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‘FROM CRIB AND CROSS TO RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION’:
THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AS THE REVELATION OF GOD INCARNATE
IN KARL BARTH’S *CHURCH DOGMATICS* I/2, §§13-15

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What is the relationship between the resurrection and the divine identity of Jesus Christ? What does the resurrection mean for Jesus' identity as the Son of God? In what sense is his identity revealed by his resurrection? In what sense does the resurrection "do" something to Jesus? How does the resurrection relate to the incarnation, Easter to Christmas? What is the noetic and ontic significance of the resurrection? These systematic questions are critical not only for understanding the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ but also for understanding his whole incarnate life in the light of his resurrection.

Karl Barth indirectly addresses this nexus of questions in the context of his reflection on the incarnation of the Word as the objective revelation of God.¹ In the course of his dogmatic prolegomena, Barth sketches a preliminary Christology as the central element within his doctrine of the Word of God. Although the focus of these sections is on the incarnation, the resurrection performs a crucial function within Barth's Christocentric doctrine of revelation. The purpose of this paper is to trace this function by means of a close reading of *Church Dogmatics I/2*, §§13-15. By tracing the role of Christ's resurrection in these three sections, it will be shown that for Barth the resurrection reveals Jesus Christ as God incarnate, thereby illuminating his whole incarnate life as the revelation of God.

The Eclipse of *CD I/2* in the Study of Barth's Theology of the Resurrection

Before turning to a close reading of these sections, the decision to focus on this portion of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* must be justified. Of the many places where Barth treats the resurrection, why single out *CD I/2*? Why not treat a later section that more

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) §13-15, pp. 1-202; hereafter cited as *I/2*.

directly addresses the resurrection, such as “Jesus, Lord of Time”² or one of the transition sub-sections from the Doctrine of Reconciliation?³ Furthermore, why limit one’s inquiry to the *Church Dogmatics*, especially when the resurrection plays such a significant role in Barth’s earlier commentaries on Romans, I Corinthians and Philippians?⁴ Certainly a comprehensive treatment of Barth’s theology of the resurrection must take into account these many sources, both independently and in relationship to one another. Obviously, such a comprehensive treatment is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to justify the selection of *CD I/2, §§13-15* from among these many sources.

There are two main reasons to focus attention on *CD I/2* in a study of Barth’s theology of the resurrection. The first is the explicit dogmatic connection drawn between the resurrection and incarnation in this material. A number of contemporary theologians have developed this systematic connection.⁵ This paper seeks to highlight Barth’s contribution to this conversation. Although he develops this theme elsewhere, nowhere else in Barth’s corpus is the relation between resurrection and incarnation so firmly placed in the foreground than in *CD I/2, §§13-15*. Therefore, sustained attention to this particular portion of Barth’s work will contribute to this particular aspect of Barth’s theology of the resurrection.

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960) §47.1, pp. 437-511.

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) §59.3, pp. 283-357; *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958) §64.4, pp. 264-377; *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, first half (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961) §69.4, pp. 274-367.

⁴ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933); *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. by H. J. Stenning (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003); *The Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. by James W. Leitch (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

⁵ Although this theme is certainly not limited to their work, I am thinking especially of Jenson and Pannenberg. See Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991-98).

The second reason to focus on *CD I/2* is the striking absence of attention to this material in the secondary literature on the resurrection in Karl Barth. The other sources mentioned above have been the subject of the lion's share of scholarly inquiry. Such a focus is understandable. During the initial phase of the reception of Barth's theology, *Romans* and *The Resurrection of the Dead* were widely read texts. Later on, the aforementioned sections of the *Church Dogmatics* not surprisingly drew the attention of scholars, since each of these sections explicitly intends to explore an aspect of Christ's resurrection. So, although it needs filled, this gap in the secondary literature on the resurrection in Karl Barth is forgivable.

Although a complete review of the relevant secondary literature is beyond the scope of this paper, two representative examples of this blind spot in Barth studies will serve to illustrate the need for this project. Both Van A. Harvey and R. Dale Dawson trace the development of Barth's theology of Christ's resurrection without attending to *CD I/2*. The former represents an earlier, more critical reaction to Barth, while the latter represents a recent, more appreciative interpretation of Barth's theology. In other words, Harvey approaches Barth from the outside, Dawson from the inside. Yet both skip over *CD I/2* in their narration of Barth's developing theology of Christ's resurrection.

In his widely influential book *The Historian and the Believer*, Van Harvey addresses Barth's view of the resurrection in the context of his chapter on dialectical theology.⁶ The focal point of Harvey's study is the morality of historical knowledge. Harvey rightly identifies a shift in Barth's thinking with regard to the historicity of the resurrection, although he overstates his characterization of this shift by claiming that

⁶ Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1966), pp. 153-59.

Barth “has tried to bring the helm about 180 degrees.”⁷ Barth’s earlier writings certainly contain strong language that distances the event of Christ’s resurrection from history, while in his later writings Barth begins to incorporate the notion of history within his overall Christocentric framework. But these differences are more subtle than stark. Harvey criticizes even the later Barth for acknowledging the historical character of the resurrection without admitting historical investigation into the event.

In order to substantiate his narration of Barth’s development, Harvey quotes contrasting passages from the second edition of *Romans* and *Church Dogmatics* III/2. Having been published in 1922 and 1948 respectively, these two texts are separated by over 25 years. Lying between these texts are numerous accounts of the resurrection that would serve to nuance Harvey’s overstated developmental thesis, including *CD I/2*, which was published in 1938. Because of his fixation on the question of historicity, Harvey overlooks the important dogmatic connection between resurrection and incarnation within the context of revelation. Although the problem of history is important to Barth, it is never in the driver’s seat. Barth always did his best to keep dogmatic questions primary. So Harvey’s account lacks sensitivity both to Barth’s development and to his dogmatic interests.

Given the size and scope of Van Harvey’s discussion of Barth, one might not expect much sensitivity to the complexities of Barth interpretation. One does expect such sensitivity of any comprehensive treatment of Barth’s theology of the resurrection. This is why it is so surprising that R. Dale Dawson, in his otherwise excellent monograph *The*

⁷ V. A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 153.

