural to human beings; the rejection of the immortality of the soul; reserve towards the aspect of eschatology concerned with the individual; eternal life as eternalization of this mortal life; the opposition of time and eternity; and the absence of human subjectivity beyond death. A further common feature underpins the others: the rejection of natural theology. In the previous chapter, a different approach to theology was advocated, one which attempted to harmonize types of theology considered by the twentieth century Protestants to be “revealed” and “natural.” Based on this understanding of the nature of theology itself, this concluding chapter will consider some of the central problems in individual eschatology which have emerged over the course of the thesis.

It will not be possible here to develop a comprehensive individual eschatology. Such a task would involve a further book-length study. Rather, the following pages will examine the two crucial areas of individual eschatology which have proved central to the twentieth century debate: the nature of the human person (section 2); and the relationship between time and eternity (section 3). It will be argued that in both these areas, the positions taken by Bultmann, Barth and the post-Barthians lead to impasses for the development of individual eschatology. To help develop alternative approaches to these issues, the work of other theologians is taken into account, particularly Wolfhart Pannenberg. His thought has already been introduced

to criticize his fellow-Protestants' disdain for theology from an anthropological perspective; in this chapter his theology will be discussed in its more substantive doctrinal form. As the argument of the previous chapter would suggest, it is no coincidence that Pannenberg is both open to theology from an anthropological perspective (a form of natural theology) and able to conceive of human subjectivity beyond death. The chapter will not however be an essay in philosophical theology alone. A further section 4 will attempt to integrate the understandings of anthropology, immortality, time and eternity with a reading of scripture. The resulting reading will thus follow the pattern for theology laid down in chapter 7: a theology both revealed and natural, with each emphasis interpreting the other. The conclusion both of this chapter and the thesis as a whole comprises section 5

It cannot be pretended that this chapter will solve the many difficulties regarding the nature of human being, immortality, temporality and eternity. Nevertheless, it is hoped that some fresh light will be shed on these ancient and perennial problems. Yet the mood of the chapter is one of tentativeness: the destiny of the human person beyond death is not an object of knowledge but of hope. Hope, no less than faith, seeks understanding, but it does not leave its character as hope behind.

2. Anthropology

The account of the human person in the four theologians studied in this thesis is largely developed as a polemic against dualistic accounts. This was established in the previous chapter. Yet we should be clear that what is being rejected by Bultmann, Barth and post-Barthians is a particular form of dualism associated in their minds with a popular conception of Platonic thought, and a popular expression of Christianity. Roughly speaking, the twentieth century theologians oppose a "dualism" which understands the human person as a combination of two distinct substances called soul and body. The soul is a spiritual substance which inhabits the body, and is the essence of the human person. There were in Patristic times a number of theories as to its source: including creationism, which considers it to be directly created by God at or around the moment of physical conception;

emanationism, which understands it to be a divine part of the human being; and traducianism, which believes it is propagated naturally in procreation. Whichever account is given for the soul's formation, it is believed to be immortal. The body is the physical extension of the person made of matter, which has a beginning at birth, and an ending at death. At the death of the person, the immortal soul is separated from the mortal flesh, and does not die. Only the body truly dies. The soul is superior to the body; indeed, the body is an obstacle to the true purposes of human endeavour. The person is fundamentally the person's soul.

Summarizing the discussion of chapters 3 to 7, such a view of the human person is opposed by the subjects of this thesis as follows. A dualism of mortal body and immortal soul leads inevitably to a chronically narrow soteriology: a soteriology *from* the body. The soul – superior to the body – longs to be free from its imprisonment in physical environment, which provides the opportunity and material for yielding to temptation. Furthermore, the human being's true fulfilment is to be found in immortal life with God, and so the mortal body can only be a hindrance to that perfection. Hence, the human being requires to be saved from the incapacitating effects of its bodiliness. The human being needs to be liberated from the body. But, the twentieth century criticism replies, the human being *is* body, whatever else it is, and Christian theology denies the nature of human being and the goodness of creation if it considers human fulfilment to be the *escape* from the condition of its ordinary existence. The resultant theology denigrates both the body and the material conditions of this-worldly life. Moreover, this form of dualism fails to represent the experience which human beings have of themselves. They do not experience themselves or the world as two parallel types of substance: material and spiritual. They do not feel two substances inside them, one imprisoned by the other.

This account of dualism is more or less applicable in the case of certain philosophers of religion and theologians writing in the twentieth century, who continue to insist on the existence of separate entities within the human person, albeit with greater subtlety than many popular descriptions of the human person as soul and body. E. L. Mascall, for example, adheres to a straightforwardly dualistic view when he writes that a human being is “a real unity of two distinct but mutually adapted constituents, and, both at the first moment of his existence and throughout

his subsequent life, the two fit together, develop together and influence each other.”¹ A more recent example is Keith Ward, who develops an account of the human being as an animal in which soulfulness evolves, “as the inner aspect of the human brain.”² The language of “aspects” may not appear to imply two distinct entities within the one person, but Ward approaches a more traditionally dualistic view when he considers death. In dying, he writes, it “is possible for the soul, the inner aspect of the brain, to be separated from the brain.”³ Such separation, or “disentangling,” as he puts it elsewhere,⁴ appears to indicate the presence of a separate entity alongside the human body.

However, it should be noticed that the twentieth century Protestants’ attack on dualism tends to operate with a narrowly conceived enemy: an account of the human person as being two entities which separate at death. This definition of dualism is not foreign to Christian tradition: the Platonic definition of death as the separation of soul from body was at times adopted by Christian theologians, as we saw in the case of Calvin. The conclusion is then swiftly drawn by Barth and the post-Barthians that since the human person is no longer viewed as a mortal body inhabited by an immortal soul, the human being cannot be considered immortal. However, such a conclusion may only follow if the only version of dualism which is considered is the sort of outright dualism discussed above. But the picture is more complicated than that.

First, we have to ask whether dualistic pictures of the human person which emerged in philosophical and religious reflection do not express something fundamental about human experience. The heart of the traditional pictures of the person, no matter how crude, is that a person’s life, which is invariably an embodied life, is directed by the person. There is a subjectivity which makes decisions, orders the person’s bodily thoughts, intentions and movements, and is conscious of the self. The person is aware of being a centre of subjectivity, conscious of being the subject of its own experience, and the agent of its activity.⁵ This self-perception

¹ E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), 265.

² Keith Ward, *Religion and Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 142.

³ Ward, *Religion*, 147.

⁴ Keith Ward, *Defending the Soul* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1992), 145.

⁵ For a recent expression of this, see John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 234.

which human beings have of themselves need not depend on positing any entity within the human person alongside the body, although it commonly did lead to crudely dualistic ways of thinking in traditional Christian formulations. This self-perception that one's person is a centre of subjectivity is compatible with understanding all human experience to be bodily experience. There is no reason to deny that human subjects make decisions bodily, think in bodily form, and are self-conscious because of bodily events. The whole person is an embodied person, and there are no disembodied events between birth and death.

This notion can be further explored by asking what the connection is between a person's centre of subjectivity and his or her identity. Identity is of course a slippery term that shifts easily between meanings, and we should be conscious of this in developing an account of it. Nevertheless, it seems true to say that as a centre of subjectivity, a person is conscious of having an identity, and aware of the identity of other persons. Almost every person knows who he or she is, in physical and psychological terms among others. One's body is one's own. And combined with physical attributes, a person's identity is found in his or her history, including relationships established, events undergone, emotions experienced, achievements made, abilities gained and so on, in which personality and character are developed over many years. This history is of course a series of embodied events which have taken place in the person's past, mostly forgotten, some remembered more or less correctly. Of course, these aspects of a person's identity change. A person's physical form, made up by a spatially extended pattern of cells most of which die and are replaced throughout a person's life, grows and decays throughout that life. Furthermore, one's history and personality are never fixed, but alter to varying degrees as time passes. Yet in the concept of identity, there is a sense of something which does not change despite the march of time. One wakes up every day, changed in certain ways, but still the same person. Therefore a person's identity must at the very least be formed by the holding together of certain fleeting events, sensations, relationships, physical manifestations, memories, losses, and even anticipations. The existence of identity then is a provisional holding together of a shifting transient pattern of events, memories and anticipations; it is in some ways a transcending of the person's temporality. The person's past is all past, and future yet

to be: the present is the vanishing point between these two. Against this perpetual rush from future to past, personal identity is the provisional transcending of temporality.

