

Chapter 5

The Church's mission to the "faithless"⁷²

The man who is isolated over against God is as such rejected by God. But to be this man can only be by the godless man's own choice. The witness of the community of God to every individual man consists in this: that this choice of the godless man is void; that he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and therefore is not rejected, but elect by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision (CD II/2:306).

1. Introduction.

Following on from the previous chapter, the deduction can be made that where God is revealed through Jesus Christ to the whole of creation, there is already a point of contact between God and those who do not subscribe to the Christian faith. This intersection between God and creation is therefore not dependant upon creation's ability or willingness to understand or receive the divine revelation, but is an act of God that depends solely upon the Free Will and grace of this Creator. This point of contact, where the Creator reveals openly and freely to all, includes those who do not subscribe to any religious system at all. This chapter explores the church's relationship with those who do not subscribe to the Christian faith, but also those who do not adhere to any religious system at all. The question that religion, even the Christian religion has to struggle with concerns that consequences for those who deem themselves to be "outside" the parameters of what institutional religion believes to be a healthy relationship with God.

⁷² In Church Dogmatics (I/2:297) Barth's term "Unglaube" is translated as "Unbelief". Di Noia (2000:249-250) contests that this translation does not do justice to the meaning intended by Barth. Di Noia (2000:249) then draws on Green's interpretation of the word and suggests that "faithlessness" would serve Barth's usage. It is from this definition that I prefer to use "faithless" and "faithlessness" instead of "Unbelief".

For this purpose, *Church Dogmatics Volumes II and IV* are of particular significance as they focus specifically on Barth's understanding of salvation. Notes have also been taken from Barth's sermons to those in correctional institutions. Using these sources, a description of the church's interaction with those "outside" the faith can be observed which in turn, leads us to a more specific understanding of church-mission.

The first question that needs to be asked is: "How do we define 'faithless'?" The title already suggests that it is possible to define and separate two groups of people, namely those who belong to the church and those who are "faithless". Two admissions must therefore be made before we proceed. The first is that the term "faithless" is an inaccurate definition, for it has to be interpreted within a very specific understanding. All people have faith, whether religious or irreligious. It may be a faith in a deity, in the self and abilities or in a system. Life and faith co-exist. Even the most hardened atheistic scientist⁷³ exhibits faith when conducting an experiment, in his/her abilities, reasoning and logic to obtain a certain specified result. "Faithless" in this context refers to the absence of evidence of the Lordship of Christ within the individual. This point leads naturally to the second admission. This is that a person can adhere to a belief-system, even the Christian religion, but be "faithless" in their day-to-day expression of life.

This understanding is very ambiguous, for how does one measure the extent of the Lordship of Christ in a person's life? The best that we can do, therefore is to give thanks that we are not burdened with the task of judging. Our task is to try to

⁷³ The word "Atheistic" is intentionally used because it would be unfair to juxtapose science and religion.

understand the church's role in mission to a world that is a mixed blend of faith and faithlessness, characteristics that can manifest even inside the institutional church.

A wonderful aspect of Barth's soteriology is in the premise that every person can be placed in the category of the "faithless. All need salvation and no person is born with the inherit gift of not having to be saved. Personal salvation, like all the other encounters with God as described in previous chapters, is greatly dependant on God's initiative to be in relationship with God's creation. This intent is manifest in God's self-revelation to creation through Jesus Christ.

Despite wanting to understand the human condition, ecclesial condition included, as a mixture of faith and faithlessness, one is nevertheless challenged by one word that arises in discussion concerning salvation: Election.

2. Election.

Barth is not immune to this challenge and a great deal of his soteriological approach is governed by his understanding of divine election. The best place to find Barth's understanding of election is in CD II/2. Graafland (1987:509) agrees with this point. He adds (1987:509) that Barth's understanding of Election, as described in CD II/2 (written in about 1944), was not a new development in his theology. Barth already developed a basic understanding of this theology in the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*. We find further evidence of Barth's thinking around this subject in addresses to universities in Hungary and Romania in 1936, which appeared later in the series *Theologische Existenz heute* (Graafland 1987:509).

Graafland raises another point: “Die verkiezingsleer is voor Barth van het begin af aan het hart geweest van zijn theologie, waarin tevens de diepste motieven van zijn theologie tot uiting komen”⁷⁴ (1987:509). Barth placed the Doctrine of Election before his discussion of the Doctrine of God. To Graafland (1987:509), this is an intentional move. By placing the Doctrine of Election before the Doctrine of God in *Church Dogmatics*, Barth describes the nature of God’s relationship with humanity before investigating who God is.

By placing the doctrines in this order, Barth manages to give sufficient emphasis to the Doctrine of Election, while sketching the scene for the doctrines to come. God’s revealing Word described in CD I establishes the point that God does not remain hidden. The Doctrine of Election follows this doctrine, giving the reason for God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Only when humanity stands before the revealed God, receiving God’s Word of grace, can it start to speak about who it understands God to be.

By giving the Doctrine of Election such prominence in his theology, the reader is forced to hold onto this notion when reading the rest of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. The Doctrine of Election is the reason God reveals Godself, reaches out to humanity and offers a restored relationship, thereby establishing the Kingdom of God.

Deze keus van God voor de mens is so diep in het Godzijn van God gegrond, dat ‘Gott wirklich in diese seine Urtat eingeht’. Hij wendt zich tot de mens geheel van binnenuit, zodat er geen neutrale, causale afstand bleeft, die te vergelijken zou zijn met die van een pottenbakker en zijn vat, het beeld uit Rom. 9, dat in die klassieke, causaal gestructureerde predestinatieleer zozeer geliefd was. Nee, God komt in zijn genade zo dicht by de mens, dat deze een plaats krijgt in het binneste van zijn zijn en zijn willen. God wil met de mens

⁷⁴ “From early on, the Doctrine of Election was at the heart of Barth’s theology, giving expression to the deepest motives in his theology.” (My translation).

samen zijn op de meest innige wijze. God als subject der verkiezing end de mens als object ervan sluiten zich hier samen tot een diepe eenheid (Graafland 1987:510)⁷⁵.

The breakdown of the sections in this volume already gives a clear outline of how Barth interprets election. Barth (CD II/2:3-76) starts his conversation by describing the doctrine of election as one of Grace. This already sets a positive tone for further discussion, where one might be tempted to view an Augustinian or early Calvinist definitions as sources for great anxiety and fear.

To Barth, speaking about election as a doctrine of grace can only be adequately defined in the portrayal of the election of Jesus Christ (CD II/2:77-194). This will be made clearer later in this chapter. As Jesus becomes the possibility of election in creation, so we find the election of the community (CD II/2:195-258). Jesus becomes the instrument, the point of contact between Creator and the created whereby God can freely and openly express God's intentions for the created realm. By revealing Godself through Jesus Christ to the whole of creation, the receivers of this revelation are bound together by one common point: Jesus Christ. So, the whole creation forms part of a community formed by God in grace. Individuals in the created realm then have the freedom to either respond to this self-revelation of God in Christ, or to ignore it. Either way, the bond of God's self-expression still forms part of their lives and identity. This may become a conscious factor in their existential experience by

⁷⁵ "The choice of God for humanity is grounded so deep in God's God-ness, that 'God indeed expresses it in God's original acts'. God identifies with humanity from the inside-out, so that no neutral, causal distance exists like that described in the image of a Potter in Romans 9. This image of a classic causal predestination is very popular. No. God, in God's, grace comes so close to humanity, that the latter finds a place in God and God's Will. God wants to be with humanity in the most intimate way. God as subject of Election and humanity as the object thereof, creates a relationship where God and humanity are joined together in a deep unity." (My translation).

accepting this gift in faith. It is only here that the focus turns to the election of the individual (CD II/2:306-507).

It may not seem greatly significant, but this “order of salvation” speaks volumes in terms of God’s approach, not only to the individual, but also to the church. From the onset, Barth’s definition of election differs from the traditional understanding of predestination. When Barth speaks of election of the individual he gives a sobering perspective. It is bound in the understanding that election does not begin with the election of the individual, but starts with the choice for grace, the expression of grace in Jesus Christ, the election of the community of Israel and the Church (CD II/2:308)⁷⁶ and then only can we speak of the election of the individual.