Resurrection in Karl Barth, does not address the relevant material in *CD I/2*.⁸ Dawson begins, not with *Romans*, but with Barth's 1923/4 commentary on I Corinthians, *The Resurrection of the Dead*. He then jumps over twenty years to *CD III/2* before dedicating the remainder of his book to the transition sections in *CD IV/1-3*. In Dawson's defense, it must be acknowledged that his explicit intention is to study Christ's resurrection in the context of the Doctrine of Reconciliation, with the earlier materials serving as necessary and informative background material. There is no need to disparage Dawson's nearly thorough and on-the-whole accurate presentation of Barth's theology of the resurrection. Nevertheless, any study of the resurrection in Karl Barth suffers from a lack of attention to the role of the resurrection in *CD I/2*. The aim of this present study is to begin to fill this gap in the literature.⁹

Christ's Resurrection in Context: The Doctrine of the Word of God

In order to trace the significance of the resurrection in §§13-15, these sections must first be located within the larger architectonic context of the first volume of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. The first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* serves both as a prolegomena to dogmatics as well as a mini-dogmatics itself, centering on the Doctrine of the Word of God.

The Word of God in its threefold form provides the structure for *CD I*. After a brief introduction (§§1-2), Barth divides his discussion into four chapters. He dedicates his first chapter to the Word of God as the criterion of dogmatics (§§3-7). Here Barth

⁸ R. Dale Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth, Barth Studies* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

⁹ In her incisive comparison of Jenson and Barth on Christ's resurrection, Katherine Sonderegger does make use of material from *CD I/2*. However, her essay is more about theological method than the resurrection per se. Moreover, it does not provide a close reading of §§13-15. See Katherine Sonderegger, "Et Resurrexit Tertia Die: Jenson and Barth on Christ's Resurrection," in John C. McDowell and Mike Higton, eds., *Conversing with Barth* (Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2004) pp. 191-213.

introduces the concept of the threefold form of the Word of God as revelation, scripture, and church proclamation. The remaining three chapters correspond to these three forms of God's Word.

Chapter two is entitled "The Revelation of God" and is itself divided into three parts. Part one concerns the triune God, wherein Barth develops a doctrine of the trinity from an analysis of the grammar of revelation (§§8-12). God is the subject, object, and means of revelation. God reveals himself through himself. God is revealer, revelation, and revealedness. In other words, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Barth here establishes the triune basis for God's revelation.

In parts two and three of chapter two, Barth develops the Christological (objective) and the pneumatological (subjective) aspects of God's triune revelation. On the one hand, God in his subjectivity becomes an object of knowledge in the incarnation of his Word (§§13-15). On the other hand, God enables the human subject to know God as this object by means of the outpouring of his Holy Spirit (§§16-18). The focus of this paper is on the Christological material (§§13-15). In order to properly interpret these sections, context must be kept in mind. The location of this material within the doctrine of revelation is especially important when assessing the revelatory character of Christ's resurrection.

Having completed his three-part chapter on the revelation of God, Barth treats Holy Scripture as the second form of the Word of God in chapter three (§19-21) and the proclamation of the Church as the third form of the Word of God in chapter four (§22-24). Christ's resurrection remains an important theme throughout the remainder of *CD I/2*. Tracing the role of Christ's resurrection in the material on the Holy Spirit, on

Scripture, and on the Church's proclamation would be fruitful if space permitted.

However, the specific systematic connection between resurrection and incarnation is so prominent within §§13-15 that a limited focus on this material is warranted.

Christ's Resurrection and the Objective Revelation of God (§13)

The Christological material of *CD I/2* consists of three sections. The first is a highly technical discussion of God's freedom for humanity expressed in Jesus Christ as the objective reality and possibility of revelation (§13). The second develops an understanding of objective revelation in temporal categories (§14). The third section rounds out the material by directly addressing traditional Christological questions (§15). Christ's resurrection plays a significant role in each of these sections.

Barth divides the paragraph on God's freedom for humanity into two sub-sections: "Jesus Christ the Objective Reality of Revelation" and "Jesus Christ the Objective Possibility of Revelation."¹⁰ These sub-sections seek to answer two questions concerning the incarnation of the Word as the revelation of God. First, Barth asks "how the encounter of his revelation with humanity is real in the freedom of God" (*I/2*, p. 3).¹¹ The secondary question, which follows from the first, is "how is the encounter of his revelation with humanity possible in the freedom of God" (*I/2*, p. 3). In other words, Barth will ask *in what manner* God is free to reveal himself to us, and then will ask *on what basis* God is free to reveal himself to us. Characteristically, Barth chooses here to speak first of the reality of God's action before inquiring into the conditions for its

¹⁰ These titles parallel the division of the section on the freedom of humanity for God: "The Holy Spirit as the Subjective Reality of Revelation" (§16.1) and "The Holy Spirit as the Subjective Possibility of Revelation" (§16.2).

¹¹ Translation note: Although for the sake of accessibility I cite the English edition throughout this paper, translations have been checked against the German edition, Karl Barth, *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik I/2* (Zürich: Verlag der Evangelischen Buchhandlung Zollikon, 1938). I have revised the translations in accordance with American spelling and current gender and capitalization conventions. Revisions in word choice or syntax are noted in-text by the abbreviation "rev."

possibility. Barth dedicates the first ten pages of this sub-section to a defense of this decision to treat the question of reality prior to the question of possibility.

After this methodological introduction, Barth proceeds to answer the question of the objective reality of revelation in two stages. In the first stage, Barth identifies two characteristics of this reality. First of all, the objective reality of revelation is a simple reality: "If we now question Holy Scripture about the reality of God's revelation, ... and we obtain from it the answer that Jesus Christ is this reality, it would be well to realize above all, that this answer ... points us to a reality that is utterly simple, as simple as anything else in the world, as simple as only God is" (I/2, p. 10). The concrete content of this simplicity is a name, "the name of Jesus Christ" (I/2, p. 10). An analysis of this name will occupy the second stage of this sub-section's argument. But before turning to this analysis, Barth identifies a second characteristic of this reality: "This simple reality, however, is also a reality absolutely once-for-all" (I/2, p. 12). As Barth notes, this foreshadows his discussion of revelation and time in §14. The point is that "this very definite history" is the fulfillment of time such that all time before and after it is ordered to it as the time of witness (I/2, p. 12).