We now have a clue to the long-held human belief in soul and body. The human being is conscious of itself as a centre of subjectivity, directing itself to think and act, and self-conscious. Furthermore, the human being is aware of its identity, something shored against its ruins of decay, of transience and loss. A person's identity is found in the unchanging centre of subjectivity which persists through all the changes of a person's life. The human being identifies him or herself with this centre of subjectivity, and objectifies the body including the brain as something different from the person's own self, while at the same time recognizing that all human experience is embodied experience, and that even self-consciousness depends on particular patterns of neurons firing particular messages in the brain. It is a short step to the objectification of the person's subjectivity as soul.

The question now arises as to immortality. It might be thought unimportant in a Christian eschatology to enquire into the prospect of human immortality. Certainly, for Bultmann in particular, such an enquiry smacks of human sinfulness; and for all the subjects of this thesis, no hope for human fulfilment can be established on an investigation of the prospect of human immortality, but can only come, if it comes at all, from faith in God. Now, faith in God is not irrelevant to the enquiry into human immortality, but perhaps it should not be invoked too early in our quest. Maurice Wiles' caution is sound: "even if it were true that God could and does give to man a life beyond death by a wholly new creative act of his own determination, it is difficult to see how we could know it to be true... unless there were at least some indications of its plausibility in human experience as such. The *wholly* miraculous is the wholly incredible."⁶ If the human person necessarily ceases at death – if the meaning of death is the end and extinction of the human person – then eternal life appears to be an impossibility. At the very least then, individual eschatology needs to have an account of the human person which indicates that death does not necessarily signify personal extinction. So until all options are exhausted we should continue to examine the prospects for immortality based on human experience. As

it happens, the principal subjects of this thesis reject the possibility of human immortality because it is associated inextricably for them with all-too-crude accounts of the human person as mortal body and immortal soul. But is the account of the human person outlined above any more promising for the prospect of immortality?

Initially it would seem not, for unlike a more simplistic dualistic view, death is the death of the whole person. When a person's body ceases to function, it is the whole of the person which ceases to function in that embodied form.⁷ The centre of subjectivity dies when the body to which it belongs dies. There is no element which is thereby released from the body, freed by its dying. Human beings live between birth and death in inescapably bodily form; there is no good evidence for out-of-body experiences. It follows that at bodily death, it is the whole person which dies with the body.⁸

What sense could immortality have, given this understanding of death as final for the human person? The question could be put another way: does death mean annihilation? Or is it possible to maintain the finality of death for the human person, an embodied centre of subjectivity, but also maintain the person's immortality? The first thing that can be said here is that the question is undecidable. There may be a paucity of evidence that the human person is immortal; nevertheless, there cannot be conclusive evidence that death is equivalent to the annihilation of the person either. That no-one has reported on the nature of death may suggest that death is extinction, but at best it is an argument (perhaps the archetypal argument) from silence.

But it may also be said that the case is not so clear as it might be if a human being was not a centre of subjectivity. If it were the case that the human being was a lump of matter which had not come to consciousness, or to self-consciousness, which did not direct its own action and thought, which did not recognize in other human

⁶ Maurice Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (London: SCM, 1974), 133.

⁷ The Christian doctrine of resurrection expresses hope for immortality in another embodied form, both continuous and discontinuous with the embodied form of life before death. See section 4.

⁸ This point has been made by Barth and the post-Barthians, as we saw above in chapters 4 to 7, but has also been made with particular force by a number of Roman Catholic theologians, including Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (Edinburgh: Nelson, and Freiburg: Herder, 1961), 26, and Josef Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 44.

beings centres of subjectivity,⁹ then the death of its matter, and the decomposition of its stuff into the earth and atmosphere, might well be seen as nothing but extinction. With the death of its matter, its identity, wholly contained in its material extension, is over. However, that the human being is more than vegetable material, let's say, but a physical organism which is capable of directing its thought and action, which is a centre of subjectivity, suggests that the human being transcends its physicality, or at least that it is not entirely reducible to material redescrptions. Now this of course does not enable us to assert that the human subjectivity is thereby immortal. When the body dies, the human being can no longer be a centre of subjectivity expressed in and through physical form. There is no physical form. Nevertheless, in a human life, a personality develops, a character is formed, an identity is achieved which persists through time. It does not *necessarily* survive beyond death; but it cannot be argued convincingly that it *necessarily* enters oblivion.

It feels as if our enquiry has borne little fruit. Twentieth century Protestant polemic against dualism and the immortality of the soul has been exposed, both in this chapter and the last, as working with a narrow and crude understanding of dualistic ways of thought and the possibility of immortality. Yet, although it has been argued that the presence of a centre of subjectivity in a human life indicates the possibility of immortality, it is only a bare possibility. It seems much easier to conclude with Barth and the post-Barthians that in the absence of the immortal soul of a crude dualism, the human being cannot live beyond death. But that conclusion is not inescapable, if we broaden out the current line of thought from the nature of the human person, to the nature of the human person in relationship to God.

Indeed, this line has been developed by Wolfhart Pannenberg, whose critique of the approach taken by twentieth century German Protestant eschatology was discussed in chapter 7. Pannenberg, no more than the principal subjects of this thesis, believes in an immortal soul within the human person. However, he is more sympathetic than they to the possibility of the human being's continuing beyond death. His most succinct account of this possibility is in the following sentence:

⁹ The significance of human intersubjectivity, undeveloped here, may provide another fruitful starting-point for individual eschatology.

If our life remains present to God, is it not conceivable that God could restore its ability of relating to itself, a form of self-awareness, though different from self-consciousness in the present world, because it would not occur in a succession of perishing instants of time, but in the eternal present and therefore could relate to the simultaneous whole of one's life?¹⁰

In other words, each human being's individual identity is not annihilated with the person's death but is maintained by God, who restores self-awareness to a person's life beyond death. Indeed, this restoration to a form of self-awareness is not merely some restarting of a human identity, but the fulfilment of that identity, its "ultimate completion."¹¹

Pannenberg bases this audacious account of immortality's possibility on the absence of wholeness in life before death. This life is marked by transience, such that our identity is never definitively established. We attempt to build our identity by "integrating the facts of previous and present life into the complex of a more or less clearly envisioned idea of what we can be and shall be."¹² The identity a person does have is an anticipation of his or her definitiveness, which is only found in that for which God has destined the person. Death is not for Pannenberg an event in life, but the event which conditions the entire life which precedes it, casting its shadow, preventing the possession of wholeness of identity. Only beyond death can each human life gain its definitive, perfect identity. "The eyes of love see in us the potential of our destiny that is realized here only fragmentarily."¹³ Restoration beyond death into definitive identity, into one's destiny, is the completion and fulfilment of identity.¹⁴

Other theologians develop similar arguments. Simon Tugwell, from a quite different perspective, offers a comparable account of immortality's possibility. He suggests that "the continuity between ante and post mortem existence resides in the fact that what is dead is always alive to God."¹⁵ The basis for this is the belief that

¹⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology," *Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984), 133.

¹¹ Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions," 138.

¹² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-8), 3:640.

¹³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:640.

¹⁴ See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:641, also 2:272-3.