To Barth (CD II/2:309), the thesis of double predestination does not do justice to the testimony of Holy Scripture and therefore proposes an altered understanding of this doctrine. In double predestination, Scriptural testimony would demand an answer to the following question: If God had already pre-ordained some to salvation and others to eternal damnation, then why do we have such an extensive recorded history of God being involved in the realm of creation, obviously working towards the restoration of creation to its intended glory and reflecting a coherent relationship with its Maker?

The *telos* of double predestination suggests a neo-Platonic duality which places God

⁷⁶ Later theologians like Jürgen Moltmann continue this understanding of salvation. Moltmann (1996:1-340) speaks about eschatology, but defines salvation in the light of this doctrine. The chapter headings Personal eschatology (1996:47), Historical eschatology (1996:129), Cosmic eschatology (1996:257) and Divine eschatology (1996:321) suggest a traditional understanding of salvation and eschatology. This professes that God’s work starts with the individual’s salvation. As individuals experience salvation, so God is able to work in history, in the cosmos and so fulfil God’s own expectations of relationship with creation. Such a reading of Moltmann is incorrect. Moltmann starts from the opposite side. Personal eschatology (and salvation) is dependant on Historical eschatology (and salvation). That, in turn, is dependant on God’s Cosmic work, which in turn hinges on God’s initial choice and commitment to embark on this eschatological and salvific journey. Moltmann’s theology is perfectly summed up in the following statement “*So the Kingdom of God is a more integral symbol of the eschatological hope than eternal life*” (Moltmann 1996:133).

in the position of having to physically re-create creation if God wishes to be in full relationship with it. Those who have received the gift of election to eternal life, can then form part of the Divine reality, while those who are the recipients of eternal damnation, can only experience eternal Divine abandonment.

Salvation history does not seem to fit into this picture. Neither does the reasoning behind God calling a specific people. Holy Scripture testifies to God calling two different sets of people. God first creates the community of Israel under the Covenant relationship between God and the Patriarchs and then, later, the Church is called to be both “the Body of Christ” and tasked to share the news of God’s grace to the whole of creation.

At first, there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with this reasoning, but the problem arises when one considers the following: Why does God first call a people, Israel, and then forms an extended community called the Church? In double predestination there are only two groups of people, namely those who have been elected to eternal life and those who have been elected to eternal damnation. If God calls a specific community to be in relationship with God, then we can safely assume that this community would form part of God’s elect.

Nevertheless Holy Scripture does not stop at the election of Israel. The post-exilic prophets suggested a community beyond Israel. The New Testament, in turn, gives rise to another community called the Church. Before proceeding with this argument, certain observations need to be made. If double predestination were the full testimony of God’s relationship with creation, then it would suggest the following. First, we

would assume that the community of Israel as portrayed in the Old Testament, consisted of those elected for eternal salvation, while those who did not form part of this community would be excluded from salvation. God's election would therefore be ethnically based. This argument can be countered as Israel comprised many different ethnic groups (especially after the settlement in the Promised Land), only is bound by the Covenant between God and the people.

What happens now with the rise of the Church? As stated in the previous chapter, the Church is both the continuation of Israel, yet is a distinct entity from it. The Church is both linked with- and independent of Israel. What would double predestination then make of the Church? Who is then the elect? Israel or the Church? Can it be Israel and the Church? If this change from "only Israel" to "Israel and the Church" took place, or if it moved from "Only Israel" to "Only Church" then it would mean that there was a change in God's criteria for election. Double predestination in the context of Israel and the Church thus does not seem to be a viable explanation for a soteriological approach. If it were, then double predestination has no way of being able to reconcile the election of the community with its proposal of the election of the individual.

Barth's understanding of election is more inclusive and is not dependant on God's differentiation between those whom God elected to eternal life or eternal damnation. In the manner which God forms the community, by the choice for grace, it seems as if the Covenant pre-empts the formation of the community as where the traditional interpretation of the formation of Israel suggests a process that is the other way around. Barth's (CD II/2:306-507) approach to election in the form of God's election of the community therefore includes all individuals by default. To use the term "by

default” is nevertheless incorrect for this would imply that God is obligated to include certain individuals into the group of elect, using a specific set of criteria. This leads us to a situation where the criteria for election then supersede God’s grace and God’s Free Will. Barth’s alternative understanding is then portrayed in God’s choice to elect all, therefore creating the possibility of the existence and continuation of Israel and/or the Church in every individual.

In Barth’s understanding of election, there is nevertheless an order of salvation that sounds like that proposed by Catholicism. “Protestant Christianity...makes the individual’s relation to the church dependant on his relation to Christ, whereas Catholicism makes the individual’s relation to Christ dependant on his relation to the church” (Mangina 1999:269)⁷⁷. The Catholic position as revealed in this statement sounds similar to Barth’s approach. However, it is somewhat different to what Barth was trying to convey.

The difference lies in the major issue Barth has with Catholic theology, namely that of *analogia entis* vs. *analogia fidei* (Mangina 1999:272). The order of salvation in Barth’s soteriology, namely the election of Christ, the election of the community and then the election of the individual, may seem to suggest that the individual’s election and salvation is dependant on the individual’s relationship to the church only. This can only be the case in an indirect, figurative way. As we have noted in earlier chapters, the church as institution cannot replace, or be a progression, or a substitute for the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Barth’s “*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” (CD II/2:197) is therefore different to the same statement made by the Catholic tradition.

⁷⁷ Mangina is partly quoting Schleiermacher, F. 1928. *The Christian Faith*. Translated by H.R. Mackintosh. Edinburgh: T&T Clark. p. 103.

The church can at best only be a reflection of the Saviour, therefore making the church the bearer of a testimony concerning her Saviour. This is an act of faith.

The act of salvation is therefore not captured in the individual's ability to identify or belong to what is believed to be God's chosen community, but is fully dependant upon the Free Will of God to show grace. God's grace is an act of God's Free Will. In as much as we are redeemed by God's grace, a fact that we receive and hold onto in faith, so God too has the freedom, despite our faith, to reject us (Barth 1991:454). The Church as God's elect is therefore not a responsive consequence of human faith, but is the underlying work of God's grace in every individual that may only find fulfilment in the individual's faithful recognition and submission to this Divine act.

The concept that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all humanity has become part of a new creation and has been blessed by being included in the Divine community called by God, "revokes" the freedom of a human response to God as a pivotal point for the possibility of individual salvation. This is what Barth would call "Brutal grace": where humanity is "doomed to salvation" (Bosch 1980:215). "The centrality of the Atonement is thus not the centrality of a doctrine of the Atonement, but the centrality of the act of Atonement in which God is God" (Sykes 1979:40).

For God to be able to pronounce God's grace over creation, thereby creating the possibility for salvation to take place, Barth (Barth and Thurneysen 1933:123) finds the full expression of God's denial of human sinfulness, and God's acceptance of humankind in the person of Jesus Christ, specifically in the Cross: "Man can be saved only by God through man's complete ruin: That is why the Cross stands at the center

of the life of Christ” (Barth and Thurneysen 1933:123). Election as grace therefore finds completion in the election of Jesus Christ first before the act of election can find full expression in both the community and the individual.

Even in the case of classic double-predestination, the church has no means of knowing what criteria can be used to assess whether a particular individual has been elected or rejected by God. It can make no claim on Divine justice and is certainly not in the place to make a pronouncement on whether God rejects or for that matter, accepts a particular person and/or community. This description of double predestination creates little space for understanding the grace of God, particularly as displayed in the life of Jesus Christ. Barth’s view of election seems to be congruent with the story of God’s involvement in human history as reflected by the testimony shared in Holy Scripture. Barth therefore cannot be described as an unbiblical theologian, proposing something so totally revolutionary that it may as well constitute a new religion.