Having identified these characteristics in the first stage of his discussion, Barth proceeds to the second stage: an analysis of the twofold statement of the New Testament regarding the identity of Jesus Christ. This twofold statement is "that God's Son is called Jesus of Nazareth, and that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son" (I/2, p. 15). Barth acknowledges that "this twofold statement ... is not very often found in so many words in the New Testament" (I/2, p. 13). It appears in part at "certain solemn climaxes," it does not "come easily" nor is it "frequent," but rather is "found between the lines and inferred"

(I/2, p. 13-14). Furthermore, Barth notes that this twofold statement is “secondary in relation to the name Jesus Christ itself” (I/2, p. 14). The simple, once-for-all reality of the name Jesus Christ is primary; the twofold statement is a secondary and dependent witness to the identity of this reality. Yet the twofold statement is not some arbitrary addition to the reality of Jesus Christ. Rather, the twofold name Jesus Christ already points to the twofold statement (I/2, p. 15).

Barth explores this twofold statement by means of a “dialectical strategy of juxtaposition.”¹² Each statement serves to block a certain heretical tendency and is exemplified by a specific New Testament tradition. The first statement, “that the Son of God is this man” (I/2, p. 16), contradicts a docetic Christological tendency by making “the definite claim that in him alone, for the first time, and fully, they [the New Testament witnesses] had found the Godhead” (I/2, p. 18). The Gospel of John exemplifies this first statement. The second statement, “that this man is the Son of God” (I/2, p. 19), contradicts an ebionite Christological tendency by making that claim that in Jesus Christ “we have met God, we have heard his Word” (I/2, p. 21). The Synoptic Gospels exemplify this second statement. These two statements cannot be synthesized but must stand beside one another as a dialectical “penultimate word” that points to the ultimate word: “the name Jesus Christ” (I/2, p. 24).¹³

It is within Barth’s inter-textual exposition of this twofold statement that Christ’s resurrection comes into play. For each of the two statements and their corresponding

¹² George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character,” in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 137.

¹³ The argument of this sub-section is implicit in Barth’s pithy statement from *CD I/1*: “In the New Testament itself we may recall the relation between the Synoptic tradition and the Johannine tradition in respect of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ... It is impossible to listen at one and the same time to the two statements that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that the Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth. One hears either the one or the other or one hears nothing. When the one is heard, the other can be heard only indirectly, in faith.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), p. 180.

scriptural traditions, the resurrection manifests the identity of Jesus Christ. The first statement, that the Son of God is this man, supplies the starting-point for the Johannine tradition, such that “to believe in and know God’s revelation means to believe in and know this man in his identity with the presence and action of God” (I/2, p. 19). Barth goes on to offer this exegetical insight:

such a starting-point renders intelligible the frequently emphasized and unusual transparency of the Johannine picture of Christ and the dominant position, at first so striking in view of I Cor. 1:23, of the risen Christ in the Pauline message. Neither must in any way be brought into connection with Docetism... no abstractly historical knowledge of the man Jesus or any becoming acquainted with him as such could be contemplated (I/2, p. 19).

As Barth sees it, the transparency of the risen Christ in the pre-Easter narratives of John’s Gospel is not a problem. There is no other Jesus Christ than the Son of God who became this man. Although the divine sonship of this man is made manifest by the resurrection, the Son of God is this man from the beginning. Thus, we should expect that a narrative told from the retrospective standpoint of Easter would speak of God’s Son as this man.

The second statement, that this man is the Son of God, supplies the starting-point for the Synoptic tradition, such that “we are concerned with knowledge of the reality of revelation, with knowing that God is active and present in the man” (I/2, p. 22). The humanity of Jesus is not presented in the Synoptics independently of his deity, but rather is understood in terms of his deity. Thus, although the Synoptics tell the story in chronological order, they have their end-point in mind. This end-point is the unveiling of Jesus Christ as God’s Son in his resurrection. As Barth explains:

In this sense the Synoptics, as distinguished from the Johannine Gospel of Jesus, are meant to be regarded as Gospels about Christ. Inwardly and essentially they start from the fact that the man Jesus of Nazareth ... shows himself in his resurrection from the dead to be the Messiah and the Son of God. In that light they look back and understand all his words and actions. The revelation of this

man as God and Lord that takes place in his resurrection is the very thing they wish to say and attest. But that means that externally they must start from his humanity, from his life before the resurrection (I/2, p. 22).

So, Christ's resurrection provides the light by which the Synoptic tradition narrates the story of this man who is the Son of God.

What is the result of this sub-section for an understanding of the relation between resurrection and incarnation? In his exposition of the twofold statement, Barth shows that the incarnation is not a status, but a history. The term "incarnation" does not refer to a passing moment that secures Jesus' divine status, but rather points to the whole life of Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God's Son. Thus incarnation includes resurrection. Yet the incarnation does not include the resurrection as one episode in the narrative alongside the others. Rather, the resurrection reveals Jesus Christ as God incarnate, thereby illuminating his whole life as incarnation. As Barth puts it,

The content of this New Testament witness is the message of the resurrection and ascension which runs through all the Gospels and Epistles and is the mainstay of everything. He who died on the cross and thereby clearly showed himself to be a man, he who completed his incarnation on the cross and was thereby veiled in his divinity, rose again the third day from dead, and sits on the right hand of the Father ... that is the solution to the problem of Jesus, to which even the miracles could only point as Messianic signs. It belongs to the incarnation itself as a mighty counterpart to it (I/2, p. 23).

So, the resurrection is the counterpart to the incarnation, for the resurrection reveals the incarnation and the incarnation takes place for the purpose of the revelation completed in the resurrection.

Having provided an answer regarding Jesus Christ as the objective reality of revelation in terms of the twofold statement of his identity, Barth turns to the question of the possibility of Jesus Christ as God's objective revelation. In this sub-section, he inquires into the presupposition of the reality explicated in the previous sub-section. He

asks, "How in God's freedom is it possible for his revelation to encounter man" (I/2, p. 27)? Barth reasserts his methodological decision to move from the reality of revelation to its possibility. The reality of Jesus Christ provides an answer to which corresponds a question (I/2, p. 26). By proclaiming a solution, the reality of revelation also reveals a problem. The problem is hiddenness of God and the blindness of humanity (I/2, p. 28-30). By revealing himself, God also reveals the need for revelation. Since this "need" can only be known on the basis of the reality of revelation, it must be inferred from this reality.¹⁴ As Barth puts it, "The possibility of revelation is actually to be read off from its reality in Jesus Christ. Therefore at bottom the individual explanation to which we now proceed can be only a reading and exegesis of this reality" (I/2, p. 31). Barth exposts this objective possibility by means of five inferences drawn from the reality of Jesus Christ.