¹⁵ Simon Tugwell, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 161.

there is "a continuity of creative purpose in the creator."¹⁶ If God is related creatively to a person throughout his or her life, that relationship will not cease with death, but will continue, taking new forms. Maurice Wiles expresses a similar thought in the concept of faith: "The heart of the matter is a relationship between man and God which can be entered upon now and which death is simply unable to touch."¹⁷

These attempts by Pannenberg and others to maintain the possibility of immortality without retrenching in some crude form of the immortality of the soul have a surface similarity to the account of eternal life as the eternalizing of this mortal life put forward by Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel in their various ways. It is not yet clear, therefore, whether the approach advocated here is capable of offering the prospect of human subjectivity beyond death, and of love and knowledge of others and God. Furthermore, this prospect of the fulfilment of human identity cannot be properly understood without a more detailed examination of the relationship between time and eternity. In examining more closely the concepts of eternity and eternal life, the consequences of this understanding of anthropology should become evident, particularly the central question as to the possibility of human subjectivity beyond death.

3. Time and Eternity

The second major area in which twentieth century Protestant theology has led largely to an impasse in individual eschatology is the relationship between time and eternity. As we saw in chapter 7, human life for Bultmann, Barth and the post-Barthians is inescapably temporal because it is finite. The human being in common with all other creatures enjoys a finite existence, whose limits are the temporal events of birth and death. Human mortality is, for these theologians, a function of human finitude, and so is an essentially natural event (no matter how sudden or violent). As temporal, human life has a span, which has a beginning-point and an end-point.

¹⁶ Tugwell, *Human Immortality*, 163.

¹⁷ Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, 134.

There can be no temporal existence for the human being outside these limits of birth and death. As far as death is concerned, it may be considered the dissolution of time for the human person, the end of the person's time. The last things in both an individual and cosmic sense mean that there will be no more time: time will be dissolved in the Eschaton, as the end of the individual life, or end of the world.

By contrast, these theologians maintain, God is eternal. As infinite, unlimited in the way creatures are, God does not exist temporally. There is no beginning, nor end to God; nor does God exist within a span of time. God does not experience time as creatures do – as the past held only in memory and the future only held in anticipation separated by a fleeting present. Rather God, as Barth suggests, enjoys the perfect simultaneity of past, present and future in eternity. God is pre-, supra- and post-temporal.

Given this opposition between eternity and time, the Protestant theologians find it hard to make sense of the scriptural and traditional Christian expression “eternal life.” God may be said to enjoy an eternal life, but finite human life is inescapably temporal. “Eternal life” for human beings sounds oxymoronic to the theologians studied here. Bultmann deals with the problem by adopting a particular use of eternal life in the Gospel according to John as the life lived today, between birth and death, in response to the kerygma. The phrase has no meaning for him beyond these finite limits. Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel all prefer a variant of eternalization of this mortal life for eternal life, in which the past human life is held in God's eternal present. The difficulty with this approach is that while it makes the human life between birth and death an object of God's knowledge, judgment and love (insofar as they can be distinguished) it is unable to safeguard any sense of subjectivity in the human person. The human person is dead: and in the absence of body, brain and mind, cannot know or love God or others. Eternalization, if portrayed in images, seems to be a sort of video playback overlaid with God's perfect narration, or a petrification of the entire life. This may satisfy some who enquire into the meaning of eternal life. However, at the very least it should be pointed out that Christian theology, as we saw with regard to Luther and Calvin, has traditionally understood by eternal life the possession of subjectivity in the presence of God's eternity, often expressed as heaven. Furthermore, it is questionable

whether a “heaven” of eternalized lives, all known and made perfect by God, accords with the Christian conviction that the consummation of a human life or indeed, the entire creation, is the glorification of God. What are we to make of a creation which has been granted the freedom to glorify God, for example in conscious decision, through the living of life, moral action, art, prayer and praise, yet which glorifies God in the consummation by being known and loved by God? Why should we not think that God would be glorified by creaturely action beyond death as much as before it?

Clearly, the framework of time and eternity which the subjects of this thesis employ is unable to develop an understanding of “eternal life” which offers anything in the way of “life” beyond death. Are there alternatives to their framework?

There have been critics of the conception of God’s eternity outlined above. Oscar Cullmann, for example, protests that Barth’s understanding of eternity veers too close to timelessness, which Cullmann believes is not taught in scripture. By contrast, God’s “eternity can and must be expressed in this ‘naïve’ way, in terms of endless time.”¹⁸ Cullmann’s individual eschatology does not explicitly state, however, that *human beings* will enjoy an endless life after death. There will be some sort of intermediate state for those who die before “the end of days,” but all will rise together in the resurrection of the dead. Cullmann does not speculate as to how the dead human being may exist in an intermediate state, nor what sort of existence will be enjoyed in the resurrected body. It seems that Cullmann is sure that eternity means endlessness for God, but does not know whether eternal life for human beings is endless.

Nevertheless, it is occasionally suggested by others that eternal life might mean some sort of endless life. Eternity means time which will not come to an end; eternal life means life which, now it has passed through death, will not die again but will go on for ever. There is, according to this understanding of eternity as endlessness, a continuity between the temporality under which finite life happens in the spatial universe, and the endlessness of a non-spatial eternity. This type of thinking is associated particularly with British philosophers of religion. As one commentator has noted: “The general thrust of British theorizing is overwhelmingly

towards the intellectual defence of the popular intuition of eternity as a chronological future or quasi-future. Eternity is time continued – in a much improved condition, but essentially continued.”¹⁹ Keith Ward is a contemporary advocate of this position: he believes that eternal life must “come into being after earthly life has been completed, and must therefore stand in an ordinary temporal relation to earthly time.”²⁰ Ward, we recall, also advocates a form of body-soul dualism, in which the soul disentangles itself from the body at the moment of death. Indeed, the same philosophers of religion who advocate dualistic accounts of immortality tend to believe that eternity follows time on the same time-line, with the soul passing from one form of the time-line to the other at death.²¹

In addition to the difficulty of envisaging the continuation of the human person, perhaps in the form of soul, beyond the person’s death, the problem with this approach to eternity is that it lacks the sense of consummation and fulfilment which is central to eschatology. If the human being is to achieve fulfilment beyond death, there must be a sense in which the person’s experience reaches a form of climax. This is rendered unimaginable according to eternity as mere non-stop time. As Wittgenstein put it, “is some riddle solved by my surviving for ever? Is not this eternal life as much of a riddle as our present life? The solution of the riddle of space and time lies *outside* space and time.”²² The danger of envisaging eternity as non-stop time is that it seems to push the consummation itself, perfection or bliss into an ever-receding future, a Sisyphean goal which appears to make eternity more hellish than heavenly.²³ “Yonder all before us lie/Deserts of vast eternity,” was Andrew Marvell’s gloomy reaction to this thought.²⁴

Yet there is a further alternative to the Barthian conception of eternity as time’s dissolution, which does not consider eternity to be endless time in continuity with a

¹⁸ Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, rev. ed., trans. Floyd V. Filson, (London: SCM, 1962), 63.

¹⁹ Charles Stinson, “On the Time-Eternity ‘Link’: Some Aspects of Recent Christian Eschatology,” *Religious Studies* 13 (1977), 59.

²⁰ Ward, *Religion*, 312.

²¹ See Stewart Sutherland, “‘What Happens After Death?’” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (1969), 404–18, for an argument which seeks to establish that an understanding of immortality as survival necessarily implies that eternity is continuous with time, one after another.

²² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.4312.

²³ See Karl Rahner, “The Life of the Dead,” *Theological Investigations*, 23 vols (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961-92), 4:347-8, and “Eternity from Time,” *Theological Investigations* 19:170-1.

life's time. This alternative approach sees in eternity the *transformation* of time. Eternity is not something foreign to time, but a possible form of temporality. Eternity is then a possibility even under the condition of temporality between birth and death. Yet beyond death, eternity as the transformation of temporality means its perfection, its fulfilment. As eternity is possible in the temporal sequence, so a form of temporality is maintained under conditions of eternity.

First, what is meant by saying that eternity is possible even under condition of temporality? Temporality is the conception with which we explain the transience of history. Events happen in the present, but once they have occurred they belong to the past, and remain, if they do, in memory alone. Each event gives way to another, which, we might say, comes from the future, from that which has not yet occurred. Time does not stop, but is a constant which marks the shifting pattern of events.