Barth’s struggle with double predestination is perhaps the same one most people have with the concept, namely that it seems neither just nor grace-centred. Barth (1991:468-469) expresses this frustration, quite humorously, while reflecting on Lutheran cartoons of Calvinists, which have been in existence from as early as the 16th century. From these cartoons, Barth describes a picture where a man is lying on his deathbed accompanied by a Reformed pastor who then advises the dying man that Christ did not die for all, but has already decided who will be elected and rejected for all eternity. One can imagine the man’s response. Although a simplistic way of describing the Reformed notion of double predestination, it cuts to the heart of every

person's struggle with their relationship with God and their projection of what is to come in the here-after. It asks the question of assurance.

In the situation described in the cartoon there is no assurance of salvation. It creates the classic picture that the church is the bearer of bad news, testifying to a God who will not disclose the status of God's relationship with God's created beings. The only assurance that can be given is that God stands in relation to creation as the judge who alone decides the fate of God's creation.

Barth's understanding creates a different picture altogether. To Barth, the only way in which a person can understand predestination is in the notion that it refers to the "...divine attitude to all people at all times." (Barth 1991:469). Judgement therefore does not take place on the basis of a predestined verdict delivered at the end of time, but that through election, God has already made a pronouncement on all of God's creation before all time. Barth takes a Supralapsarian position, declaring, "...predestination is set at the *beginning* of God's ways." (Barth 1991:468). God is serious about God's relationship with creation and therefore does not naturally choose for creation to be segregated into two different entities that will either live in close relationship to God or experience eternal separation from God.

Election therefore stands even before creation, finding its pinnacle in God's acceptance of creation and creation's experience of complete harmony within itself and with God⁷⁸ as celebrated in the Sabbath. In this understanding of it, Election is not a reactive measure to counter the effect of humanity's choice to sin. If Election

⁷⁸ This point is argued in more detail by Moltmann (1985:276-296).

were a reaction to creation, and more specifically, creation's engaging in sinful activity, then the nature of grace would move from being a primary relational attitude that God shows to creation, to a sympathetic reaction to another's fallen state. Sin is a result of humanity using the Free Will that God has given as a gift. It is therefore impossible to think that God's Free Will to choose grace and the Election of humankind as a reactionary act. This form of Infralapsarianism⁷⁹ nullifies the nature of humanity's Free Will by suggesting that in the giving of this gift, God did not count into the equation the consequence of the negative impact sin would have on relationships. It also suggests that God's plan for creation was poorly defined and that God's interaction with creation is restricted to the way humanity uses Free Will.

Creation would therefore only be able to experience life in all its fullness if it plays according to God's rules. If it chooses to do otherwise, God would refuse to participate. It also suggests a healthy dose of pre-determinism.

This is where Barth's position is extremely helpful. If God has already chosen, before creation began, that the nature of God's relationship with creation would be governed by grace, electing creation to be in full relationship with God, then God's acts of revelation and salvation cannot merely be reactive approaches by God to reconcile the world to Godself, but that in God's revelation and salvific acts God declares a respect for Free Will whilst at the same time declaring God's "No!" to sin and God's "Yes!" to creation.

⁷⁹ "A doctrine on the Fall of creation and on election (predestination) that argues from a historical point of view, i.e. from man's point of view, or from a point of view from 'below' (*infra*) or 'on this side of' the fall (*lapsus*), e.g. in holding that election of individual believers did not begin until after the fall, that sin must have been included in God's decision to create man, and that election serves to reveal God's mercy to a fallen human race" (Deist 1984:125).

The point and goal of predestination is not therefore rejection, but rather election. (Barth 1991:460). The focus of Free Will is not creation's ability to rebel against God, but to freely respond to God's gift of Election in grace by faith, nurturing a natural and mutually loving relationship. Anything else would suggest that God is the indirect author of sin, responsible for human rebellion and, by extension of the argument, an unjust judge.

The possibility for Assurance now becomes feasible. Assurance, from the human perspective can only be a reflective- and relative understanding (Barth 1991:469). It is reflective in the sense that creation is only able to look back at God's revelation of grace in Jesus Christ and so become aware of the work of restoration done in self through the power of the Spirit. Assurance is relative, because only God has the absolute perspective on the issue of Election. One could argue that this precise point calls Assurance into question once again, but Barth holds to the idea that Assurance is more concerned with the individual's and community's sense of the unchangeable Will of God (Barth 1991:454) than the destination of their eternal state of being. To have it the other way around would cause humanity to have a false sense of confidence in itself, depending on the Assurance of eternal life and neglecting its own transformation to righteousness.

To summarize: As much as a person is not born with the gift of "not having to be saved", so according to Barth's understanding of salvation, a person is not born with the curse of being beyond God's salvific ability and/or purpose.

To describe the process of the individual's Election, we have to go back to Barth's understanding of election and review the role and importance of Jesus Christ.

3. The personal nature of the Incarnation.

God's personal decision to bring to realization a relationship with creation that is determined by grace requires that God is also personally involved in the unfolding of salvation within the restrictions of the created dimensions of time and space. Even if God determines that grace is the standard for God's relationship with creation, God cannot leave it to the created order to recognize this gift, nor is creation able to implement the order of grace in its own strength, for it has fallen to sin. The focal point of God's salvific act for Barth is therefore captured in the idea that God took it upon Godself to deliver the world (CD IV/1:215). This is done completely and perfectly in the Incarnation.

Incarnational theology has to have as a starting point the notion that God's motive is one of reconciliation with creation and not an act of wrath. In his sermon entitled "Jesus and Judas", Barth (Barth and Thurneysen 1933:123) gives a clear, but concise, definition of the Incarnation by stating "He did not come to announce the ruin of mankind. He came to reveal God and save men". This is the crucial point in Barth's understanding of Incarnational theology.

Jesus Christ is first the revelation of God. Although creation may not be able to grasp this tremendous gift and miracle in time and space, Jesus' presence is God's presence in the world in a way that God has never been revealed before. The very nature of Christ in His lifestyle and interaction with people gives a clear revelation of God's

gracious dealing with creation. God, in Jesus, is equally accessible to shepherds and wise men, to a Samaritan woman and Pilate alike. A God of wrath is not an accessible God and such a god's nature would not allow for gracious dealings, but would be much closer to the Messianic expectation of a great warrior who would destroy all Israel's enemies and re-establish the monarchic line of David.

God's first choice is to be in relationship with creation, despite its ability and constant will to rebel against God. This Supralapsarian⁸⁰ position is further supported by Barth's exposition on 1 Timothy 4:4-5⁸¹ (Barth 1961:94-95). In this sermon, the primal announcement of God's view of creation becomes the premise for all God's dealings with the created realm. God calls creation "Good", displaying God's belief in the goodness of creation. God works towards the eternal establishment of this "Good" reality. For God to call creation, and every creature in creation, "Good" is a significant statement on God's chosen relationship with each creature. It expresses the beauty of God's creation in the light of God's personal interest in creation. Nowhere is this beauty and interest better portrayed than in the Incarnation (Barth 1961:95). The belief that "Each creature of God is wholly and unreservedly good" (Barth 1961:94) is not only portrayed in the person of Jesus Christ, but it is also the basis of the annunciation of this revelation.

The annunciation of the Birth of Christ serves as the proclamation of the personal nature of the Incarnation and God's belief in creation's potential for good. Barth

⁸⁰ "The view that those who would be saved had been elected by God *from eternity*, and were not (as is maintained in infralapsarianism) elected after the Fall only (referred to also as antelapsarianism)" (Deist 1984:248).

⁸¹ A sermon preached to prisoners on 6 October 1957.

(1961:23)⁸², reflecting on the Angel's words "To you is born, this day a Saviour..." (Luke 2:1-14), explains that the Incarnation is not so much the start of a universal blanket-amnesty offered by God, but in the general Will for salvation of creation. The Incarnation is a personal act of revelation to each and every person. As much as Barth emphasises the point that the Incarnation is personal, both to God and to the individual, so the Incarnation in Barth's theology is portrayed as an event that is in time, but that simultaneously transcends the limitations of time (Barth 1961:24-25). If salvation were up to creation, one could expect an attitude causing continuous postponement of the reconciliation between creation and God. Vlijm (1956:60) makes this point when stating: "Juist de glovige zal de eerste zijn om te erkennen, dat deze poging niet een aanloop was om tot geloof te komen, maar dat zijn religieuziteit een weerstand tegen de openbaring vormde"⁸³ Vlijm says this, adding to the idea that God's self-revelation does not reach a human recipient who remains neutral to the experience.

