

Alexander Garton-Eisenacher

Divine Freedom and Revelation in Christ

The Doctrine of Eternity with Special Reference
to the Theology of Karl Barth



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Alexander Garton-Eisenacher

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For My Father

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1. Introduction

1.1 Scope

Among the basic tenets of the Christian faith, two appear to exist in an uneasy tension. It is fundamental to Christianity to claim that, in and through Christ, the believer knows God as he truly is. In this way, Christian theology is founded on the claim of possessing reliable knowledge of God through divine acts in time.¹ Yet, it is also crucial for Christianity that these same divine acts are undertaken freely rather than out of necessity. It is this notion of God's freedom *ad extra* that establishes the gracious nature of humanity's existence and fellowship with God, by precluding the interpretation that this state of affairs arises by virtue of external compulsion or simply as a side-effect of God's quest for self-actualization.

Here Christian theology finds itself on the horns of a dilemma: the more we emphasize the reliability and hence ontological significance of temporal christological revelation² (i. e., that it discloses God's true reality), the less we seem able to accept the possibility of hypothetical states of affairs in which God acts differently in time (so-called "counterfactuals"). Conversely, the more we defend God's freedom to have acted differently, the less we seem able to avoid the conclusion that there is a gap between what God reveals and God's true reality. Thus, on the one hand, in stressing the role of Christ, theology risks positing a God who is dependent on the world for his existence and whose supposedly gracious acts *ad extra* were actually undertaken for God's own benefit. On the other hand, in affirming the possibility of counterfactuals, theology risks concluding that even the most fundamental

1 While the affirmation of Christ's divinity is fundamentally a matter of faith, it is essential to Christian theology to establish the internal coherence, presupposing this faith, of the claim that God is as he is disclosed in Christ. If our entire theological edifice is conversely built on the premise that this too is nothing more than a matter of faith, all theological arguments become at their most basic nothing more than faith-based assertions with inherently equal validity. By extension, though we might confess the Nicene Creed, we would be unable to articulate what this faith tells us, if anything, about God (and hence ourselves) beyond the sheer fact of the economy of salvation.

2 The term "christological revelation" is used in this book primarily to refer to knowledge about God mediated through the incarnation. Nevertheless, as we shall see in chapter two, it is a basic contention of Karl Barth's theology that all God's work *ad extra* is subsumed under his primal act of election whose content is Jesus Christ. As such, Barth sees God's relationship to creation *tout court*, including the entire content of revelation (whether disclosed through the incarnation or otherwise), as at base christological in nature. It follows that the question of whether God is truly as he is revealed in Christ is by extension the question of whether *any* knowledge about God can be said to be reliable.

doctrines of the Christian faith describe nothing more than a “mask” worn by an unknowable God.

The following book explores proposed solutions to this tension between epistemological reliability and divine counterfactual freedom (henceforth termed the “epistemology-freedom debate”), building particularly from the work of Karl Barth. The book begins with Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, before moving to the contemporary debate between the Princeton Barthian theologians Bruce McCormack and George Hunsinger regarding how Barth underpins his solution to the epistemology-freedom debate metaphysically. Next, the book explores a proposed corrective of Barth’s thought in the narrative theology of Robert Jenson. These Barthian and post-Barthian models are finally contrasted with a new solution derived from classical metaphysics, focussing particularly on the works of Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

1.2 Purpose and methodology

The purpose of this book is to contribute to the epistemology-freedom debate, in the first instance by offering a fresh reading of the *Church Dogmatics* that marks a distinct break from the cul-de-sac in which recent Barth scholarship has found itself. Despite the prominence of McCormack’s and Hunsinger’s interpretations of Barth, neither is able convincingly to explain all of Barth’s metaphysical statements beyond recourse to the suggestion of inconsistency. At root here is the fact that neither’s proposed “Barthian” solution to the epistemology-freedom debate effectively balances Barth’s genuine concerns over both epistemological reliability *and* divine freedom. By contrast, my own reading traces a consistent understanding of the divine ontology in the *Church Dogmatics* that holds together the twin facets of the debate, reclaiming Barth’s theology as a promising starting point for a comprehensive solution.