However, there is the possibility of a form of eternity even in temporality's midst. Karl Rahner suggests three hints of eternity. First, things persist over time, maintaining their identity despite the ceaseless shift of present to past. Something permanent, he suggests, sustains the changing appearances, bringing them together into a totality, into a history which does not disintegrate into individual moments. Examples include a flower, or a person's own identity which persists over time. He goes on:

These identities, lying behind the alternation and contents of the moments of time and thus holding together the infinitesimally tiny elements of time, shaping out of the dust of these elements a greater, structured history, cannot as such share the quality of time itself as it divides and passes away, if they are to fulfil their task of sustaining and unifying time.²⁵

Second, the human mind is capable of shaping and unifying time, binding into something more than the inexorable passing away of instant into instant. This thought of time is itself "an event intimating eternity."²⁶ After all, expanding on Rahner's point, there is a subjectivity to time. The world is not experienced as a steady plodding from one moment to the next. By contrast, time itself seems to be a quality of experience. For example, when work goes well, time races; when reading a

²⁴ Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress."

²⁵ Rahner, "Eternity from Time," 173.

stodgy book, time dawdles. Occasionally the human person can seem to experience all time at once, in the presence of great emotion or danger, or when the moment of death is felt to be near. Many people lose themselves in sport, art or music, for example, and have no idea how much time has passed. Religious history witnesses to the centrality of transcending time in mystical experience, in which the soul approaches eternity. Third, ultimate personal decisions, made freely and involving a person in entirety, are not decisions which can be rendered void at death. Rather these decisions have the quality of eternity, of "eternity coming to be in time."²⁷

Whether or not Rahner's particular examples persuade, his basic principle is central for this line of argument. It is that time bears within itself the possibility of eternity. Time is not something opposed to eternity, which repels eternity like oil and water. Instead, extending the metaphor, time is the water in which is found a solution of eternity, invisible but detectable by experience. Principally, in the establishing of eternity over time, in the experience one has of oneself in duration, a hint of eternity is gained. Pannenberg develops a similar argument. The duration which creaturely existence enjoys in time is "as such an anticipation of eternity."²⁸ This broken and fragmented existence in time is a first instalment and foretaste of unbroken participation in eternity. Pannenberg seems to be suggesting that temporality's participation in eternity is a condition of any experience of duration in life, but we need not follow him in considering it to be at the level of proof. At best, it offers a way of thinking about eternity, given the inescapable temporality of human life.

How does this help us understand eternity itself? It suggests (and perhaps no more than suggests) that eternity is not opposed to temporality but is temporality's fulfilment, that eternity is the transformation of temporality, perfecting it. Eternity is neither endless time nor the dissolution of time, neither of which would be time's consummation. Rather, time is consummated in its transformation into eternity. Pannenberg expresses this idea as follows: life in time is characterized by separateness, and its totality evades us. The identity of human beings is always

²⁶ Rahner, "Eternity from Time," 174.

²⁷ Rahner, "Eternity from Time," 175.

²⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:644. See also Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions," 138.

before us, always anticipated. The sense of identity we do have is not our true self, but a self-image built from self-love. In eternity, however, our true identity is not dissolved or absent, but is represented "in the totality of our earthly existence."²⁹ Eternity "will no longer have to be in antithesis to time but must be thought of as including time or leaving a place for what is distinct in time."³⁰ Eternity is the setting for the re-integration of all that is fragmentary under temporal conditions into its definitive identity.

Pannenberg's vision here is driven by his understanding of redemption. That creaturely life exists under the condition of temporality is part of God's creative will towards creation, necessary for the development of mature, independent creatures. Nevertheless, the fragmentation of creaturely identity under temporality is the consequence of sin. Sinners attempt to integrate their experience in an identity on the basis of self-love, and so "in the brokenness of our experience of time temporality is of a piece with the structural sinfulness of our life."³¹ In eternity, this fragmentation gives way to totality in the perfect presence of God's redemptive will. Temporality *per se* does not stand in need of redemption, but will be experienced quite differently by finite creatures in perfect harmony with God's will.

An early version of Pannenberg's eschatological vision was criticized influentially by John Hick in *Death and Eternal Life*. His central criticism is that Pannenberg's vision does not answer the human hope for justice:

I suggest that in the case of those whose earthly lives have been almost empty of moral, physical, aesthetic and intellectual good it is not a credible conception of the eternal life in Christ that they should simply experience that same earthly life as a whole instead of receiving it serially through time. Its evils will still be evils; and indeed they may in their accumulated totality seem even more evil than when known one by one.³²

Pannenberg responds more than once in later years by suggesting that Hick has misunderstood the degree to which human lives are transformed in eternity. This transformation takes the form of God's judgment: "the simultaneous presence of

²⁹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:561.

³⁰ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:595.

³¹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:561.

³² John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976), 225-6.

the whole content of one's life through participation in the eternal presence of God means judgment."³³ It seems that for Pannenberg, the fact that God's eternal presence enables human lives to be seen whole involves a transformation such that Hick's demand for justice is answered. Life's evils will be judged, seen as part of life's whole, and so will be transformed in eternity. This transforming judgment is nothing other than God's loving relationship to human beings, a relationship whose merciful character is seen in God's "sending" of Jesus. It follows then that the eschatological transformation from time to eternity "also contains an element of compensation for the sufferings and deficiencies of the present world."³⁴ Here Pannenberg's distance from the main stream of twentieth century Protestant eschatology is clearly evident. The principal subjects of this thesis all claim that Christian eschatology does not involve compensation.

The question which remains is one which is implied in Hick's critique. Even if the transformation of time to eternity, when a human life ends with death and is found whole in God's eternal presence, involves judgment, making whole, a making good of life's pain, how can it be a true theodicy if there is no temporal experience? It is very difficult to imagine such "compensation" except in temporal terms. It may be a symptom of the frailty of human imagination, but the thought of judgment and compensation seems only to be possible in terms of duration of the individual subject, a sense that it exists in a non-momentary fashion. Further, the very concept of duration, of lastingness, implies a form of successiveness, in which one moment gives way to the next. Does Pannenberg's account of eternity transforming temporality give grounds for believing that human beings enjoy some form of temporality beyond their death? Does the fulfilment of their temporal lives involve a form of temporal experience?

Evidence here is slight, but Pannenberg does indicate that while creaturely finitude rules out unlimited existence beyond death, it does not rule out "the present of the whole of this limited existence *in the form of duration* as full participation in eternity."³⁵ Each human life, transformed in eternity such that it is seen as a whole, endures in that eternity. Eternal life involves the enduring of the person beyond

³³ Pannenberg, "Constructive and Critical Functions," 134.

³⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:639.

death for Pannenberg. It is this emphasis, allied to his understanding of judgment as involving compensation for the evils of life, that marks out Pannenberg's eschatology as distinctive from the other post-Barthian theologians studied here. There are human subjects in Pannenberg's heaven.

There is in fact a strong tradition in individual eschatology that attempts to develop a form of temporality in eternity, but without conceiving of eternity as mere endlessness. It is a transformed temporality, proper to finite creatures, perhaps analogous to the condition of temporality in life before death, but about which it is almost impossible to develop any firm opinions. Some of the clearest attempts to sketch out this line are as follows. Russell Aldwinckle considers that " 'Duration' must be as real for persons after death as it is for us here and now. Granted that the passage of time or successiveness will be vastly different after death from what it is now, we cannot abandon this way of talking without treating persons as only the transient and ephemeral manifestations of an unchanging reality."³⁶ John Baillie situates his view of eternity between a mere perpetuity and Barth's belief in non-temporal eternity beyond death. First, if eternity does not involve any temporality, he argues, "we cannot speak of a *timeless* life to come."³⁷ A timeless life may float, as it were, beyond the temporal life lived in the here and now, and there is no reason to consider it to be subsequent to life between birth and death. Second, it belongs to finitude to experience successively: only God relates to the world without successiveness. It follows therefore that in the transformation of temporality in eternity, the tragedy and even the boredom of temporality is laid aside for a transformed successiveness and duration. The point here is that eternal life for human beings is not the eternal life of God, but the eternal destiny of finite creatures. God's eternity, insofar as it can be conceived, is unlimited.