It is like a person thinking that salvation and the process of making peace with one's Maker is an issue for the deathbed, an event still distant and in the future. Barth's (1961:25) notion of the soteriological aspect of the Incarnation suggests that the work of God is neither locked in the past, as if the Incarnation is a past event that we merely have to remember, nor is salvation delayed to a future pronouncement of acceptance at the Last Judgment, but is secured in each and every moment. Each moment is therefore also an Incarnational moment.

⁸² A sermon preached to prisoners on Christmas Day 1954.

⁸³ "The believer will be the first to admit that such an attempt did not result in a 'coming to faith', but that religiosity acts as a resistance against revelation" (My translation).

The Incarnation is part of a greater process. If salvation were complete in the Incarnation alone, then we could assume that if Herod managed to find the Christ-child and killed Him, that the salvific process would not have been compromised. The Incarnation leads Christ down a further path, namely that of humility and obedience. It is in His obedience and humility that the revelation of God's grace becomes clearer to the created realm. Hans Küng explains:

...the secret of the true Godhead of Jesus Christ consists in Christ's being true God at the same identical time that He is man, in that His obedience is as Son and that in His obedience He humbles Himself even unto death on the cross. In His humiliation He is Reconciler and thus is true God (1964:37).

The Incarnation and life of Jesus Christ then lead to the pinnacle of God's salvific act. This is found in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. Mangina (1999:275) describes Barth's view of the act of reconciliation in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as two distinct divine actions. The first is found in the Cross, where Jesus becomes the "Judge judged in our place" (Mangina 1999:275). In this event, Christ takes upon Himself the godforsaken state the world finds itself in. This event therefore becomes "the end of the world".⁸⁴ The second is found in the Resurrection, which serves both as a vindication of Jesus' life and death, but also as the proclamation of a new possibility for humanity — the ability to live in grace rather than in the shadow of sin. This is a new creation — the new world has started. The Incarnation deserves special recognition, as it is a distinct event giving full account of the extent of God's grace to the world.

⁸⁴ Mangina argues using the following quote: "If God in Jesus Christ has reconciled the world with himself, this also means that in him he has made an end, a radical end, of the world which contradicts and opposes him, that an old aeon, our world-time (the one we know and have ourselves) with all that counts and is great in it, has been brought to an end. The humility in which God willed to make himself like us, the obedience of Jesus Christ in which this self-humiliation of God and in it the demonstration of his divine majesty became a temporal event, does mean, in fact, that our hour has struck, our time has run its course, and it is all up with us." (CD IV/1:294).

4. Salvation.

Justification and Sanctification are the end products of the work of God in the process of the Incarnation, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Barth (CD IV/2:523) is quick to add that both the processes of justification and sanctification are Trinitarian works. One may be tempted to think that Barth's emphasis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ comes at the expense of the rest of the Trinity's involvement in the salvific process. This is nevertheless unfounded. The Son stands as example, in the full revelation, support and will of the Father, empowered by the Spirit as one person who is truly righteous and displays the life of the sanctified person.

It is by the same Son that this justification and sanctification of the individual is possible by the power of the Spirit, and so receives God's "Yes" of justification and sanctification. The process of justification and sanctification therefore bring to reality the essence of the Covenantal relationship between God and creation.

One of the most apt depictions of sanctification Barth offers is found in a sermon entitled "Nevertheless I am continually with thee", preached to prisoners on 1 August 1954 (Barth 1961:13-19). The text used is Psalm 73:23. Focussing on the text's expression of God holding our right hands, Barth explains that a person's right hand is usually the strong hand, the hand used for writing, working and, if necessary, defending oneself⁸⁵. The right hand is symbolic of ourselves. It symbolizes the notion in human living of having to control and shape one's own life. This text expresses that God holds our right hand, which means that our right hand is not free – He is holding

⁸⁵ Assuming a person is right-handed.

it, meaning that ultimate control and direction of one's life is not in one's own hands, but that humanity depends largely on the direction and control of God's hand.

This is the essence of the Christian gospel. God holds the hand of the one professing a particular creedal faith in God, but also, by God's grace, the assurance of God's presence and positive Will for all people is given in the testimony of Holy Scripture (Barth 1961:51). This demands a great sense of humility not only from God, but from creation as well. Creation needs to acknowledge that it holds no rights to salvation, but that its reconciled state with God is an act of God's grace, something that creation itself is unable to achieve.

The space for personal sanctification becomes a possibility in the resurrection of Christ. This is what completes the possibility of reconciliation between God and creation (CD IV/1:351). The resurrection of Christ announces the possibility for each individual to experience the full extent of a reconciled state with God. This possibility is open to all people equally and does not discriminate. It is as if this relational state lies dormant in the individual until the person willingly acknowledges the work done for him/her in the Christ-event. Barth (CD II/2:458) describes the process as follows: "It is that from being a reluctant and indirect witness he should become a willing and direct witness to the election of Jesus Christ and His community".

The human effort to make itself righteous and holy is an impossible task. Barth (1957:14-15) describes the human effort to become righteous. He compares this drive to be holy to the event of the building of the Tower of Babel. The moral of the story is

that the more we try to achieve something that is clearly not dependant on our own doing, the more the goal will evade us. The attempt is nothing but an act of pride.

Sanctification, although initiated by justification is the process of a new creation (CD IV/2:514) taking shape. It is not new in the sense that the original creation will be destroyed or that it is deemed to be redundant. Such a suggestion would imply that God did not create perfectly and renders salvation to a divine effort to make something that is broken, somewhat acceptable. The alteration that takes place in the person is in a change of direction. The same is true for the salvation of a community as well as the whole of creation. Sanctification, and the change that it brings, is bound in the words of Jesus to the disciples: “Follow me” (CD IV/2:533).

In grace, God chooses to save, brings about the possibility of salvation for each person and then calls each individual to discipleship. This is a calling to discipline. The discipline of being a person justified and sanctified by God, carries two responsibilities. Barth (CD IV/2:526) suggests that the person is called into fellowship, but also called to witness.

What about the church? This is the point of contact between the church and individuals, those who are faithful and faithless. The fellowship of those who have submitted themselves to the justifying and sanctifying work of God form the core of the Christian community, called the Church. It is therefore evident that the Church’s first responsibility to the faithful and the faithless is to merely exist. The presence of the Church in the world creates the place for the Body to join together and offer

opportunities for corporate worship, communal prayer, participation in the Sacraments and assistance for those in its midst who find themselves in need.

The existence of the Church is itself a witness. Witnessing inside the Church, among those dedicated to the process of justification and sanctification, carries the same characteristics as the witness to those who have not responded to the gift of grace. Witnessing, in this sense, involves self-denial and the professing of the act of love generously revealed in grace by Jesus Christ (CD IV/2:546).

The struggle in the church⁸⁶ is that its practices do not always relay the message of God's grace that goes before the world, that it portrays a community that consists of people who have been able to meet certain criteria of righteousness, that it assumes the power to deny access to worship, the sacraments and therefore the acceptance of God. One can safely say that any of these flaws border on heresy.

5. Teaching on the Sacrament of Baptism.

With this understanding of salvation and the description of the extent of God's grace to the world, one would not blame the church for responding to Barth by either being speechless or by objecting vehemently.

The church could object to this liberal view by stating that it devalues certain church practices, such as baptism and limiting its meaning. This objection is justified, because baptism is widely celebrated as a Sacrament of entry into the Body of Christ. Barth's view of election demands that the church gives a very specific explanation of

⁸⁶ Note that here we refer to the Institutional church.

what it means by celebrating entry into the community of faith using this sacrament. There is an interesting dynamic. On reading Barth, the assumption can be made that Barth had very little regard for the Sacraments. The contrary is true and is clearly reflected in, for instance, the Göttingen Dogmatics (Barth 1991:26-27). Here we find three instruments that cultivate faith. They are preaching (proclamation), the sacraments, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church.