Nonetheless, the book also shows that Barth’s theology on this point is undermined by the doctrine of eternity within which it is framed. By identifying similarly fatal problems with Jenson’s narratological “corrective” of Barth, also as a result of his understanding of God’s relationship to time, the book demonstrates that the doctrine of eternity plays a much more decisive role in the epistemology-freedom debate than hitherto acknowledged. In the Barthian and post-Barthian solutions, the doctrine of eternity is employed merely *ex post facto* to build a metaphysic around a prefigured epistemological stance. As a result, the resources offered by this doctrine have been underplayed in the debate, and its formulations have suffered due to being moulded as ancillary arguments rather than made a direct focus of analysis. The book aims to show how approaching the debate through the explicit lens of the doctrine of eternity provides a more comprehensive account both of

God's relation to time and of how the reliability of christological revelation can be reconciled with divine counterfactual freedom.

I thus begin with the classical doctrine of eternity but seek to read this doctrine against a Barthian background. Specifically, I identify two key motifs employed by Barth to underpin his doctrine of election – the *analogia temporalis* and the identification of God as a being-in-act – which I propose should equally serve as foci when examining classical eternity. This book shows that both principles can indeed be authentically derived from the latter doctrine, and furthermore that these classical explications have major advantages over their Barthian equivalents. At the same time, in reading the classical doctrine of eternity against a Barthian background, we draw out a more temporal, dynamic interpretation of classical eternity than the characterization that has dominated contemporary scholarship. In this way, the book also shows that reading classical eternity against a Barthian background offers a way of both reframing and ultimately reclaiming it as a viable Christian understanding of God's relationship to time.

One of the core tensions exhibited by competing solutions to the epistemology-freedom debate concerns whether one understands divine decisions within an “intellectualist” or “voluntarist” framework. For the purpose of this book, I use these terms to refer to the theories originally codified in the later Middle Ages regarding whether the intellect or the will is assigned a predominant role in God's decisions. In the former (intellectualist) case, any choice of the will inherently results from what the intellect identifies as the greatest good; hence, every divine act is undertaken because and only insofar as it represents the greatest possible good as discerned by God's omniscient intellect. By contrast, the latter (voluntarist) reasoning emphasizes the divine will over the divine intellect and so stresses the indetermination of the will. As Tobias Hoffmann notes, however, these two terms most appropriately describe the extreme ends of the spectrum, with many writers showing tendencies towards both intellectualism and voluntarism, or considering the intellect and will to be so intertwined that the classifications become meaningless.³

It is the contention of this book that almost all of its key interlocutors fall into such an intermediary position, for which reason applying the terms “intellectualist” or “voluntarist” as hermeneutical keys in assessing their arguments would serve only to promulgate reductionistic accounts.⁴ I thus consciously eschew these cate-

3 Tobias Hoffmann, ‘Intellectualism and Voluntarism’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* Volume 1, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 414.

4 For example, Hoffmann convincingly argues that Aquinas sees the will and intellect as thoroughly interpenetrated (Hoffmann, ‘Intellectualism and Voluntarism’, 415–416). Both Ian A. McFarland and Matthew J. Aragon Bruce have shown that, despite tendencies towards voluntarism, Barth's theology cannot be simply reduced to this position (Ian A. McFarland, ‘Present in Love: Rethinking Barth on the Divine Perfections’, *Modern Theology* 33, no. 2 (2017): 246; Matthew J. Aragon Bruce, ‘Election’,

gories, instead seeking to take each scholar on their own terms. In keeping with this sensitivity towards varied and often nuanced attitudes towards the will and intellect in divine decisions, a deliberate effort has been made to ensure that the themes at play in the following discussion are fundamental across the voluntarist-intellectualist spectrum, such that the overarching thesis developed in the course the book is applicable regardless of the position one takes in this debate.