Even more difficult to express with confidence is the possibility of novelty or creativity in eternity. The eternal God's mercies may be thought to be new every morning, and God's creativity is a continuous presence in the world, but it is harder to conceive of human beings, who have lived and died, and whose lives are

³⁵ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:601, fn. 244 (my emphasis).

³⁶ Russell Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City: A Study of the Notion of Life After Death in Contemporary Theology and Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 163.

³⁷ John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 225.

transformed and judged in eternity, doing new things and being creative. One attempt to envisage novelty and creativity has been made by Hans Urs von Balthasar. Drawing on his account of the divine-creaturely relationship as the dramatic interplay of free persons, Balthasar believes that even in eternity, the freedom proper to finite creatures will be fulfilled not in stasis, but in "the vitality of spontaneous, free, inventive living."³⁸ Freedom here cannot be the freedom to choose between good and evil, but the perfect freedom of harmony with God's will. If eternity does involve some form of successiveness and duration, and according to Balthasar, God alone knows "the way that events succeed one another in the transtemporal sphere after death,"³⁹ then perhaps it is not impossible to hold that there may be some transformation and perfection of human freedom and creativity beyond death, in which human beings may continue to act creatively.

These few remarks have attempted to shed some light on the extremely complicated subjects of time, eternity and their relation, which are so crucial for the development of individual eschatology. Bultmann, Barth and post-Barthians present their view of time as swallowed up in eternity as opposed to the view of eternity as mere perpetuity, or endlessness. However, they fail to take sufficient account of the belief among some theologians that eternity neither dissolves time, nor is formed of more time, but is itself the transformation of time, such that time is fulfilled in eternity. This approach recognizes the possibility of approaching eternity under the conditions of temporality before death, offering an intimation of the nature of eternal life beyond death. This understanding of eternity leaves open the possibility that there may be a form of successiveness and duration experienced beyond death in eternity, akin perhaps to temporality experienced before.

³⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama V: The Last Act*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 410.

³⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Credo: Meditations on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. D. Kipp (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 95.

4. Individual Eschatology and the Bible

The previous two sections have taken issue with the main stream of twentieth century Protestant theology's understanding of the human person and the relationship between time and eternity. In both cases, it was found that the theologians opposed narrow concepts, of crude anthropological dualism and of eternity as endless time, and failed to recognize the possibility of certain alternatives. These have been suggested above as potentially more fruitful avenues for individual eschatology than either the traditional approach associated with a popular Platonism, or the austere non-temporal eschatology of Bultmann, Barth and the post-Barthians, which denies the possibility of subjectivity beyond death. The emphasis in our discussion so far has been on the nature of human experience, and attempting to draw out theological possibilities therefrom. In this section, the emphasis will be placed on scripture. In the light of the possibilities for individual eschatology outlined above in sections 2 and 3, a reading will be offered here of the central features of individual eschatology according to scriptural witness, particularly the New Testament. Unfortunately, pressure of space forces many emphases in scripture to be left unexplored, including New Testament material on dying with Christ, apocalyptic material in the gospels and elsewhere, and much of the book of Revelation. What follows then is brief and fragmentary, leaning heavily on Pauline material, in part because it is in the Pauline corpus that the greatest concentration of individual eschatological thought resides.

Creator, Creation and the Human Person

First, it is a central conviction articulated in scripture that God is the loving creator of the world. That the world is the creation of God, meaning that God fashioned the world in the beginning and continues to uphold it in being, is central to the writers of the Bible. Scripture understands the world theologically; furthermore it understands the human being theologically. For the Bible, the human being is a person whose very existence depends on the creative activity of God. Genesis 2:7 – “The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” – clearly expresses this

dependence of the human being on God. For the psalmist too, human life depends on God's sustaining power, so people are dismayed when God hides God's face, "when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust" (Ps. 104:29).

Second, the understanding of the human person in scripture accords with the account given above of the person as a centre of subjectivity whose every mental and physical action takes place in and through the body. As many studies have shown, the Hebrew scriptures do not usually comprehend the human being as containing an immortal soul imprisoned in mortal flesh. Nevertheless, the same Hebrew scriptures do conceive of the human person as comprising a controlling centre acting bodily. As the verse from Genesis already quoted indicates, for the Hebrews, the human being lives by God's breath, and hence the human being is a spiritual being. Joel Green's conclusion is accurate: "It is axiomatic in Old Testament scholarship today that human beings must be understood in their fully integrated, embodied existence. Humans do not possess a body and soul, but are human only as body and soul."⁴⁰ Furthermore, as we saw in the previous chapter, James Barr makes a persuasive case for understanding the Hebrew *nephesh* as "a superior controlling centre which accompanies, expresses and directs the existence of that totality [of human] personality, and one which, especially, provides a life to the whole."⁴¹ Indeed, as Barr suggests, immortality is implied in the ascription of a soulful aspect to humanity. Writing of *nephesh* in Hebrew thought, Barr goes on: "Because it is the life-giving element, it is difficult to conceive that it itself will die. It may simply return to God, life to the source of life. Otherwise it may still exist, and the thought of its being brought down to Sheol, or being killed, is intolerable."⁴²

Jewish thought around the time of the New Testament has been shown to be extremely fluid on questions of anthropology and immortality. H. C. C. Cavallin's detailed investigation of Jewish texts from the intertestamental and New Testament periods has found that there is no common anthropology, "no common view on the

⁴⁰ Joel B. Green, " 'Bodies – That is, Human Lives': A Re-Examination of Human Nature in the Bible," in *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. W. Brown, N. Murphey and H. N. Malony (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 158.

⁴¹ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM, 1992), 43.

⁴² Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 43.

relationship between body and soul.”⁴³ It follows that “there is obviously no single Jewish doctrine about life after death in the period under consideration.”⁴⁴ Belief in immortality of the soul seems equally as strong as resurrection of the dead, contrary to the popular view of Jewish eschatology exemplified by Oscar Cullmann, as we saw above in chapter 7. Nevertheless, if there is a common theme in the individual eschatology of this time it is the survival of the personality, the centre of subjectivity, however conceived.⁴⁵

The New Testament presents a similarly complicated picture, with evidence for a large variety of views of human nature.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, there is little reason to believe that the New Testament writers differ radically from the Hebrew scriptures in seeing the human person as a body animated by a centre of subjectivity, which whole they conceptualize as a unity of body and soul.⁴⁷ In other words, the dominant understanding of the human being in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures is a unified whole which, by virtue of its soulful aspect (itself God-breathed), is unable to be extinguished in death. Death cannot bring a person’s subjectivity, or identity, to an end.

Moreover, there are a number of indications in scriptural texts that in the course of human life, human identity remains provisional and that true human identity remains to be achieved beyond death. For the writer of 1 John, “what we will be has not yet been revealed,” though “we will be like him,” namely Christ (1 John 3:2). Throughout the gospels, the kingdom of God is expressed in terms of treasure awaiting the person, and the epistles commonly describe the crown in store for the righteous. These expressions appear to show the provisionality of life before death compared to its completion beyond. The best example of this, however, is the series of beatitudes found as part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-12). Those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers or

⁴³ H. C. C. Cavallin, *Life After Death: Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Cor. 15 – Part 1: An Enquiry into the Jewish Background* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1974), 212.

⁴⁴ Cavallin, *Life After Death*, 199.

⁴⁵ Cavallin, *Life After Death*, 212.

⁴⁶ See Green, “Bodies,” especially 172-3.

⁴⁷ See Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 113.

persecuted – they will receive their fulfilment, ultimately beyond death in the perfection and completion of their identity.