One nevertheless has to ask the following questions concerning the sacrament of baptism: Does it imply that one is not part of the Christian community if one has not been baptized? Is baptism a license to live as a Christ-follower, without which a person is regarded as a mere spectator of the Christian faith? All of these questions suggest that the church is able to use certain practices to measure whether a person is part of the community of faith. This is incongruent with Barth's understanding of salvation. It is for this reason that Barth raised certain objections to the church's understanding of, specifically, the sacrament of baptism.

In "The Teaching of the church regarding baptism" (Yocum 2004:97) delivered in 1943, Barth rejected the concept that Baptism had any salvific power of its own, but claimed it served as a symbolic gesture celebrating the salvation of the one being baptized. It is for this reason that infant baptism does not make sense in Barth's Ecclesiology or soteriology. If baptism is a celebration of something greater than itself, then it means that the salvific act of God in the person's life had already taken place. The celebration of the sacrament of baptism can therefore be compared to a child blowing out their birthday candle in the midst of their friends. A child may look forward to his/her birthday party, more specifically when he/she gets the opportunity

to blow-out the candle and hears his/her friend's appreciation of the moment by singing "Happy Birthday". That is the moment when the child's birthday may seem more real than any other moment. The fact is that it had been their birthday the whole day. It would have been their birthday irrespective whether they had the opportunity to blow out the candle or not. It would have been their birthday even if they didn't have a party. Their friends would have been their friends, whether there was a party or not.

Similarly, the grace of God extends to all people whether they acknowledge it or not. The church should be present and open to all people whether they are "faithful" or "faithless". But what a special occasion it is when a person professes their faith in God's act of grace and is afforded an opportunity to celebrate this divine act in the midst of friends. Baptism has no salvific power in itself, just as a birthday candle does not have the ability to make it someone's birthday. Yet both are powerful symbols. Baptism is therefore an outward symbol of an inner truth. The emphasis being on the word "symbol".

"And the meaning of Baptism is just this — that we have this promise of participation in this inconceivable life of God. God's life for us in Christ – in us through the Holy Spirit – that is the Christian life" (Barth 1962:14). Baptism implies a new way of living, a new moral-code that suggests a new set of standards that are raised in the person. Baptism is therefore also the celebration of discipline. Barth (1982:128) suggests that this principle of God's discipline is clearly portrayed in the case of raising of children. When children grow, they do so in an environment where there are, amongst other influences, issues of discipline and punishment. Discipline is not

the same as punishment, and cannot be held equally as a means to effect obedience. Correct discipline creates moral boundaries and therefore becomes a measure in life of right and wrong. Where an offence has occurred, a child is brought to discipline, reminded of the difference between right and wrong. Punishment, on the other hand, has no pre-emptive moral-code. Logic tells us that a child who grows in a home where s/he learns from being punished, can only find a place of acceptance where punishment is absent. “Acceptance” is therefore measured by the absence of punishment. Where discipline is used, “Acceptance” is a reality that is not dependant on the absence of discipline, but re-enforced by its presence.

Discipline therefore has a twofold character. It is first directed towards the establishment of certain principles in the life of the individual and the community that shapes the way in which we understand the morality of humanity. Second, it is a word of grace, calling back from the wilderness, those who have strayed from its path.

Barth (KD IV/4:112)⁸⁷ illustrates the nature of baptism well in the following quote:

*Die Taufe... ist nicht Gnadenträger, nicht Gnadenmittel, nicht Instrument der Gnade. Die Taufe antwortet auf das eine ‘Mysterium’, das eine ‘Sakrament’, der Geschichte Jesu, seiner Auferstehung, der Ausgiessung des Heiligen Geistes: sie selbst ist kein Mysterium, kein Sakrament*⁸⁸

To make baptism anything more than the celebration of God’s “Yes!” to the individual, would be an error by falling into the trap of turning a symbol into that which it symbolizes. The act of baptism cannot, in itself, be the instrument of God’s grace to either the individual or the community. It can at best be the celebration of God’s grace in the individual and in the community. In infant Baptism, too much

⁸⁷ As quoted in (Floor 1986:11-12).

⁸⁸ “Baptism... is not a conveyor of grace, means nor instrument of grace. Baptism is a response to the ‘mystery’, the ‘Sacrament’ of the story of Jesus, His resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: it is itself neither a mystery, nor a Sacrament” (My translation).

value is placed on baptism where families are pressured by their peers or other family members to baptize their children, thereby conforming to social expectations. This cannot be regarded as a sacrament, but as a religious act — a practise that we have already defined in Barthian terms as unbelief.

How do we then understand the Great Commission⁸⁹? In this light, the baptism of the nations has two significant implications. The first is to attest to the fact that their salvation is not won by themselves, but is a Trinitarian act of grace. The focus of the Great Commission is not on the practice of baptism, but more specifically on the duty of Christian disciples to be present in the world and to be bearers of the news of God's grace. The second, is that it is a joyful celebration of the new converts' freedom from the burden of sin. If baptism were to be a militant church-practice, then the consequence would be a message that salvation is only possible in and through the church, and the occasion is robbed of joy and negates the freedom of the one being baptized. The Sacraments, but very specifically that of Baptism, must then be seen as "...grateful responses to, and attestations for, the divine act of election and reconciliation" (Yocum 2004:97).

The Great Commission then becomes a helpful tool to give direction to the church in its mission to the "faithless". It first recognizes that it consists of disciples itself. This implies that those who form part of the church are not born without the need for redemption, but that individuals in the church have experienced, and are experiencing the grace of God within their lives. This grace is not earned, but has been the decision for each person before the world began. It is by grace, through Jesus Christ (in the

⁸⁹ Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus explicitly states that Baptism is part of the disciples' ministry.

power of the Spirit), that a community is formed — a community of both those who have and those who have not responded to God’s salvific act. The church’s responsibility through its presence in the world is to share its own testimony of its experience of God in Jesus Christ to the rest of the world.

It cannot do more than that. This work is sufficient in itself. Through the Sacraments, especially Baptism, the church is able to facilitate the celebration of God’s work in each person. Through fellowship, each individual, irrespective of how far they have travelled down the road of faith, is encouraged to grow in their relationship with God and with those around them.

6. Universalism.

Does Barth not advocate a case for universalism using this view of election and salvation? According to Busch (1976:302), Barth’s view of election should not be misunderstood as being an argument for universalism. He argues this point in the following way:

He guarded against that by making the ‘open multiplicity of those who are elect in Jesus Christ into a closed group’ – whether the elect were a particular group of people or the totality of mankind. In view of this ‘open multiplicity’ the ‘elect community’ has no more urgent task than proclaim the gospel of the grace of God (Busch 1976:302).

Barth himself speaks about the Universalist tendency in his understanding in the following way: “...it can only be a matter of the unexpected work of grace.” (CD IV/3:477). An understanding of universal salvation as a form of blanket amnesty, is to Barth nothing but a tendency where humanity waits expectantly on a form of “cheap

grace” (CD IV/2:505).⁹⁰ This is simply not a possibility. Universal salvation is nevertheless a possibility in the sense that all people are offered the gift of grace and therefore have the opportunity to respond in faith. To deny this possibility would lead us down the road of a definite double-outcome eschatology.

Looking back in history, one might argue that a double-outcome is already assured as history testifies to the lives of tyrants, such as Adolf Hitler. Are people like this, who by human judgment, have broken the parameters of righteous living, not guaranteed the existence of eternal damnation?

The church should respond with the testimony that it is not there to judge, but simply to witness to God’s gift of grace. “It is not for fallen sinners to deduce what God ‘must’ do in consummating his work of salvation” (Hunsinger 2000b:244). The church simply does not have the means to determine whether God’s grace only extends to those who are physically alive. How far does God’s grace then extend? Is it possible that God’s grace extends beyond the parameters of life and death?