For this reason, the use of counterfactual possibility as a metric for divine freedom in this book should not be taken to entail a modern conception of freedom as “liberty”; that is, having multiple options to choose from when making a decision. Insofar as “liberty” suggests that any of these alternative options could equally well have been actualized, the resultant conception of freedom is incompatible with a strict intellectualism in which the will is always bound to actualize the greatest perceived good between contrary potentials. Rather, following both Patristic and Barthian theology, the book argues for a definition of divine freedom in terms of *aseity*, for which the key criterion is whether God’s actions *ad extra* are extrinsic to him. By extension, in focussing the discussion of divine freedom on counterfactual possibility, we are not asking whether God could have undertaken hypothetical alternative courses of action to his actual acts of creation and salvation. Rather, this line of questioning is concerned simply with whether the bare possibility exists for God to *refrain* from a given action *ad extra* while remaining essentially the same God known to us in Christ. In this way, the use of counterfactual possibility serves as a heuristic for ensuring that God’s action *ad extra* is indeed gracious, by demonstrating that God can coherently be described (in principle, not in practice) without reference to creation.

1.3 Narrative outline

The next chapter begins by outlining Barth’s attempt to secure the reliability of christological revelation not through historicizing the divine nature in creation (following Hegel), but rather through eternalizing the christological act, in the hope that this will better protect divine freedom. For Barth, therefore, revelation is reliable specifically because Christ’s actions in time serve as a signpost both to God’s eternal self-determination to be for-us (in his pretemporal decision to elect humanity to salvation), and to his eternal reality as Trinity through which everything God does in time merely repeats who and what God is in himself. In this way, Barth argues that God’s eternal predestination is fully enacted and thus

in *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, ed. Paul Dafydd Jones and Paul T. Nimmo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 318.

comprehensively disclosed on the cross as the election of the Son's humanity via the rejection of the Son's divinity. This importantly replaces the traditional Reformed *decretum absolutum*, a double-predestination made by an unknowable God on an unknowable basis, with a decision of salvation whose subject and object are none other than the Jesus Christ known to us in revelation.

It is clear that this principle, known as the *analogia temporalis*, is intimately bound up with both the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of election. What is less clear is the relative ordering of these two doctrines in Barth's mature thought: is the subject of election the antecedently triune God who determines himself for incarnation *within this triune framework*, or is the self-determination of God actually a complete *self-constitution*, including the generation of his triunity as the means to facilitate election? In other words, does Barth posit the reliability of revelation by arguing that it ultimately points to God's primal reality as triune or to his primal act of election? Chapter three examines these two alternative interpretations of Barth, seen most archetypally in the works of McCormack and Hunsinger. For McCormack, Barth's mature thought is thoroughly actualist; yet while Barth thus identifies God's triunity as a logical function of election, he fails to carry this through consistently in the rest of his theology, repeatedly lapsing back into essentialist statements to secure divine freedom. By contrast, Hunsinger argues that Barth's concern not to tie God to creation convinces him to maintain a traditional ordering of election as logically subsequent to God's triunity, and thus fundamentally as an expression of the latter. He explains the presence of both actualist and essentialist statements in the *Church Dogmatics* by arguing that Barth rejects metaphysics as a controlling system in his theology, instead jumping from actualism to essentialism as he sees fit in the conviction that no one system can encapsulate God.

After showing that neither position is able to reflect the full range of ontological statements in the *Church Dogmatics*, I put forward my own interpretation of Barth's metaphysics in chapter four. While I agree with Hunsinger that Barth places God's triunity before election, I depart from both Hunsinger and McCormack by arguing that Barth does in fact have a consistent understanding of the divine ontology. This is summarized in Barth's description of God as a "being-in-act" which, rather than collapsing being into act (as McCormack claims), instead presents being and act in God as equiprimordial and mutually entailing. That is, God is neither an essence that subsequently engages in act nor an act that generates the divine essence, but a "divine reality" whose act of triune relationality both constitutes and expresses his essential being. In the act of election, God determines his being-in-act anew as this primordial triune relationality *plus* a new elector-elected relationality in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, while God gains a new mode of identification as a result of this decision (insofar as he becomes God-for-us), his *essential being* remains the same insofar as this new relationality is fundamentally a repetition *ad extra* of God's

primordial intratrinitarian relationality *ad intra*. In this way, Barth is able to assert both God's counterfactual freedom in the act of election (that is, that God would be essentially the same had he not engaged in election) *and* that the act of election has ontological significance for God such that he cannot now be considered devoid of it.