Death in the Old Testament

As important as the Bible's basic assumptions as to the nature of the human person is its understanding of death, and death's relationship to God. Old Testament attitudes to death have been discussed above especially in chapter 6 on Eberhard Jüngel, and do not need lengthy repetition here.⁴⁸ Put simply, all thought of death is circumscribed by the belief that God is the author of life and death. Thereafter, on the whole, the Hebrew scriptures present death as the completion and fulfilment of life, and as a good thing when it occurs at the end of a long and faithful life. There is a belief in Sheol, a place where shades of the dead exist in something much less than life. Even in Sheol, however, God is not absent.

An Overview of the New Testament Understanding of Death

The New Testament, however, is of greater significance for Christian eschatology. In the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth his first followers see far-reaching significance for the destiny of every human being. The death of Jesus is understood to be, amongst other things, the means by which sins are forgiven. The texts indicate that had God not redeemed the world in the death of Jesus, human beings would remain unreconciled to God. Furthermore, for Paul in particular, sin and death are in close proximity, and at times are asserted to be in a causal relationship: death is the consequence of sin. For example, Rom. 5:12 states, "Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned..." If sin remained unforgiven, then death would be the inevitable consequence. However, since the death of Jesus has effected redemption from sin, death is abolished (2 Tim. 1:10) and so need no longer be the inevitable destiny of human beings. Clearly, there is more going on here than a literal understanding of the term "death." Paul and other New Testament writers were well aware that their fellow followers of Jesus still died. The death from which

⁴⁸ The rest of this paragraph follows Barr's analysis in *The Garden of Eden*, chap. 2.

those forgiven in Christ were freed was not physical death as such, but its sting – sin, and sin’s consequence – which at the very least for the New Testament means eternal separation from God.

This liberation from death as separation from God would not be effected, however, if Jesus’ death had not been followed by his resurrection. That God raised Jesus from the dead is essential to New Testament writers as indicating the overcoming of death. Peter speaks of Jesus as follows: “‘God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power’” (Acts 2:24). Paul too considers Christ’s resurrection from death to be the overcoming of death: “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom. 6:9). Jesus’ resurrection ensures that although his followers will (with the exception of those still alive at Jesus’ return) undergo physical death, they may hope to be raised by God into eternal life – “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:14). There, the redeemed will be found with Christ, without sin, pain or death, as recounted in the revelation to John (Rev. 21:1-4).

How does this accord with the account of human destiny and fulfilment outlined above? A preliminary answer is that both the account above of human identity under the condition of temporality and the New Testament view envisage human fulfilment as taking place beyond death, when each life has been judged, redeemed, and seen whole. Indeed, for the New Testament, Jesus’ resurrection does not merely exemplify human resurrection, but inaugurates it, making it possible. Let us therefore take the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in turn, although it is somewhat artificial to separate them out, and see in greater detail how the events related in scripture, which are understood as having redemptive force, might correspond to the account of human fulfilment outlined above.

Jesus’ Life and Death

The life of Jesus is understood by Christians to be revelatory of God’s character, while at the same time exemplifying the highest possibilities of humanity. Our perception and contemplation of this life are essential to the Christian life. It shows the Christian (to some extent) what God is like, and how the Christian should be.

Jesus' death may similarly be understood as part of God's creative relationship with the world. Jesus died as every human being must die. The fear and perhaps horror he showed (as the Evangelists record it) are the human fear and horror at death. On one level, then, Jesus' death is the same death as every person's. But Jesus' death is something more, showing God's creative relationship with the world stretching even into death. It shows God freely identifying with the experience of death. Peter preaches, for example, that the psalmist's words, "He was not abandoned to Hades," refer to God's relationship to Jesus in his death (Acts 2:31). Jesus' death shows how God's loving relationship with creatures does not cease with their deaths. This creature, whose friends believed bore God's presence uniquely, died – and God continued to relate lovingly to him. There is no need here to decide whether the theologian can assert truly that God died on the cross, or that God suffered on the cross, or, with Moltmann, that the Father suffered the death of the Son and the Son suffered the abandonment of the Father in the event of Jesus' death. What is essential is to maintain the principle that Jesus' death, in the context of his life and resurrection, is an event in which God's creative relationship with the world is seen, as deeply as perhaps it ever could be, as one of love.

Jesus' Resurrection

All this can, of course, only be said in the light of the resurrection. It is only by dint of Jesus' being raised by God that it can be said with any confidence that God continued to relate lovingly to the dead man Jesus. The resurrection shows us that death need not mark the end of human existence. Despite his death, Jesus did not cease to exist. God continued to relate to him as dead, and in a new form of living as raised. There are a number of central features of the New Testament understanding of resurrection, which will now be outlined and compared to the account of human fulfilment suggested above.

God who raises. The first essential feature of the New Testament understanding of resurrection is that the agent of resurrection is not the one who is raised. Resurrection implies one who raises – God. God is the one who raised Jesus Christ from the dead by the Spirit, and, it is believed, will raise all people from the grave (Rom. 8:11). Resurrection is incompatible then with any understanding of human

life beyond death which sees that life as progressing from life before death to life after death, without reference to God's creative relationship to each person, perhaps according to some accounts of the immortality of the separable soul. Resurrection requires the creative energy of God.

Jesus' resurrection the example of human resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus functions for the New Testament writers as an example of the resurrection of all human beings: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). What can be inferred from scripture regarding the New Testament conception of individual resurrection? The biblical concept of resurrection does not require belief in the physical resuscitation of the human corpse: it does not necessitate the atomic reconstitution of the human body which ceased to be alive at death. The enigmatic accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances, in Matthew, Luke, John and Acts, indicate that Jesus did not return to embodied life as had, for instance, Jairus' daughter. Rather his life seemed to have taken a new form, with aspects seemingly physical, such as the ability to eat, and aspects seemingly immaterial, such as being able to appear in a locked room.⁴⁹ More than this it is impossible to say with any certainty what form Jesus' resurrection body took; furthermore the study of Jesus' resurrection is so complex that it has to remain relatively unexplored in this enquiry.

Paul's account of the resurrection of the body seems to be consistent with the gospels' accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances when he argues against any crude belief in physical reconstitution of the body after death: "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable... It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42-3). Paul offers little detail as to what a spiritual body might be like, but he is certain it is to be distinguished from a physical body. These phrases have given rise to a great deal of discussion. Ronald Sider, for example, argues that "physical body" in this passage means

⁴⁹ This runs counter to the commonly held view that the accounts of Jesus' resurrection present a strongly materialist risen Christ, found for example in Werner Jeanrond, "Death, Where is your Sting? Death as the Ultimate Challenge to Christian Hope," in *Christian Resources of Hope*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny (Dublin: Columba, 1995), 124.

something like the sinful person, hence “spiritual body” refers to the person who as a consequence of redemption is immortal and imperishable. “Spiritual” and “physical” make no reference to bodily constitution in the resurrection.⁵⁰ This interpretation, however, fails to take sufficient account of the context, which is the resurrection of the dead, by which Paul clearly means “dead” in its straightforward, biological sense. Paul is making a simple point here, which is that the resurrection body is transformed in some way from its ante-mortem physical form. It must also be recognized, however, that Paul’s discussion of physical and spiritual body implies continuity within transformation. The seed sown becomes the wheat. The physical body is transformed into the spiritual body. Elsewhere, Paul makes clear this continuity between physical and spiritual bodies, and between the spiritual body and Christ’s risen body: “He [namely Christ] will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil. 3:21).⁵¹

Jesus’ resurrection the cause of human resurrection. The resurrection is not merely the example of the resurrection human persons may hope for; in some sense it is the cause of that resurrection. Paul writes, “since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:21-22). The belief is that God’s raising Jesus from the dead, the raising of the one who was crucified, makes it possible that other human beings may be raised by God. The clear implication is that, were it not for Jesus’ death and resurrection, God would not raise men and women from the dead. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died [lit. fallen asleep] in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:17-18). Jesus’ death and resurrection are a necessary cause of others’ being raised. Paul expresses this idea in terms of the Spirit. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, became a life-giving spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), imparting this spirit to all who share in his life. It is this spirit which is the pledge (or first instalment, or guarantee) of our resurrection (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5). This is connected with the twentieth century theological claim that Jesus Christ inaugurates a new age, that in his being he brings

⁵⁰ Ronald Sider, “The Pauline Conception of the Resurrection Body in I Corinthians XV. 35-54,” *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975), 434.