There are no definite answers to these questions. So, what happens to those who perpetually deny the work done for them in Jesus Christ? Do they have the freedom to remain outside God’s grace? This, in terms of Barth’s understanding of election, is a totally illogical proposal (CD II/2:454-455). Rejection of the work done on their behalf, a work by God for creation, is completely possible. Denial nevertheless does not undo the work done by God in Jesus Christ. If the individual can choose to be outside of God’s gracious act of redemption, thereby negating salvation, then the

⁹⁰ Barth uses this term “Cheap Grace”, recognising that the term was first used in this context by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

following assumptions are made. First, that God's work in Christ is not done for the whole of creation, but that God's work is merely an offer which can be accepted or declined by individual created beings (CD II/2:454). Second, that the individual can take back the "godforsaken" state that Christ carried on behalf of the entire created order. For a person therefore to deny, or ignore, the work of God does not force that person out of God's line-of-sight. It does not classify the person as "rejected", for this category has been removed from the created order by God's divine act in the Cross. All that it can say about the individual, is that, despite their denial of the Divine work done for them, that this is the "worst" they can do as a response to God. It is precisely for this person that the Incarnation, Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ become necessary and eternally valid (CD II/2:455).

"Barth leaves the question of universalism open, yet keeping it as an object of the church's continual prayer and hope" (Hunsinger 2000b:12). For this reason, the church has a responsibility to exist in the world. To neglect its own existence and to surrender hope for those whom humankind has judged as unworthy is not a true reflection of its calling.

Another argument against Barth's universalistic tendency is "...the supposed impact it would have on weakening the church's mission of evangelism" (Hunsinger 2000b:12). This, too, is a misinterpretation of what Barth is proposing. In the light of God's universal revelation, the church has the responsibility to share the Good News of God's grace to the world. The church is furthermore not tasked to convince the world of this truth. Barth does not seem to be interested in apologetics — proving or convincing non-believers of the relevance of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, he

seeks a way to communicate the message of the gospel effectively to those who do not form part of the Christian faith.

The purpose of the church is therefore: “The positive will of God is that this loving-kindness should be revealed to us in proclamation and faith, that we might live by and with it” (CD II/2:458). Although it cannot be deduced, universal salvation must be held as a possibility, for the nature of God’s salvific work points in that direction (CD IV/3:478).

Perhaps the following words of Barth can shape the way in which the church understands its mission to those who do not form part of its fellowship: “First, I have to recognize that I can meet others only in God’s name. Certainly my I must be the Thou that binds them. But it must bind them, not to me, but through me to Christ.” (Barth 1981:371).

Chapter 6

Barth's definition of Church in politics and culture.

“Fürchtet Gott, ehret den König!” (1 Petr. 2:17)⁹¹

1. Introduction.

This chapter provides a description of Barth's views on Church, its role in politics and its relationship to culture. This is done by identifying the way in which the church participates in the social-realm through its relationship with the State. The historic religious question asks whether there is a natural mutually determining relationship between church and State. The church may ask whether faith and politics should mix, while a secular state may question the authority from which the church claims to speak. Culture determines the bias in this relationship to a large extent.

History has shown that Church-state dynamics is not an either/or relationship, where either the authority of the Church or that of the State should function as the ruling norm. Karl Barth describes the dynamics of this relationship, within the context of culture, in the way his faith engages with the political status quo. Once we understand this relationship better, Barth's definition of the church will prove to be more effective in its evangelical voice, speaking to those who guide its citizens through political power.

⁹¹ 1 Peter 2:17 is quoted as the substantive text of the fifth article of the Barmen Declaration.

2. Karl Barth's political activity and theology.

On reading Karl Barth's theology and then looking at his engagement with the political world, one is left asking the question whether Barth struggled with the question of the church-State relationship, or whether he knew the answer and acted on it. Some key moments in Barth's life where his political awareness shaped the way he viewed Church-State relationship are examined. This is not an exclusive list of events, but that it reveals how seriously Barth took political activity in his faith.

From an early age, Barth displayed a deep sense of social awareness and acted on it while fulfilling his pastoral role in Safenwil. It is here that Barth was an active lecturer in the Continuing Education programme of the Safenwil Arbeiterverein (Hood 1984:33). It was also no secret that Barth joined the Social Democrats, and even in this political role, he advanced with great strides through its ranks.

In 1916, Barth became the president of the Social Democrat's conference, a position that would give him opportunities to speak boldly against socio-economic, and political injustices. Barth was known for the way he was able to speak honestly about issues, which he believed concerned not only the church, but also society at large (Busch 1976:88). An example was Barth's open opposition to the institution of the office of the Reichsbischof⁹² (Erler 1984:182-183). Barth was convinced that the church could never be a mouthpiece for the State, and that this office would undermine the independence and critical stance of the church in relation to the State. A year later, Barth participated in the formation of the Barmen Declaration; a

⁹² "State (Kingdom) Bishop" (My translation). Krötke (2006:268) cites this event as one of the reasons for the German Christians' adherence to the religious-ideological principles of the Reichskirche. The Barmen Theological Confession serves as a response to this relationship between Church and State.

document that to this day is widely used to describe the responsibility of the State as seen through the eyes of the church.

Barth's outspokenness and refusal to pledge his allegiance to the Führer did not come without a price. In 1935, Barth was forbidden to speak in public and was subsequently relieved of his post at the University of Bonn. This nevertheless did not stop him from teaching as he immediately took up a post at the University of Basel.

The question that arises out of observing Barth's political interaction is: How does Barth understand the relationship between church and State that would drive him to act in the described manner? This question is open to debate. Many have also tried to answer this question from different angles. Jüngel (1992), attempts to answer this question from a purely doctrinal point of view, while an author like Marquardt (1972) maintains that Barth's political affiliation tended to colour his theology. Three documents are important in this critique – The Barmen Declaration, the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* and the second edition of *Der Römerbrief*. Let us look at both Jüngel and Marquardt's views:

2.1 A Doctrinal argument.

Jüngel presents an argument, using as his premise the fifth thesis of the Barmen Declaration⁹³. From the start it has to be acknowledged that it is risky to use the

⁹³ “Fear God, honour the King!” (1 Peter. 2:17)

Scripture tells us that by divine appointment the State, in this still unredeemed world in which also the Church is situated, has the task of maintaining justice and peace, so far as human discernment and human ability make this possible, by means of the threat and use of force. The Church acknowledges with gratitude and reverence toward God the benefit of this, his appointment. It draws attention to God's Kingdom.

Barmen Declaration to prove something about Barth's theological stance as Barth was not the sole author of the Declaration, but was certainly one of the main contributors⁹⁴.

Jüngel (1992:37) is able to use Thesis 5 as he views this part of the Declaration to be word for word Barth's handiwork. According to Jüngel (1992:37-38), Barth – who is a staunch opponent of the Luther's Two-Kingdom theory, here displays something of a contradiction by reworking this classic doctrine. Although subtle, the Thesis indeed creates the impression that church and State are two opposing forces which will never be able to speak from the same side. Hood comes to the same conclusion, but adds that the *telos* of Thesis 5 is different from that of the classic Two-Kingdom theory. Thesis 5 gives the impression that, although different, church and State can operate in God's Kingdom on earth, if the State recognises that its authority is not self-driven, but a God-given gift. If this is true, then the State should be subject to God and therefore accept the voice of the church as a testimony of what God is revealing (Hood 1984:168). Jüngel (1992:45) agrees with this point of view, but continues to argue for a dualistic relationship between the two: "Barmen V does not speak of the state in the abstract and outside of its relations, but formulates the state's own original and particular function as opposed to the church's own original and particular function" (Jüngel 1992:40-41).

(Reich), *God's commandment and justice, and with these the responsibility of those who rule and those who are ruled, It trusts and obeys the power of the Word, by which God upholds all things.*

We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well.

We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the Church should and could take on the nature, task and dignity which belong to the State and thus become itself an organ of the State."

(Jüngel 1992:xxvii)

⁹⁴ See also Busch (1975:258-260).

Not only does the content of the fifth thesis imply this dualism, but so does its structure:

The first sentence formulates the task which belongs to the state according to divine ordering. The second sentence formulates the grateful affirmation by the church of the divine ordering in accordance with which the state exists and has to act. The third sentence formulates the particular task of the church with respect to the existence and task of the state. The fourth sentence once again binds the insights of the fifth thesis back to the insight of the first thesis (Jüngel 1992:45).