Within the course of his five-point exposition, Barth makes a number of references to Christ's resurrection. The resurrection is identified as the definitive unveiling of Jesus Christ as God incarnate. The movement toward resurrection is the movement toward revelation. This unveiling is crucial for the logic of Barth's inferences. It is by means of the resurrection that the specific manner of God's incarnation is made known, which in turn reveals its possibility.

Barth's first two points do not address the resurrection explicitly, although the preceding material shows that any talk of the incarnation presupposes knowledge of the resurrection. First, Barth infers that God remains God even as he condescends to us in his revelation: "We infer from the reality of Jesus Christ that God is free for us in the sense that revelation on his side becomes possible in such a way that he is God not only in

¹⁴ Barth repeatedly points out that this language of "necessity" does impose an absolute necessity on God, but rather thinks through the internal logic of God's action as attested by Holy Scripture (I/2, pp. 32, 35, 37, 39, 43-44).

himself but also in and among us, in our cosmos, as one of the realities that meet us" (I/2, p. 31). Second, Barth infers that God is able to reveal by his Word becoming flesh: "We infer from the reality of Jesus Christ that God is free for us, in the sense that he reveals himself to us in such a way that his Word or his Son becomes a man—not God the Father, and not God the Holy Spirit" (I/2, p. 33). Barth here indicates the trinitarian basis for God's self-revelation.

Barth's third point is that God is able to reveal because God's Word becomes knowable by becoming a creature: "We infer from the reality of Jesus Christ that God reveals himself, that he is free for us, in such a way that God's Son or Word assumes a form at least known to us, such that he can become cognizable by us by analogy with other forms known to us" (I/2, p. 35, rev.). Here Barth makes an indirect reference to the resurrection by speaking of the unveiling and exaltation of the Word of God:

Jesus Christ can reveal God because he is visible to us humans as a human. His actual entry into this visibility signifies, let us remember, the entry of the eternal Word of God into veiling, into *kenosis* and passion. But this very veiling, *kenosis* and passion of the Logos, has to take place in order that it may lead to his unveiling and exaltation and so to the completion of revelation (I/2, p. 36).

Having earlier identified the resurrection as the unveiling of the identity of Jesus Christ, Barth here shows how the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is an incarnate movement toward resurrection. God is revealed by first becoming hidden in order to unveil himself.

The movement of revelation from veiling to unveiling is elaborated further under Barth's last two points. Barth's fourth point is that God's Word remains fully God in becoming human: "We infer from the reality of Jesus Christ that revelation is possible on God's side, that God is free for us, in such a way that his Word by becoming human at the same time is and remains what he is, the true eternal God, the same as he is in himself

at the Father's right hand for ever and ever" (I/2, p. 37, rev.). The incarnation of God does not imply a diminution of his deity. Barth explicitly states that we only know that this is the case by looking back on the life of Jesus Christ from the vantage point of his resurrection: "The *kenosis*, passion, humiliation which he takes upon himself by becoming human, signifies no loss in divine majesty but, *considered in light of its goal*, actually its triumph" (I/2, p. 37, emphasis added). In the incarnation, God's majesty is not lost, but veiled: "We may and must, of course, speak of a veiling of the divine majesty" (I/2, p. 37). The resurrection is the only noetic entry point to this veiled divine majesty: "Knowledge of it [divine majesty] becomes real to men *only* in virtue of a special unveiling through Jesus' resurrection from the dead, or through all the sayings and acts of his life so far as they are signs of his resurrection" (I/2, p. 38, emphasis added). Only by means of the resurrection do we know that in becoming human God did not cease to be God, because the resurrection is the unveiling of what had been veiled:

But the succession of veiling and unveiling, incarnation and resurrection (John and the Synoptics) suggest that in the veiling, in the incarnation, we do not have to do with a lessening in the divinity of the eternal Word. That it is only veiling, not abandonment nor yet lessening of his divinity, is shown by the unveiling, which is not only the result but from the start—it is revelation we are concerned with—its goal. He who on the third day rose from the dead was no less true God in the manger than on the cross. (I/2, p. 38)

So Christ's resurrection reveals who he was all along: God's incarnate Son. Knowledge of the resurrection is therefore the entry point for knowledge of the incarnation.

Christ's resurrection not only reveals his deity, but also his humanity. Barth's fifth and final point is that God reveals himself by becoming human: "We infer from the reality of Jesus Christ that God's revelation becomes possible in such a way that God's Son or Word becomes human. He does not become any kind of natural being. He

becomes what we ourselves are” (I/2, p. 40-41, rev.). The humanity of Christ is made manifest as God’s self-revelation by means of the resurrection. Barth explains this point in terms of the movement from veiling to unveiling:

God wills to veil himself by becoming a human, in order to unveil himself as a human by breaking out of the veiling. He wills to be silent and yet also to speak. His humanity must be a barrier, yet also a door that opens. It must be a problem to us, yet also the solution of the problem. He would die as a true human, only to rise from the dead the third day as the same true human. It is always in the act of moving from the one point to the other, in the decision by which the second springs from the first, that God’s revelation is accomplished in the reality of Jesus Christ (I/2, p. 41, rev.).

Thus the resurrection is related to the incarnation not only by revealing Christ’s deity but also his humanity. Both aspects of the incarnation are effectively revealed in the resurrection. In his resurrection, Jesus Christ is manifest as the Incarnate One—both fully God and fully human.

In the course of this sub-section, Barth has inquired into the conditions for the objective possibility of revelation. Within his exposition, Barth has repeatedly assigned a special function to Christ’s resurrection in relationship to the incarnation: although the incarnation is God’s revelation, it can only be known as such on the basis of the resurrection. This relationship is explored in terms of the movement from veiling to unveiling. As a description of a definite movement, Barth employs the language of veiling and unveiling in a historically extended fashion corresponding to the scriptural narrative. The fruition of this form of veiling/unveiling language is that objective revelation is understood as a dynamic movement from the first history of Jesus Christ (running from birth to death) to his second history (the Forty Days): “God’s revelation is the way from the veiling of the eternal Word to his unveiling, from crib and cross to resurrection and ascension” (I/2, p. 43). Although Barth does not yet employ the language

of “second history”¹⁵ as he will do in *CD III/2*, it is incipient within his historically extended use of veiling/unveiling language. The dogmatic import of this mode of conceptual description is its ability to display the intimate relationship between incarnation and resurrection within the context of revelation.