In chapters five and six, I show how Barth underpins his solution to the epistemology-freedom debate through his doctrine of eternity. Here Barth argues via the *analogia temporalis* that since Christ's relationship to time must provide reliable knowledge of God's eternity *in se*, the divine life must likewise be structured by the distinctions of past, present and future, and hence chronological succession. However, since this successive structure threatens to relegate election exclusively to the pretemporal past, isolated from its realization in the incarnation, Barth develops the idea of God's being-in-act as continually reaffirmed at every moment. This means that God reiteratively wills, and thereby maintains, both his triune relationship *ad intra* and his elector-elected relationship *ad extra* in the present. In this way, Barth is able to affirm both that God will never contradict his determination to be for-us in election (thus redefining divine immutability as God's faithfulness to this decision) *and* that he always retains his freedom regarding subsequent manifestations of this relationship.

Nevertheless, as chapter seven argues, this division between election and the incarnation fatally undermines Barth's argument. Most notably, it refutes Barth's claim that *election* determines the divine being-in-act anew by integrating into it a new elector-elected relationality in the person of Jesus Christ. This is because the person of Jesus Christ and hence the human nature in which humanity is elected only comes into being with the *incarnation*. However, if it is not Christ but rather creation generically considered which comes into being as a direct result of election, and which thus stands as election's object, this decision is detached from christological revelation, undermining Barth's reformulation of Calvinist double-predestination and returning us to the *decretum absolutum*. Barth's attempt to bridge this division by stating that God reaffirms his triunity and election at every moment results in a tension in Barth's theology between either (1) claiming that God *cannot* withdraw from his relationship with humanity, tying him to creation; or (2) claiming this relationship is always subject to the danger of being rescinded and, by the same token, that God's triunity is also liable to being dissolved. Further, as Robert Jenson notes, the separation of primordial election from the act of the incarnation results in the *analogia temporalis* becoming in essence the attempt to transcend revelation in favour of a qualitatively different, albeit analogically related, reality behind it. By extension, Barth's strong theological focus backwards to pretemporal eternity as the true nexus of God's relationship with creation inevitably correlates to an equal focus on the primordial reality of the Logos behind the flesh of Christ, resulting in a *Deus absconditus*.

It follows that while Barth's argument serves as a promising starting point for a comprehensive solution to the epistemology-freedom debate, it requires a significant corrective. The book turns in chapter eight to the post-Barthian theology of Robert Jenson to seek this corrective, on the basis that his theology builds on Barth's but significantly departs from it over the aforementioned concerns regarding the separation between election and revelation caused by Barth's *analogia temporalis*. Jenson identifies the key problem with Barth's use of the doctrine of election to be his analogically mediated epistemology. He attempts to resolve this problem by locating election within the event of revelation itself as God's decision to resurrect Jesus. Redefining metaphysics along narratological lines, Jenson argues that God is not merely to be identified *by* the biblical narrative but moreover *with* the biblical narrative itself. He maintains divine freedom within this system by redefining it as God's "futurity" and hence as a function of the doctrine of eternity, asserting that God cannot be conditioned by anything outside of himself because he is always "ahead" of anything within creation that might threaten to circumscribe him. Our critical evaluation of Jenson's argument ultimately concludes, however, that his identification of God with the biblical narrative results in a form of idolatry. Jenson's attempt to deny this by redefining freedom in terms of futurity is unsuccessful because futurity is simply unable to serve the same purpose as counterfactual freedom; namely, to secure the gracious nature of divine acts *ad extra*. Finally, because the shape of Jenson's doctrine of eternity is dictated by these concerns, it is unable to conform to key aspects of the scriptural account of Jesus' pre-existence.