⁵¹ See Jacob Kremer, “Paul: The Resurrection of Jesus, the Cause and Exemplar of our Resurrection,” trans. David Bourke, *Concilium* 10 (1970), 88-9.

about the kingdom of God, that – in an equation of seemingly disparate elements – Jesus Christ is the last things.⁵²

Bodily resurrection. A further implication of resurrection is that while resurrected persons will not be physical, they will still be bodily. It is a spiritual *body* which Paul proposes. What kind of body is not physical? It is a question which baffles the enquirer whose ordinary understanding of all bodies is gained from the physical world. By its very nature, the physical world knows only of physical bodies.⁵³ An immaterial body is an oxymoron. It can only be supposed that in the transformation in eternity marked by and initiated in death, God's loving activity in relation to created human beings involves the taking on of a new form of existence which, by analogy, may be thought of as bodily. If that is so, we might tentatively believe that the following characteristics will belong to such a "spiritual body." They will include individuality: the individual person will remain individuated from other people, and from God. They will include sociability: the individual person will be knowable, and capable of relationship with other people and with God. They will include the ability to exist temporally, with a transformed sense of duration and successiveness appropriate to the redemption of finite creatures. They will include the capacity for free action, enabling the person to love and know others and God. This may well be the correct sense to give to the much-disputed words "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). Creaturely physicality will cease, but God will continue to sustain our being in some different, eternal form. Yet it should be stressed how tentative this development of the Pauline expression "spiritual body" must be.

Resurrection and Immortality

With these crucial aspects of the biblical concept of resurrection, the account given above of human fulfilment in and beyond death agrees. First, the conviction that it is God who raises the dead is equivalent to the belief that a new form of human life

⁵² See e.g., Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 5:57. On this paragraph as a whole, see Kremer, "Paul: The Resurrection of Jesus," 78-82.

⁵³ I leave to one side the intriguing findings of sub-atomic physicists which may cast doubt on this sentence.

beyond death requires the creative energy of God. It is God whose loving relationship with the person enables that life to continue beyond death – just as it is God's creative relation to the person which ensures its existence before death also. Second, as in the understanding of the resurrection of a spiritual body, the concept of the presence of human subjectivity beyond death in eternity does not require the reconstitution of the human body. After death, the body exists only as inanimate matter. Finally, the concept of the presence of human life beyond death is compatible with the emphasis resurrection places on the resurrection of the *body*, so long as the bodily aspect of resurrection life is seen as referring to certain characteristics of bodiliness in embodied existence which will remain in life beyond death, rather than to the materiality of the human body as it is between birth and death.

The strength of understanding life beyond death in terms of God's creative relationship with the person as a centre of subjectivity is therefore the overcoming of the opposition of immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body, as discussed in previous chapters in relation to Barth and the post-Barthians. Immortality of the person and resurrection of the body may now be understood as different attempts to describe the form that God's loving creativity takes in the human being beyond death. It has been recognized by a number of observers that resurrection and immortality are complementary in Christian eschatology, including Simon Tugwell:

There would certainly be something very odd about a doctrine of resurrection *ex nihilo*, without any kind of continuity of existence between the person who died and the person who was resurrected. That would smack very much of the production of a replica of the dead person, rather than a genuine resurrection of the same person. That is the main reason, at least until a relatively recent period, why christians have appealed to the immortality of the soul.⁵⁴

It is possible now to see immortality and resurrection as not being merely complementary, but different expressions for the same hope. Both expressions may overlap with incompatible interpretations – in the case of immortality of the soul an immaterial substantial soul, and in the case of resurrection of the body a literal

⁵⁴ Tugwell, *Human Immortality*, 163. See also Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, chap. 5, especially 105-6.

resuscitation of the body's atoms – but when disentangled from these extreme interpretations, immortality and resurrection appear to state the same basic hope: that in the transformation to eternity, God's relationship to the individual personality will be maintained, indeed, transformed by judgment. This transformed person, will have achieved his or true identity: immortality, if you like, or resurrected, if you prefer.⁵⁵

Judgment

A principal theme in New Testament eschatology remains to be explored – judgment. New Testament writers, and probably Jesus himself, believed that at or after death, the individual would be judged by God for the life lived in the body. There are many examples in the texts. For example, Jesus' parabolic account of the nations gathered before the king in Matthew 25:31-46 indicates that in a judgment after death, the righteous will inherit the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world, while the accursed will go away into eternal punishment. Moreover, Acts records the conclusion of Paul's sermon to the Athenians as follows: God “ ‘has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead’ ” (Acts 17:31). A final example from Paul shows the importance of judgment in the New Testament's understanding of life beyond death: “By your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness; there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:5-8).

Has the account given above of human fulfilment beyond death paid sufficient importance to this theme of judgment? Pannenberg, for example, certainly does not envisage judgment in quite the same terms. The biblical imagery of judgment is cast in legal terms as a form of criminal trial, with evidence brought to bear from the person's history, and a verdict being handed down by God, or by Jesus who gives

⁵⁵ See Aldwinckle, *Death in the Secular City*, 99: “immortality language and resurrection language can both be made to bear the meaning which a Christian would want to give to it in the light of his

God's judgment. The account of human destiny proposed here does not use such imagery, but it does maintain the principle of judgment. Again, God's loving creative activity is central to any answer to be sketched. Part of that divine activity within lives before death is judgment. The self-centredness with which all lives contend is continually being judged by the gracious love of God, which encourages repentance, and a new less self-centred approach involving love for others. God's love itself, as has often been pointed out, is an attribute which contains within itself justice. God, being good, does not love without that love being informed by divine holiness. God loves with perfect knowledge of the object of that love, and that love, in confronting what is not holy, appears as a judgment on its object. Throughout life, then, an individual person undergoes God's judgment. It is continual; it is patient; it may well be unnoticed; but it is part of human existence in relationship to the creator.

What then for the life to come? The best assumption we can make is that in the transformation to eternity, human lives will undergo a definitive judgment. Indeed, if human lives are to become fulfilled in love for others and themselves, they require the loving judgment of God, making good the evils undergone in life. In the words of Stephen Sykes, "heaven, the attaining of life in all its fulness, is, in the promise contained in the Christian's faith, the result of the perfect judgment which will be passed down on his own life by God himself."⁵⁶ In the presence of this loving judgment, human persons will face in a more radical fashion than before their own self-centredness, and will enter into entirely just and loving relationships with others and with God.

It should be emphasized that this judgment involves reconciliation not only with God but also with others. Human fulfilment before death is thwarted by the presence of injustice, pain and suffering caused by the actions of human beings on each other. Complete fulfilment will require not only the absence of pain, suffering and injustice but also the presence of reconciliation between human persons.

understanding of God."

⁵⁶ Stephen W. Sykes, "Life After Death: the Christian Doctrine of Heaven," in *Creation, Christ and Culture*, ed. Richard McKinney, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 261. See also John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1977), 365, for a similar statement of the relationship between belief in judgment and in God's goodness.