Christ's Resurrection and the Time of Revelation (§14)

Since God reveals himself by the event of incarnation, God's revelation includes the aspect of time. As Barth starkly puts it, “The statement, ‘God reveals himself’ ... is equivalent to the statement, ‘God has time for us’” (*I/2*, p. 45). Because of the importance of this aspect for understanding not only revelation itself but also the relationship of revelation to the rest of human history, Barth dedicates an entire section to the question of the time of revelation (§14). Since he only makes a number of passing references to the resurrection, a summative analysis of the entire section is not necessary. It will suffice to analyze closely a number of key texts to exhibit how Barth develops and extends his understanding of Christ's resurrection in this particular context.

This section on the time of revelation is divided into three sub-sections: (1) “God's Time and our Time,” where Barth interprets revelation as fulfilled time, (2) “The Time of Expectation,” where Barth treats the Old Testament as the pre-time witness to the fulfilled time of revelation, and (3) “The Time of Recollection,” where Barth treats the New Testament as the witness which follows after the fulfilled time of revelation. In each sub-section, Barth makes explicit reference to the resurrection.

In the first sub-section, Barth introduces the concept of the time of revelation by distinguishing it from created time and fallen time. The time of revelation is new time, a time that judges our fallen time. “In revelation a negative judgment is given upon our

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/2*, p. 441.

time” (I/2, p. 49). If revelation merely happened within our fallen, lost time, the incarnation would at some point cease to be. But this is decisively *not* what happens in the incarnation: “according to Is. 40:8 the Word of our God ‘abides eternally’ and according to Jn. 1:14 this Word became flesh and according to the entire New Testament witness it remained flesh even in his resurrection, it is and remains flesh even in his glory at the right hand of God the Father” (I/2, p. 50, rev.). Barth here speaks of the transformation of time that takes place in the incarnation. This flesh is given the gift of eternal life. Such a statement can only be made if one affirms a bodily resurrection, such that the Word who became incarnate remains incarnate eternally. The risen flesh of Jesus Christ is the material point of connection between incarnation and resurrection.

Barth moves on in this sub-section to discuss Jesus Christ as the “Lord of time” (I/2, p. 52). Here he speaks of Christ’s Lordship over all times, both before and after his own life history. Barth is sure to indicate that Christ’s Lordship over the future is known only through his resurrection: “... the future can be proclaimed *only* in the form of recollecting the resurrection of Christ” (I/2, p. 54, emphasis added). Only on the basis of Christ’s resurrection can we speak of the future. Knowledge of the future is opened to us not by an abstract assertion of Christ’s eternal status, but by specific reference to Christ’s own act of opening the future in his resurrection. As Barth puts it, the future “opens with the resurrection of Christ” (I/2, p. 54).

The last explicit reference to the resurrection in the first sub-section emerges within Barth’s discussion of three major errors committed with regard to the problem of revelation and history. The last of these three errors is “a failure to see that if revelation is revelation, we cannot speak of it as though it can be discovered, dug up, worked out as

the deeper ground and content of human history” (I/2, p. 58). It is in this context that Barth makes his famous statement, “Revelation is not a predicate of history, but history a predicate of revelation” (I/2, p. 58). The material basis of this conceptual insight is the relation between the resurrection and the crucifixion. Only by means of the resurrection can we see that the cross is the fulfillment of time:

To break through and abolish this [fallen] time cannot be a matter of our skill and effectiveness. It is first recognized in its frightfulness and inscrutability in the crucifixion of Christ, when we are aware that there is nothing in it to interpret and nothing in it to appraise, that it can *only* be set and is only set, before our eyes, as it was set long ago, by virtue of the unveiling in revelation itself, i.e., in Christ's resurrection (I/2, p. 58, emphasis added).

As before, Barth employs the language of unveiling to refer to the revelatory function of the resurrection. In this case, he speaks of how Christ's resurrection manifests the meaning of the cross. Barth is not speaking directly of the resurrection as the unveiling of the divine identity of Jesus Christ. This reference thus adds an important nuance to Barth's understanding of Christ's resurrection: it reveals not only Christ's person but also his work. However, this added nuance must not be overstated, for the person of Christ cannot be separated from his work nor his work separated from his person. The incarnation takes place for the purpose of crucifixion, and the crucifixion presupposes the incarnation. Moreover, Barth's understanding of revelation as a historically extended movement means that the incarnation is not one episode in the story of Jesus Christ alongside other episodes, but is the whole movement from crib and cross to resurrection and ascension (see I/2, p. 43). So the resurrection reveals the incarnation of the Word, which includes the way of Jesus Christ to his death on the cross.

The second sub-section explores the time of expectation. The purpose of this sub-section is to indicate how Old Testament time relates to the fulfilled time of revelation in

Jesus Christ. This relationship is one of prophetic witness. Barth examines the content of this witness under three headings: the Old Testament bears witness to (1) the covenanting God, (2) the hidden God, and (3) the coming God. It is worth noting that these headings correspond to the headings in the following sub-section on the time of recollection. This formal correspondence serves to highlight the material unity of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁶

There is very little talk of the resurrection in this sub-section, which should not be surprising given its focus on the Old Testament. Yet there is one noteworthy instance that falls under the second heading: the witness of the Old Testament to the hidden God. Here Barth makes a passing reference to both Easter and Christmas as the noetic point of access to the reconciliation achieved in the crucifixion: “reconciliation is the truth about God’s action on Good Friday, and is recognized as the truth, in virtue of the revelation at Easter or Christmas (*der Offenbarung der Ostern oder der Weihnacht*)” (I/2, p. 93). At first glance, this appears odd, given that the identity of the Word who became incarnate at Christmas is only known on the basis of his unveiling at Easter. Can we really know the truth of reconciliation from either Easter *or* Christmas? Such an “or” must not be pressed beyond its limits. First, it is noteworthy that Barth mentions Easter *before* Christmas. More importantly, Barth’s point is that Good Friday is known as *God’s* reconciling work if and only if the one who was crucified is God incarnate. We know this on the basis of the Easter event, which in turn casts light on the Christmas event, so that both bear witness to the identity of Jesus Christ. Barth returns to the dual-witness of Christmas and

¹⁶ This threefold structure also corresponds to the *Aufhebung* pattern of affirmation, negation and reconstitution that is materially rooted in the movement of incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, which supplies the architecture of a number of sections and sub-sections in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (e.g., IV/3.1, §70.1). For more on the *Aufhebung* pattern in Barth’s theology, see George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) pp. 85-86.