Our examination of Jenson demonstrates, first, that the problem with Barth's solution is not his use of the *analogia temporalis* per se, since rejecting it serves only to create serious problems for divine freedom, resulting in the re-emergence of this analogy to compensate. The implication is that our corrective of Barth is instead to be found in a more robust and therefore comprehensive use of the *analogia temporalis*. Second, our analysis of where Jenson's solution breaks down reveals that for him, as for Barth, a key source of problems is the doctrine of eternity. Both theologians employ this doctrine only in an ancillary capacity, dictated by presupposed epistemological concerns, resulting in a truncated version of the doctrine unable to withstand metaphysical or exegetical scrutiny. On this basis, the book concludes that the doctrine of eternity in fact plays an essential role in the epistemology-freedom debate that has hitherto remained unrecognized. Accordingly, the book proposes that the debate instead be approached from the explicit standpoint of the doctrine of eternity, allowing us to fully utilize the latter's recourses. The classical interpretation of eternity is identified as the logical framework from which to proceed in this regard, both because it offers a highly developed metaphysical grounding, and because Barth builds his own doctrine of eternity around the Boethian definition that is the archetype for the classical model.

Chapter nine thus commences with an outline of the classical doctrine of eternity, noting its basic principle of simultaneity in the articulations of Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas. The chapter goes on to examine the origins of classical eternity in divine immutability, simplicity and, ultimately, the identification of God as *actus purus*. An extended engagement with this latter concept reveals that scholarship on the terms *potentia* and *actus*, despite their foundational importance in classical Christian metaphysics, has been underdeveloped, resulting in the terms being misconstrued. In response, I show that the term *actus* is indissoluble with “activity”, since the original Greek word ἐνέργεια to which it refers was designed with the explicit remit of combining the concepts of being and act. This results in the conclusion that God, as *actus purus*, is inherently active, with the act inherent to God being subsequently identified as his triune relationality. In this way, the principle of *actus purus* results in a divine ontology very similar to Barth’s identification of God as a being-in-act.

Unlike the Barthian equivalent, however, use of the classical *actus purus* results in a conception of God’s acts, whether *ad intra* or *ad extra*, as eternally operative, on the basis that God has no latent capacities and thus no beginning or end to his acts. I follow Brian Leftow in identifying eternity as a dimension outside of four-dimensional space-time for which all temporal beings and events have co-ordinates and on the basis of which God can produce temporal effects. The upshot of these conclusions is an eternal conception of the incarnation, and hence the unreserved identity of the Logos with the person of Jesus Christ. By our identification of being and act as indissoluble in God, we are, moreover, able to deny a higher “essence” behind God’s act of incarnation and, by extension, a reality of the Logos that is not *ensarkos*. Instead, since God is his act of incarnation, the content of christological revelation is none other than the divine reality itself. Finally, since classical eternity denies the before-after structure in God that subsequence presupposes, we are able to side-step the question of whether God is able to rescind his election or triunity as a category error.

In chapter ten, I return to the concept of eternity as “unity”, showing how it results in an understanding of time as distended eternity. In this way, the book turns the ubiquitous characterization of classical eternity as “absolute timelessness” on its head, instead showing that it envisions eternity as the archetype and source of all time. Based on this conclusion, I show that eternity possesses the truest forms of duration and movement from which all temporal duration and movement derive. Developing from our conclusions in chapter nine, I identify this movement of eternity as the triune perichoresis, with time’s procession from and return to eternity as a reflection of this circular movement of the divine persons. Yet, if this latter temporal efflux and reflux is understood primarily as the economy of salvation – creation from God for the purpose of reconciliation in Christ – it follows that the divine circular movement has *itself* a created analogue, namely the divine

missions. In this way, the classical doctrine of eternity produces its own concept of the *analogia temporalis*.

Unlike the Barthian version, however, the eternal reality of the divine missions (from the divine perspective) proposed by classical eternity allows us to identify them as the temporal dimension of the divine processions themselves, rather than as a distinct temporal occurrence that merely reflects the latter. Von Balthasar develops this point, arguing that the kenosis, suffering, Godforsakenness and death found on the cross are, properly understood, none other than temporal manifestations of the eternal self-giving by which the triune persons are generated. This importantly overcomes Jenson's critique that the *analogia temporalis* constitutes the attempt to transcend revelation, since it means that an exploration of God's immanent reality is simply the attempt to understand the event of revelation itself more fully.