Judgment is not only a feature of the relationship between God and people, but between people and people. As God extends loving judgment towards people and they in turn increasingly attain self-knowledge and love for God, people will be enabled to repent of the injustice they have perpetrated on others, and forgive in love injustices perpetrated on them. The fulfilment of society will involve loving judgment between people as well as between God and people.⁵⁷

Does this understanding of judgment imply that *all* human beings, judged by God as part of a loving creative relationship, will undergo the inter-related process of repentance, forgiveness, and the fulfilment of love and knowledge of others and God? To make that implication into a necessity is a move which does not seem warranted by the principles with which this account has been guided. Throughout this chapter, God's loving relationship with the world has been an implicit principle, but alongside and part of this principle is that the human creature is capable of free, creative relationships with others and with God. People are free centres of subjectivity, influenced but not controlled exhaustively by their ultimate goods of love for others and God. This freedom itself is a good, which when exercised correctly results in love. The question is whether, in the presence of God's love beyond death, a person could freely not choose the good. It is hard to imagine that God's influence will not bring all free creatures to their ultimate goal.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, it cannot be *presumed* that all will choose the good. It cannot be a part of knowledge that the entire creation be fulfilled. It is, perhaps, incumbent on human beings to hope that all will be fulfilled in their human nature as loving subjects of God and others, but that hope cannot become knowledge. God's freedom and human freedom require that that step not be taken. Self-centredness may remain a temptation. This approach respects the scriptural ambiguity as regards the possibility that all may be saved: at different times, the writers of the New Testament appear to envisage a universal salvation; at others they conceive a judgment in which it appears that not all people will inherit eternal life. This ambiguity is respected by the approach advocated here, that we may hope that all

⁵⁷ Inter-human judgment has been emphasized by Miroslav Volf in "The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition," *Modern Theology* 16 (2000), 91-113.

⁵⁸ This is, in essence, Hick's argument in *Death and Eternal Life*, 250-59.

may be saved, but we may not presume to know that all people will realize their fulfilment in love for God and others.⁵⁹

The Return of Christ

The subject of judgment after death is closely linked in the New Testament to the return of Christ, or the parousia. According to Matthew, Jesus says that “the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done” (Matt. 16:27). The early 1 Thessalonians envisages this coming with great anticipation: “For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). For James too, “the coming of the Lord is near... See, the Judge is standing at the doors!” (Jas. 5:8-9.) The New Testament writers, particularly towards the beginning of the church’s life, believed fervently in the imminent coming of Jesus, to judge and to take the redeemed into the kingdom of God. The hope of Christ’s return has remained a central theme in Christian eschatology in the church’s history. How is it related to the account of human fulfilment outlined here?

It expresses the fervent wish of the Christian to be in the immediate presence of God and Christ. Nevertheless, alongside the imagery of judgment as taking place in a law-court, the idea of the return of Christ to judge and effect the entry of the redeemed into heaven has to be re-conceived. The idea of Christ’s return may partly be understood as the continual presence of Christ with his fellow men and women. Christians do not believe Christ to be absent from creation now, but present in it as the resurrected Lord. They believe that Christ is with his people, by his spirit. It may be imagined, then, that in the life to come, Christ will continue to be present with his people, loving with God’s love. There will be no need for a particular *return* of Christ; rather Christ is continually turned towards those he loves.

However, the parousia may also be interpreted as the hope for the final fulfilment of creation. The parousia is a symbol equivalent to the expectation for a *last* judgment, a *general* resurrection of the dead at the end of the world, a cosmic

⁵⁹ This approach is influenced by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?*, trans D. Kipp and L. Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

eschaton. These images express the human hope for a final and unequivocal conclusion to history, which seems never to progress beyond antagonism and ambiguity under its own steam. They envisage a creative act of God which brings the creation and its history to a fulfilment of justice, peace, righteousness and love. They may be interpreted as follows: when the process of growth, judgment and forgiveness has reached its fulfilment, when all self-centredness has been transformed into love for God and others, when all life has achieved its goal, then God will be worshipped, known and loved perfectly. The parousia as the complete presence of Christ with his people symbolizes this final entry of God and creation into glory. Whether or not this eternal consummation is a transformation even of the form of life beyond death granted by God's loving interaction with people is an extremely difficult question. It has often been suggested that what seems to be the temporal distinction between dates of death ought not to be extrapolated into different temporal spans *in eternity before* the final consummation. Rather if this is conceivable at all, perhaps the general resurrection is "simultaneous" with the end of every human life, such that the individual's last things coincide with those of the universe. Yet others have considered such an approach incoherent. Perhaps here we may simply say we have no means of deciding. Regardless, it may still be hoped that the final consummation involves the achieved perfection of love, of society and of creation. It can best be expressed as the glorification of God.

5. Conclusion

'Do you know what, chum?' he was saying with a saucy smile. 'I think you're just as big a bleeding unbeliever as I am. You say you believe in the next world, and you know just as much about the next world as I do, which is sweet damn-all. What's heaven? You don't know. Where's heaven? You don't know. You know sweet damn-all!'⁶⁰

Frank O'Connor's speaker is perfectly correct: nothing is known of heaven. Yet ever since the earliest days of Christianity, and for long before, theologically-inclined

⁶⁰ Frank O'Connor, "Guests of the Nation," in *Guests of the Nation* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1979), 10.

minds have turned to the prospect of human destiny and the possibility of immortality, and have attempted in the light of their faith to express hope for human beings beyond death. Each era in the history of theology has developed individual eschatology in its own language and concepts, and the twentieth century is no different. This study has been of one tradition in twentieth century theology, the particularly dominant and influential tradition which found expression in the dialectical theology of Rudolf Bultmann and the early Karl Barth, found towering development in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, and has begotten heirs in the contemporary theologians Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel.

It was discovered that the common features of individual eschatology as articulated by this tradition are as follows: the understanding of death as natural to human beings; the rejection of the immortality of the soul; reserve towards the aspect of eschatology concerned with the individual; eternal life as eternalization of this mortal life; the opposition of time and eternity; and the absence of human subjectivity beyond death. A further common feature was found to underpin the others: the rejection of natural theology. A sense of austerity runs through these expressions of hope. At times, their reserve towards individual eschatology and dismissal of hopes for individual subjectivity beyond death is even reminiscent of Margaret's words in *Howards End*: "People have their own deaths as well as their own lives, and even if there is nothing beyond death, we shall differ in nothingness."⁶¹

It may seem slightly harsh to consider the twentieth century Protestant view as being, in essence, that beyond death human beings shall differ in nothingness. After all, as they say, beyond death is not nothingness but God. This is offered as comfort. However, it is far from clear that such an assurance will comfort many who contemplate their own death, or indeed, the death of those they love. What is missing is the person. God may dwell in eternity; God may not cease to exist with every human death; but what of the individual? Will he or she continue to live beyond death? Will such life involve knowledge and love of God and others? The twentieth century Protestants answer these questions at best, ambivalently, at worst, with a short shake of the head.

This thesis has, in the final two chapters, attempted to raise doubts as to this dominant treatment of individual eschatology in the twentieth century. At a methodological level, it has established the crudity of the Protestants' demarcation of revealed and natural theology, and so attempted to rehabilitate the understanding of theology as reflection proceeding from a nature which is revealed and a revelation which is natural. At a substantive level, it has pointed to the bluntness of the Protestants' polemic against a dualistic understanding of the human person, and against the doctrine of the soul's immortality. An account of duality in human nature has been offered, as human identity residing in a person's being a centre of subjectivity, which offers renewed prospects for the hope of immortality. Furthermore, the theologians' view of eternity's opposition to time has been questioned, and a more supple, interpenetrative understanding of time and eternity has been suggested, which allows for the possibility of individual subjectivity beyond death, and the enjoyment of some form of temporality. Throughout this outline, the tentativeness of all eschatological thought has been stressed: it is not disputed that we know sweet damn-all about life beyond death, but it is nonetheless asserted that we may enquire into the rationality of our hope.

It may be that, despite the over-simplifications and doubtful dichotomies which characterize the twentieth century Protestant approach to individual eschatology, its substantive positions are persuasive. Yet it seems unlikely that the human enquiry into the destiny of the individual (no less than the parallel enquiry into cosmic eschatology) will be satisfied with the positions developed by Bultmann, Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel – with, in short, their acceptance of missing persons. Their austerity may satisfy some, but the human spirit is rarely satisfied with such self-denial (in both senses). Future expressions of hope for life beyond death will not of course merely re-state worn-out visions, such as those of Luther and Calvin for example, but they may well recapture certain elements of those visions lost to view in twentieth century Protestant theology: the presence of individual subjects beyond their deaths, before God, who know and love God and others. They may find the missing persons.

⁶¹ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941), 292.

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