Easter as he moves on to make his point: “The [Old Testament] fathers had Christ, the complete Christ. Here, too, naturally, not an idea of Christ, but the incarnate Word, the Christ of history. Such a statement is allowable only from the standpoint of a Good Friday illumined by Christmas and Easter (*von Weihnacht und Ostern*)” (I/2, p. 93). Clearly, Barth here presupposes an intricate interrelationship between incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, which informs any proper discussion of the time of revelation.

The third sub-section explores the time of recollection. The purpose of this sub-section is to indicate how New Testament time relates to the fulfilled time of revelation in Jesus Christ. This relationship is one of apostolic witness. The apostles look back to recollect fulfilled time. As noted above, Barth examines the content of this New Testament witness under the same three headings as his discussion of the Old: the apostles bear witness to (1) the covenanting God, (2) the hidden God, and (3) the coming God. Barth discusses Christ's resurrection under the second and third headings.

Under the second heading concerning God's hiddenness in the New Testament, Barth's focus is fixed on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is in the cross that God's hiddenness comes to the foreground. The cross is “the great center of New Testament witness” (I/2, p. 110). Yet, as previously indicated, the crucifixion of Christ must not be understood in abstraction from the resurrection of Christ: “the New Testament never speaks abstractly about the passion of Christ. It always appears limited, illumined and verified by the reality of his resurrection—and that is what makes its central” (I/2, p. 110). Barth goes on to speak at length about the utter unity of cross and resurrection:

Obviously in the New Testament the resurrection of Jesus, the aspect of Easter, does not play the part of a second aspect alongside Good Friday, or a final aspect

following the many other aspects of the rest of the preceding life of Jesus. True, its special place in the history is at the end, as the limit of the story of Jesus' life and death. But its function extends further, namely, to cover all that precedes it. Our reading of the Gospels from the beginning is only right if they are read of the standpoint of this place ultimately reached in their narrative. And because this whole story culminates in the passion, the function of the resurrection is related directly and comprehensively to the fact that the rejected One of Israel and the crucified One of Pilate rose again from the dead. But the function of the resurrection is to make the passion of Christ, in which the incarnation of the Word of God was consummated, clearly and unmistakably revelation, the realization of the covenant between God and humanity, God's act for us, as reconciliation. The occurrence of the resurrection is not a second and further stage, but the manifestation of this second dimension of the Christ event. The resurrection is the event of the revelation of the Incarnate, the Humiliated, the Crucified. Wherever he gives himself to be known as the person he is, he speaks as the risen Christ. The resurrection can give nothing new to him who is the eternal Word of the Father; but it makes visible what is proper to him, his glory (I/2, p. 110-11).

This passage is a powerful statement of how in his resurrection Christ is revealed as the incarnate and crucified savior. However, Barth's language, if not properly conditioned by other statements, is dangerous at this point. He skates too close to a kind of Bultmannian Docetism when he asserts the utter unity of Easter and Good Friday.¹⁷ Is not Easter what took place "on the third day?" Is not Easter in some sense an utterly new event? Does not the resurrection give something new to Jesus, at least in some sense? Is not the resurrection something that happens to Jesus Christ, and not merely a noetic illumination of the significance of the crucifixion? Would such statements require an empty tomb? Barth's position at this point needs to be clarified and developed. Later in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth will be careful to speak of the distinction between the cross and resurrection before discussing their unity.¹⁸

¹⁷ For Bultmann on the identity of cross and resurrection, see Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) pp. 293, 299, 305; "Jesus and Paul," in Schubert M. Ogden, ed., *Existence and Faith: The Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1960) pp. 198-99; "The New Testament and Mythology," in H. W. Bartsch, ed., *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1954) pp. 38-43.

¹⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, §59.3, pp. 283-357.

The charitable interpretation of this passage would be to understand these statements as referring to the noetic function, rather than the ontic reality, of Christ's resurrection. Barth states that "the *function* of the resurrection is to make the passion of Christ, in which the incarnation of the Word of God was consummated, clearly and unmistakably revelation" and that "its *function* extends further, namely, to cover all that precedes it" (I/2, p. 111). Yes, the resurrection functions to reveal the divine identity and saving significance of the life and death of Jesus Christ, but the reality of Christ's resurrection should not be reduced to its noetic function. Given the functional language of this passage and its architectonic context within the doctrine of revelation where the noetic aspects of Christology are naturally in the foreground, this charitable interpretation is warranted. Nevertheless, passages like these ought to be flagged as potentially dangerous and in need of clarification and development.

Under the third heading, Barth points out that even as recollection the New Testament bears witness to the coming God. As the apostles look back to the history of God with us in Jesus Christ, they are pointed forward to the return of the risen Christ. The kingdom of God is not here, but rather is "at hand." After setting this limit, Barth proceeds to point out an exception:

The New Testament, like the Old Testament, is the witness to the revelation in which God is present to man as the coming God... a big exception must, of course, be made here, an exception which proves the rule. I mean the Easter narratives of the four Gospels together with that of Paul in I Cor. 15... the Easter story (with, if you like, the story of the transfiguration and the story of the conversion of Saul as prologue and epilogue respectively) actually speaks of a present without any future, of an eternal presence of God in time. So it does not speak eschatologically. The Easter story, Christ truly, corporeally risen, and as such appearing to his disciples, talking with them, acting in their midst—this is, of course, the recollection upon which all New Testament recollections hang, to which they are all related, for the sake of which there is a New Testament recollection at all (I/2, p. 114).

In the event of Christ's resurrection, God is fully present in a way that does not await completion at the end of time. In other words, the resurrection is an end-time event. The story of the Forty Days is the story of God with us, full stop. This cannot be said of any other time: "The forty days and the apostolic age, fulfilled time and the time of recollection, are two different things" (I/2, p. 118). Barth goes so far as to say that the Easter story speaks of a present without any future. If Barth's tendency under the previous heading is to stress the unity of cross and resurrection at the expense of their distinction, Barth's tendency under this third heading is to stress the utter uniqueness of the resurrection at the expense of its relation to the ongoing history of Jesus Christ. Later in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth will nuance this claim by means of the threefold *parousia*: Jesus Christ comes again in the first and basic form of Easter, in the final and universal form of his return, and in the intermediary form of the outpouring of the Spirit.¹⁹ But the basic insight of the presence of the future in the resurrection of Christ should be and is retained by Barth.