Nevertheless, the book does not just conclude that the classical doctrine of eternity provides a corrective to Barth's solution to the epistemology-freedom debate. Rather, it also makes the equally strong assertion that reading this doctrine against a Barthian background allows us to rediscover significant aspects of the classical doctrine of eternity that have been underdeveloped in contemporary scholarship, such as *actus purus* and *analogia temporalis*. The picture of classical eternity we end up with thus represents a significant departure from its contemporary characterization as "timelessness," demonstrating that its chief exponents in fact understood eternity as supremely temporal, durative, dynamic and vivacious. By showing that these rediscovered features help refute three dominant critiques of classical eternity, the book ends by asserting that the classical doctrine may be reclaimed as an authentic expression of the Christian faith.

Part I: Reckoning with Karl Barth

2. Barth's Analogically Mediated Epistemology

2.1 The analogical truth of revelation

Considered in itself, christological revelation might be thought to reveal nothing more than God's relationship to creation, disclosing God's salvific action in the economy in such a way that this relationship appears describable under terms such as "gracious", "loving", "merciful" and "righteous". Nonetheless, as Karl Barth recognizes, it is a theological imperative that revelation has the ability to describe not only God's relationship to creation but also the divine reality *in se*. Any possibility that God would have been (or is) different apart from creation is intolerable to Christian theology, since it means nothing revealed in Christ can be accepted as definitive of God. Without assurance, therefore, that what is disclosed in the divine economy corresponds to God's true nature, faith is condemned to the suspicion that God has "revealed" himself in a way 'completely different' from his immanent reality.¹

Barth attempts to provide such assurance by appeal to what we may term an *analogia temporalis*, arguing that christological revelation has unreserved reliability because it acts as a temporal signpost to God's eternal triune reality *in se*.² This argument is predicated on the assertion that God is completely himself in his act of revelation, such that revelation can be described as a repetition of God, 'completely identical with God himself'.³

The use of this analogy takes multiple forms throughout the *Church Dogmatics*, of which I shall cite three prominent examples. First, in terms of fellowship, Barth argues that God did not need to seek out and create fellowship between himself and humanity in time because he already has fellowship in eternity by virtue of his triunity. Accordingly, when God creates human beings in order to have fellowship with them, this fellowship constitutes merely a temporal reduplication of the fellowship existent in the intratrinitarian life.⁴ As such, Barth argues that God's choice to elect humanity is fundamentally the choice to continue for an other *ad extra* the love he already has for an other *ad intra*. This means that, in God's love

1 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/1 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 364–365. [„Ganz Anderer“.]

2 Barth, *KD* II/1, 59–60.

3 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/1 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 313–315. [„Restlos mit Gott selber identisch ist“.]

4 Mark James Edwards, *The Divine Moment: Eternity, Time, and Triune Temporality in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics"* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2013), 83.

for humanity exhibited in revelation, we see 'the true nature and essence of God's love for "others" *ad intra*.'⁵

Second, in terms of the dynamic of otherness and obedience, Barth argues that the antithesis between God and his creation reduplicates what exists within the intratrinitarian life. Specifically, Barth argues that the relationship between God and Jesus exhibited in the divine work of reconciliation is a temporal analogue of the eternal relationship between the Father, commanding in majesty, and the Son, obeying in humility. This means, by extension, that the Son's humility in the incarnation is done in correspondence to, and thus 'as the wonderfully consistent final sequel to', his eternal intratrinitarian history.⁶ Thus, in the act of the atonement, God 'not only depicts his inner being as God as he did in creation...but lets it become external as such', "activating" and so revealing himself *ad extra*.⁷

Third, in terms of the very fact of the economy of salvation, Barth argues that the covenant of grace that we experience in time is a demonstration and confirmation of God's eternal intratrinitarian relationality. He explains that this grace is 'properly and essentially divine', since the prototypical archetype of this form of relationality is 'the Holy Spirit's union across the "antithesis" of Father and Son'.⁸ It follows that the grace we experience in the economy of salvation is not the result of caprice, but is rather 'the very essence of the being of God'.⁹ In this way, Barth establishes an 'absolute continuity' between God's eternal grace *ad intra* and his temporal grace *ad extra*, secured by his language of "repetition" and "recapitulation".¹⁰