It is interesting that Barth should describe both the church and State as necessary agents in the process of God's Kingdom becoming a reality in ordinary living, as will be described later. At the same time, they should not see themselves as indispensable. The *telos* that Hood referred to, is simply this: that in Barth's view, the consummated Kingdom of God on earth will render both these institutions meaningless. Their existence depends on the Kingdom of God not being a consummated reality. The State functions as a humanly defined — yet God granted authority — structure that acts in a way that ensures the responsible co-habitation of human beings within specific borders. The State therefore has the responsibility to direct, take care of and maintain society. This is the meaning of social order. "In the redeemed world, however, it would no longer be necessary for the life of the human community to be represented politically on the one hand and ecclesially on the other, or, secularly on the one hand and spiritually on the other. Neither the state as such nor the church as such are created for eternity" (Jüngel 1992:45-46).

So what then is the role of the church? This depends entirely on which of Barth's works one reads. In both editions of *Der Römerbrief*, church and State are part of a dualistic relationship. In the first edition, Barth places God and the church over and against the world and therefore also in opposition to the State. If this is the case, then

the church can claim a moral high ground, and therefore can refuse to co-operate or negotiate with the State. The church therefore belongs to the Kingdom of God and the State to the Kingdom of the World. The tension here is for the church to transform the State into something that would be nothing less than ecclesiastic rule.

In the second edition, Barth draws the dialectic line between the Creator and that which is created. This places God on the one side, and since both church and State comprise of human beings (the institutional church therefore being humanity's best attempt to respond to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, representing what should be the Church), this will make them the other part of this relationship. A similar description of this relationship is given in Barth's "Ethics, Volume II" (Barth 1981:444).

It will be closer to the truth to describe the first edition as a reworking of the Two-Kingdom theory, whereas the second edition implies that although the world, including church and State, are fallen, it is not beyond salvation. It is for this reason that one must believe that there is still some of the goodness of God hidden in both the church and State (Hood 1984:57). The premise of both church and State is to work for the well-being of humanity. This is both honourable and noble, but practice will define the morality and ethics within which both these bodies operate. Jüngel describes the different approaches of church and State well when he writes:

The church has the spiritual task of proclaiming the sin-forgiving justice of God and therefore to forgive the sin of the sinner in the Name of God, in order thus to urge one to a sinless life. The state, however, has to work in worldly ways against sin in its worldly forms, and that means: within the context of threat and, if necessary, also within the context of the use of force (Jüngel 1992:50).

Before we draw any conclusions about Barth's theological approach to the relationship between church and State, let us look at how his political involvement seems to have shaped his theology.

2.2 A Political argument.

Barth hat gesagt, daß die Aufnahme marxistischer Elemente noch keinen Marxisten mache. So hüten wir uns, ihn gegen seine Selbstzeugnisse dazu zu stempeln. Unsere Arbeit heißt darum nicht »Theologie und Marxismus«, sondern »Theologie und Sozialismus«. Sozialismus mit unübersehbaren »marxistischen Elementen« ist die zutreffende Charakterisierung der hier vorgeführten politischen Position Barths (Marquardt 1972:33-34)⁹⁵.

Was Karl Barth a Christian first, finding the practice of his faith through what can be described as Marxist or Socialist ideologies or was Barth a Socialist who believed that God demands this socio-political orientation of the human race whom God had created? This question cannot be answered in terms of either/or logic, but reflects the different dynamics at work in both Barth's political- and religious life. Barth was human and cannot be defined as belonging solely to either of these worlds. As we see in the quote above, there may well be a great political influence on Barth's theology, but it does not make him exclusively Marxist. The following anecdote illustrates this:

Barth delivered a speech addressing the Arbeiterverein⁹⁶ in Safenwil entitled "Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung"⁹⁷. In this address, he said the following: "Jesus is the movement for social justice and the movement for social justice is Jesus in the present..." (Hunsinger 1976:19). Considering the context, it is tempting to label Barth

⁹⁵ "Barth said that the decline of the Marxist element, does not produce Marxists. So we guard ourselves, and it gives it's own stamped testimony. Our work is therefore not a 'Marxist Theology' without a 'Socialist Theology'. Socialism with incalculable 'Marxists elements' is the correct characterizing of what is proposed in Barth's political position." (My translation).

⁹⁶ "Labour union" (My translation).

⁹⁷ "Jesus Christ and the Social Movement" (My translation).

as a Christian Socialist, or a Socialist Christian. We already noted that Barth became a member of the Social Democrats, and there is a fine line between Barth's political and religious convictions. How far did Barth go in making these two worlds meet and how did they converge considering his Dialectic method?

Brouwer (1988:18) comments on Dannemann's (1977) detailed explanation of Marquardt's (1972) description of Marxist tendencies in Barth's writings, especially *Der Römerbrief*. Brouwer agrees with Dannemann when he correctly states that Marquardt is overemphasising the point of this political influence. Barth indeed uses words that are generally associated with Marxism, but when Barth speaks of "revolution", for instance, he is not using the same definition and ideological constructs as Marxist philosophy. What Barth refers to is social revolution, but this concept is not uniquely Marxist. Barth's definition of "revolution" will be explored later. To describe Barth as a pure Marxist is to misunderstand Barth completely and to do an injustice to what Barth was trying to achieve in his emphasis on social religious participation in the political realm.

Brouwer (1988:18) describes Barth's perspective on the political significance of the Gospel well by saying that the Gospel of Jesus Christ tended towards a socialism that was democratised or a democracy that was socialized. To pin Barth's strong Biblical theology to one political stance is impossible and it is equally unjust to describe it as democratic, theocratic, anthropocentric, or legalistic. Neither of the systems that Brouwer mentioned could manufacture a society that would be the equal of God's Kingdom on earth on their own. For all practical purposes, Barth displays the thinking of a social democrat. The young Barth, as we saw in the description of the first edition

of *Der Römerbrief*, would have put the church above the influence of this movement. Later on, as in the second edition of this book, he would realise that the church is indeed influenced by its political *Sitz im Leben*.

This path leads us back to the place where both the church and the political authority of the day are instruments, necessary for what politicians would call tranquillity and what Christians would call “The Kingdom of God”. It can however be debated that such a Christian perspective, equating God’s Kingdom with human tranquillity would result in nothing less than a post-millenarianist Christendom.

Barth is aware of this dilemma and draws a very sharp distinction between church and State by reflecting on the motive of each in its “mission”. The State, for instance will address issues either out of a sincere desire to act on needs within society that present themselves, or will act for the sake of obtaining more power within society. These two motives in the State are not mutually exclusive. When the Church declares its confession as an act of addressing certain issues present in society, Barth states that the Church does not do so for the sake of meeting needs or answering questions, but to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the world at that particular moment (Barth 1939:15).

An excellent book describing the growth in Barth’s theology and political stance is Robert E. Hood’s “Contemporary political orders and Christ: Karl Barth’s Christology and political praxis”. Although it is largely a biographical description of Barth’s theological and political involvement, from some ideas presented in this book can be used to substantiate the claim of the delicate balance between Barth’s political and theological views.

The first point that comes to mind is the question of absolute truth. Is it possible for both the church and the State to form part of and present an absolute truth for its people? We already know from Barth's Dialectic method that the answer is "No!" "...the Christian cannot identify any nation or party of the existing structures with absolute truth for the state" (Hood 1984:48). This does not mean that no truth exists within these structures. The church acts as the witness of the Divine Truth. It is the witness of Christ, the risen Christ, that brings significance to the way we live. The resurrection of Christ brings into being a new form of society that has authority over any humanly created order, whether economical or political. This is called the Church⁹⁸. The institutional church can and should be representative of the Church, but it cannot be equated to the Church as it consists of fallen human beings, who claim for themselves — whether by ordination or by election — positions of power within this structure.

When the church speaks to the State or society, the best it can do is testify about her experience with her Lord, and her interpretation of her Lord's will. The church, in the same breath, must not be rendered helpless, for the church is the best human attempt to respond to God's self-revelation. The Church — a creation of the Spirit — may indeed find opportunities and words to speak through the church, but that depends on the obedience and interpretation of the church.