Christ's Resurrection and the Mystery of Revelation (§15)

In the final section of the Christological material of *CD I/2*, Barth turns directly to traditional Christological questions. It is important to keep context in mind, however, lest we misconstrue this section as a complete Christology. Since Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God's *Word*, a discussion of his identity is relevant to the doctrine of revelation. Although Barth deals here with a host of traditional Christological questions from the two natures doctrine to the virgin birth, his focus remains on Jesus Christ as the objective revelation of God.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, §69.4, pp. 274-367.

Interestingly, Barth poses the question of this section in terms of the relation between resurrection and incarnation. In the opening methodological sub-section (§15.1), Barth asks about the conditions for the possibility of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ unveiled at his resurrection: “We now have to inquire into the presuppositions of this work and event, hidden in the life and passion of Christ and revealed in his resurrection. What is the power of the resurrection, and so of this work and event” (I/2, p. 122)? Even here, in the heart of his Christological discussion, Barth proceeds from the knowledge of Christ’s resurrection to the knowledge of his incarnation. This thought-form is important to note, especially in light of any misplaced objection leveled against Barth that his doctrine of the incarnation “falls from heaven.”²⁰

Barth confirms the noetic precedence of the resurrection in the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word by asserting that the objective reality of revelation is strictly speaking the resurrection of Jesus:

In §13 we answered the question as to the objective possibility of revelation (or the question as to the freedom of God for humanity) by pointing out its reality. And in §14 we held this reality to be the object of Old Testament expectation and of New Testament recollection, to be fulfilled time in the midst of times. In a strict and proper sense this reality, and so fulfilled time in the midst of times, is the Easter story and the Easter message (I/2, p. 122).

Of course, the unveiling at Easter casts retrospective light upon the whole incarnate life of Christ. Barth’s task in this section is to follow this light back to an understanding of the incarnation. So, although Barth strictly identifies revelation with the resurrection, this strict sense is not an exclusionary last word on the subject, but rather the narrow gate

²⁰ For example, see Paul Tillich’s evaluation: “It was a mistake of Barth to start his Prolegomena with what, so to speak, are the Postlegomena, the doctrine of the Trinity. It could be said that in his system this doctrine falls from heaven, the heaven of an unmediated biblical and ecclesiastical authority,” in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) p. 285.

through which we perceive the whole of Christ's life as the incarnation of God's Word.²¹

After completing the first sub-section on Christological method, Barth divides the remainder of this section in two. He deals first with the identity of Jesus Christ as "Very God and Very Human" (§15.2) and second with the conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and his virgin birth as "The Miracle of Christmas" (§15.3). Barth structures the first of these sub-sections around the statement from John 1:14 that "the Word became flesh." This statement supplies Barth's threefold outline: (1) the *Word* became flesh, (2) the Word became *flesh*, and (3) the Word *became* flesh. Christ's resurrection comes into play under points two and three.

In the opening paragraph of his discussion of the Word becoming *flesh*, Barth reminds us that the resurrection is "the supreme event of revelation" (I/2, p. 147). At Easter it becomes especially clear that God's Word took on human flesh: "According to the witness of the Evangelists and apostles everything miraculous about his being as a man derives its meaning and force from the fact that it concerns the true man Jesus Christ as a man like ourselves. This is true especially of the Easter story, the *evangelium quadraginta dierum*" (I/2, p. 147). In the resurrection, Christ not only reveals his true deity but also his true humanity, as he is raised bodily from the dead. This revelation casts light on the whole life of Jesus Christ: "It is true of the sign of his birth of the virgin at the beginning, and the sign of the empty tomb at the end of his historical existence. It is true of the signs and wonders already manifested between this beginning and end which proclaim the Kingdom of God in its relation to the event of Easter" (I/2, p. 147). Barth

²¹ It is worth noting that at this point Barth risks assimilating the resurrection into revelation. Not only is the reality of revelation the resurrection, but also the resurrection is the reality of revelation. The event of resurrection is the ontic ground of its noetic, revelatory function. Once again, the context of this statement within the doctrine of revelation must be taken into account. Nevertheless, such statements await the nuance and development provided by later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*.

wants this point to be kept in mind as he begins his discussion of the human flesh of Christ as the miraculous revelation of God: “What in fact makes revelation revelation and miracle miracle is that the Word of God did actually become a real man and that therefore the life of this real man was the subject-matter (*Gegenstand*) and theatre of the acts of God, the light of revelation entering the world” (I/2, p. 147, rev.). Here Barth is following through on his earlier intimation (cf. I/2, p. 40-41) that the resurrection reveals not only the divine but also the human aspect of the incarnation of the Word of God.

While discussing the Word *becoming* flesh under point three, Barth speaks of the resurrection as the guarantee that the incarnation is permanent: “What the New Testament says about Jesus Christ is all said in the light of Easter and Ascension, that is, in the light of the union, achieved once for all, between the eternal Word and the human existence assumed by him” (I/2, p. 165). In light of Easter, Christmas can be heard as a message for all time: “God’s Son, so the Christian message runs, is now what we are for all time, nay for all eternity; he is Emmanuel, he is ‘with us always, even unto the end of the world’ (Mt. 28:20), i.e., until we on our side ‘shall be ever with the Lord’ (I Thess. 4:17)” (I/2, p. 165). The resurrection is not the reversal of the incarnation, but its triumphant revelation: “How can that be said, if Christ’s exaltation means even remotely the abolition, the laying aside of his lowliness, the reversing of the incarnation, and not on the contrary the revelation of his divine majesty in his lowliness, the resurrection of the Crucified, the triumph of the Word in his actual human existence” (I/2, p. 165)? The Word has *permanently* become flesh. According to Barth, we can only know this on the basis of the resurrection and ascension. Here, Barth’s decision to understand the incarnation from the perspective of the resurrection bears dogmatic fruit: our knowledge of the resurrection

definitively illumines our knowledge of the incarnation as an eternally binding union.

Barth mentions the resurrection a second time in his discussion of the Word *becoming* flesh. He employs the language veiling and unveiling to speak of the incarnation of the Word as an event, and hence a becoming: "The fact that God became human, that his Word became hearable and we ourselves became reconciled to God, is true because it became true, and because it becomes true before our eyes and ears in the witness of Scripture, in the movement which it attests from non-revelation to revelation, from promise to fulfillment, from the cross to the resurrection" (I/2, p. 167). Here we can see the results of Barth's veiling/unveiling dialectic in its historically extended form based on the movement of Jesus Christ from crib and cross to resurrection and ascension. This movement of revelation determines the sense in which the Word can be said to *become* flesh.