Yet, Barth argues further that the eternal divine being is not merely signposted in historical revelation, but also acts as the very ground of the possibility of revelation itself, since the content of revelation 'refers us back to a corresponding inner possibility in God himself'.¹¹ Consequently, the content of revelation is in the first instance and decisively God's readiness to be known: that God is so constituted that he can reveal himself.¹² This is what Barth means when he says that the content of revelation is always and at all times that God reveals himself as the Lord. In the Bible, God's lordship is his true freedom, and the incarnation is a decision taken in this freedom. Hence, to say that God reveals himself as the Lord means the content

5 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 83; Barth, *KD II/1*, 306–307.

6 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/1* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 222–223. [In wunderbar konsequenter letzter Fortsetzung:]

7 Barth, *KD IV/1*, 223. [„Daß er dieses sein inneres Sein als Gott nun nicht nur wie in der Schöpfung abbildet...sondern als solches äußerlich werden läßt.“]

8 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 98–99. See Karl Barth, *The Church Dogmatics II/1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 356.

9 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 99. See Barth, *CD II/1*, 356.

10 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 99–100.

11 Barth, *KD I/1*, 412–413. [„Zurück auf eine entsprechende innere Möglichkeit in Gott selber.“]

12 Barth, *KD II/1*, 70–71.

of revelation is that God is free to reveal himself. It is for this reason that Barth can say that God's revelation of his lordship is nothing other than the revelation of himself.¹³

Since God 'by nature cannot be unveiled to humans', however, the fact that he nevertheless does unveil himself in revelation means that in this self-unveiling (and this is the definition of the self-unveiling) God takes on a new mode of being in which he *can* be unveiled.¹⁴ Barth explains that in revelation God becomes 'his own *Doppelgänger*', constituting 'a self-differentiation of God from himself'.¹⁵ With this in mind, the lordship of God that forms the content of revelation is specifically that God is free 'to differentiate himself from himself' and so to reveal himself in another mode.¹⁶ However, since God does not become these distinct modes simply in revelation, revelation teaches us, further, that God is differentiated in himself; hence the revelation of God's ability to be differentiated is ultimately the revelation of his trinity.

That God's trinity is both revealed in and forms the logically antecedent basis for revelation is made clear in Barth's excursus on God's knowability in *Church Dogmatics* II/1. Here, Barth argues that it is because God is eternally knowable to himself that he is able to be knowable to us; however, he explains that God 'is first and foremost knowable to himself *as the triune God*' (emphasis added).¹⁷ Accordingly, God is able to stand objectively before us because he first has objectivity in himself. It should be noted that Barth's concept of 'objectivity' here presents a continuity and correspondence between God *ad intra* and *ad extra*, while nevertheless ensuring the logical priority of the former in order to preclude the notion that God only becomes triune by establishing a relation with creation.¹⁸

2.2 The compatibility of the incarnation with the divinity of Christ

Barth secures the reliability of christological revelation in no way more emphatically than in his assertion that this event is not actually alien to God at all but is in fact '*most proper to him*' since revelation repeats and represents what God is in himself.¹⁹

13 Barth, *KD* I/1, 323–324.

14 Barth, *KD* I/1, 332–333. [„Des seinem Wesen nach dem Menschen unenthüllbaren Gottes“.]

15 Barth, *KD* I/1, 333–334. [„Sein eigener Doppelgänger“.] [„Ein sich Unterscheiden Gottes von sich selbst“.]

16 Barth, *KD* I/1, 337–338. [„Sich von selbst sich zu unterscheiden“.]

17 Barth, *KD* II/1, 73. [„Daß er als der dreieinige Gott zuerst und vor Allem sich selbst erkennbar ist“.]

18 Edwards, *Divine Moment*, 81.

19 Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), 381. [„sein eigenstes“.]