Having completed the sub-section on the identity of Jesus Christ as truly God and truly human, Barth turns to his final sub-section entitled "The Miracle of Christmas." Here Barth speaks of the conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and his virgin birth. Yet the resurrection returns to the foreground as Barth famously identifies a parallel between the empty tomb and the virgin birth as signs pointing to Jesus Christ as the reality of revelation. It is crucial to interpret this parallel in context. As we have seen, Barth has already developed a rich account of the relationship between resurrection and incarnation. The parallel between the empty tomb and the virgin birth presupposes this relationship, even as it develops and extends it.

The connection drawn by Barth between the empty tomb and the virgin birth is a parallelism of signification. Barth employs the language of sign and thing signified to

describe how the empty tomb and virgin birth relate to the resurrection and the incarnation respectively. The empty tomb is the sign, the resurrection the thing signified. This parallels the virgin birth as the sign of the incarnation. In both cases, the sign and the thing signified must be grasped in their proper order, distinction and unity.

With regard to order, the thing signified is prior to its sign. The incarnation as the thing signified is the prior reality to which the virgin birth as its sign points: “the doctrine of the virgin birth is merely the description and therefore the form by and in which the mystery is spoken of in the New Testament and in the creeds” (I/2, p. 179). In a parallel fashion, the resurrection as the thing signified is the prior reality to which the empty tomb as its sign points: “Similarly we might say that so far as the New Testament witness to Easter is the account of the empty grave, it merely describes the mystery, or the revelation of the mystery, “Christ is risen.” It describes it by pointing to this external fact (I/2, p. 179). So sign and thing signified, virgin birth and incarnation, empty tomb and resurrection, must be kept in proper order.

With regard to their distinction, the sign and thing signified must be properly distinguished: “Sign and thing signified, the outward and the inward, are, as a rule, strictly distinguished in the Bible, and certainly in other connections we cannot lay sufficient stress upon the distinction” (I/2, p. 179). This distinction serves to block overstated claims about the necessity of the empty tomb and virgin birth. However, sign and thing signified must not be separated: “But they are never separated in such a (‘liberal’) way that according to preference the one may be easily retained without the other” (I/2, p. 179). This unity serves to block overstated claims about the dispensability of the empty tomb and virgin birth. Acknowledging the order, distinction, and unity of

sign and thing signified in Barth's deployment of this parallelism is necessary for it to fulfill its purpose.

What is the purpose of this parallelism of signification? The virgin birth and empty tomb are not only formally parallel. They do not merely exhibit a pattern of signification that might apply in any number of cases. Rather, the virgin birth and empty tomb are materially united as miraculous signs that mark off Jesus in order to identify him as God incarnate:

Now it is no accident that for us the virgin birth is paralleled by the miracle of which the Easter witness speaks, the miracle of the empty tomb. These two miracles belong together. They constitute, as it were, a single sign, the special function of which, compared with other signs and wonders of the New Testament witness, is to describe and mark out the existence of Jesus Christ, amid the many other existences in human history, as that human historical existence in which God is himself, God is alone, God is directly the Subject, the temporal reality of which is not only called forth, created, conditioned and supported by the eternal reality of God, but is identical with it (I/2, p. 182).

These two signs perform this function not merely as two particularly striking miracles, but in light of their particular placement at the beginning and end of the Gospel narratives:

The virgin birth at the opening and the empty tomb at the close of Jesus' life bear witness that this life is a fact marked off from all the rest of human life, and marked off in the first instance, not by our understanding or our interpretation, but by itself. Marked off in regard to its origin: it is free of the arbitrariness which underlies all our existences. And marked off in regard to its goal: it is victorious over the death to which we are all liable (I/2, p. 182).

These two signs together point to the one mystery of Jesus Christ as God incarnate:

“Only within these limits is it what it is and is it correctly understood, as the mystery of the revelation of God. It is to that mystery that these limits points—he who ignores them or wishes them away must see to it that his not thinking of something quite different from this” (I/2, p. 182).

But even in their unity, each sign points to a different aspect of the revelation of God. The two signs placed in chronological order bear witness to the movement from veiling to unveiling: “The virgin birth denotes particularly the mystery of revelation... the empty tomb, on the other hand, denotes particularly the revelation of the mystery” (I/2, p. 182-83). Thus, in the parallel between virgin birth and empty tomb, Barth’s dialectical movement of veiling and unveiling takes on the form of a concrete, biblical narrative.

Although it is first of all a literary observation about the function of these signs in the identification of Jesus Christ, Barth’s parallelism of signification serves to develop the dogmatic theme of the relationship between incarnation and resurrection. Not only sign and thing signified, but also incarnation and resurrection are related according to the Chalcedonian pattern of unity, distinction and order. The unity and distinction of incarnation and resurrection has been evident throughout this material. But here Barth explores the ordering principle. This particularly relationship is an instance of mutual asymmetry, as the incarnation and resurrection are ordered to each other.²² On the one hand, the incarnation is the basis of the resurrection: “The mystery at the beginning is the basis of the mystery at the end” (I/2, p. 183). On the other hand, the resurrection is the *telos* of the incarnation: “by the mystery of the end the mystery of the beginning becomes active and knowable” (I/2, p. 183). So, for Barth, the incarnation and resurrection are mutually ordered to each other in the movement of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this paper, the complex interconnection between the

²² For the *locus classicus* of mutual asymmetry in Karl Barth, see the discussion of the relationship between justification and sanctification in *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, p. 508.

resurrection and incarnation has been traced in the Christological material of *CD I/2*. At this stage in his theological development, Barth understands the resurrection as the event that reveals the identity of Jesus Christ as the incarnate God. This in turn serves the larger purpose of the incarnation as the objective revelation of God. God becomes veiled in his incarnation in order to be unveiled by means of the resurrection. The one who is risen and ascended is the same as the one who was born and died. Although this noetic function of the resurrection is not the only aspect of the resurrection in Barth's theology, it is important and must be retained even as other aspects are explored. As we have seen, his position at this stage requires the development found in later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. Nevertheless, the insights of *CD I/2* stand as crucial elements in Barth's theology of the resurrection, especially with regard to the intimate relationship between resurrection and incarnation in the context of revelation.

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