Barth places a greater emphasis on the existence of the Church in the life of the individual Christian (CD I(2):704-705). It is in the individual that the Church

⁹⁸ This is different to "church".

happens, but it is not an individualistic movement. The Church finds expression and authority in the community of saints, which is not necessarily the church. This creates an inverse reaction from what is normally expected by modern Christians concerning the church's involvement in the political realm. Christians seem to wait for the church to respond to a particular ethical, social, or political situation. Christians then evaluate the response, and then either join in with the church in its response, or move to a denomination where their particular views are supported. Barth's theology does not allow the Christian individual to wait for the church in order to act in faith. Such a pathos implies that the church is something more than it is and that individuals are not able to hear God for themselves, but depend on the church in order to find God. "Because of his freedom which is grounded in this Word, a member of the Church cannot retain a passive, indifferent and merely waiting role in face of this will of the divine Word, as though anyway, in its own time what has to happen will happen" (CD I(2):711).

The Church, through the Community of Saints, becomes the voice of authority for the Christian. The church is where these people worship together under the guidance of specific denominational emphases, liturgy and doctrine. So, if the Church is the voice, speaking about God to and in the individual, does this mean that Christians should take it upon themselves to overthrow all governments, only to replace them with what is perceived to be a theocratic rule? The answer to this is "No". Christians need to support the State, but not necessarily agree with it. Where there are sound policies, the church needs to show support, but to be open to the idea of being prophetic when political policies go against what Christians deem to be the "Word of God". This has ethical and practical limitations, one of which is determining which strain of the

Christian belief system determines or most accurately reflects the true Word of God. The modern church, or should we say denominations, are faced with this dilemma, not only in the political sphere, but concerning social and moral issues. Abortion, euthanasia, people with homosexual orientation and/or practice wanting recognition as members and leaders in the church – these are all issues which elicit a variety of opinions and beliefs.

How can the church speak to the State with authority when there are such great divergences in opinion between different denominations? Is this a weakness in Barth's ecclesiology? Rather, it is proof of the true Church at work. If the church maintains that it holds the final and undisputed truth about any subject, it ceases to be the church. The church in discussion with itself represents a body searching for the truth. When the situation arises where the church is convinced of a certain truth and stands by it, it does so with the knowledge that the truth it maintains may only be the truth for that moment, subject to change through the Word of God or through contextual changes. It may appear that this plunges Barth's theology into the mainstream of religious relativism but it does not, as in Barth's theology the only thing that is relative is that which is created as well as creation's perception of something that is eternal and beyond its control. God is not relative and neither is God's Word or God's truth.

The second point asks the same question of absolute truth, but in relation to the State. Barth cautioned people not to fall into the trap of believing that politics is able to produce a society that is equal to that of the Kingdom of God, especially when that political power hints at being able to function without the church. After World War II,

Barth did not oppose communism in eastern-Europe with the same tenacity as he did National Socialism in Germany. After being criticized, he warned his critics not to elevate western democracy as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth (Hood 1984:30).

It may be argued that National Socialism indeed had the support of the church, even though communism was blatant in its position on church-state relationships and democracy cheapened the influence of religious input by diluting its voice in its attempt to give all perspectives, whether faith-based or not, an equal standing in society. With respect to the church-State relationship in Nazi-Germany, Barth had the following to say:

From Romans 13 it is quite clear that love is not one of the duties which we owe to the State. When the State begins to claim “love”, it is in the process of becoming a Church, the Church of a false God, and thus an unjust State. The State requires, not love, but a simple, resolute, and responsible attitude on the part of its citizens. It is this attitude which the Church, based on justification, commends to its members (Barth 1960:144).

In Barth’s theology, we find different ethical roles, those practiced by the church and that by the State. In further exploration of this dynamic relationship requires a closer look at these expressions.

3. Politics, ethics and theology.

In summary, Barth views both the church and the State as divine instruments, but summoned for different purposes. The church is “...summoned to repentance before God” (Barth 1981:442) while the State is “...summoned to serve our neighbour.” (Barth 1981:445). This does not mean that the church has no business in serving its neighbour, nor that the State should not come before God in repentance.

Palma (1983) finds a helpful tool to link the church to the State in the life of the community: This is called “culture”. Does Barth have a theology of culture? The answer is “Yes”. To Barth, culture is the highest form of human achievement, the characteristic that sets us apart from the rest of creation (Palma 1983:9). Palma claims that all culture is theologically determined and conditioned (1983:12). Culture, then predisposes the individual to very specific political orientations. Cultures that are community-centred tend to implement community-based political structures, while individualistic cultures opt for political structures that cater for the individual.

If culture were the stepping-stone between faith and politics, church and State, then we would need to find a culture that is Christ-centred. Palma (1983:31) describes Barth’s Christology as presenting Jesus Christ as the prime example of living in free culture. The concept does not mean that Jesus was free from cultural influence. Jesus was, in his culture, free to express the revelation of God without fearing that culture would hinder or distort His message. As Christians, we are called to bear testimony to the Word, which means that although we cannot be the revelation of the Word, the church is charged with the mission of bearing witness to the Word without culture and tradition distorting the message. It is a goal and not an existential reality.

The church’s goal is to grow towards free culture as revealed in Jesus Christ. How does Jesus’ free culture interact with politics? Perhaps the best description is found in Jesus’ response to Pilate as found in Jn. 19:11. Jesus acknowledges the authority of the State, but sees it in the context of the State being nothing more than an institution, permitted to exercise power but without divine authority. Although the State is

granted power by God, it does not mean that the State is beyond error or that the State cannot become corrupted by the power which it claims.

Is there a form of State that best illustrates free culture and the ability to become the most righteous form of governance? To Barth this freedom and obedience was best illustrated in democracy and in socialism. For this reason, he affiliated himself with the Social Democrats (Palma 1983:38) and opposed communism (Palma 1983:39).

“Wie Jesus Christus die Krisis und Hoffnung des Menschen ist, so ist er auch die Krisis und Hoffnung der Gesellschaft”⁹⁹ (Dannemann 1977:184). Dannemann marks the delicate tension between God as the “Crisis”¹⁰⁰ and as the Hope of humanity, not only of individuals, but as the quote marks, also of society¹⁰¹. If God confronts humanity, including the State, effecting not only a religious, but also a social transformation, then God is also introducing a set of ethics that directs society, including its culture.

Hood (1984:xiv) sums up Barth’s description of ethics in CD II(2), which introduces divine ethics even in the political sphere:

First, ethical action means that we confess an ignorance of being able to apprehend or decide about God’s command without the aid of God’s grace...

Secondly, ethical action means that man’s obedience is to a command, which transcends his actions...

Thirdly, ethical action means that it is communal, not individualistic...

⁹⁹ “As Jesus Christ is the Crisis and Hope of people, in the same way he is also the Crisis and Hope of the community” (My translation).

¹⁰⁰ The term is used for lack of a better translation for the German word “Krisis”, “Crisis” is apt, because it captures the deep sense in which humanity is challenged when God confronts it. No other word describes the dialectic tension between Creator and creation better.

¹⁰¹ See also Rostagno (1985:347) about the radical portrayal of Jesus being the only true revelation of Divine Truth and so influencing a “revolution” in society.

Fourthly, ethical action means that it is concrete, not abstract...

Political ethics and Christian ethics, at the best of times, are not synonymous. It is therefore the church's duty, even, its mission, to act when ethics existing in the political realm are inconsistent with that of the Gospel-message (Dijkstra 1986:21). The church has an added responsibility to speak against state-ethics when the State professes to act from a Christian standpoint, as was the case in Nazi-Germany.

Although a good example of the church's response in such a situation is in the Barmen-declaration, it has not been without criticism: It said nothing about the fate of the Jews after the announcement of the Aryan-paragraph of 7 April 1933. This legislation stated that Aryans, not Jews, were able to be leaders in the German Evangelical Church. All Jews were subsequently relieved of their posts and debarred from citizenship (Barth 1965:16).

Barth's "Ethics thus seeks, not to translate the will of God into the situation of the believer, but rather to translate or move the person and community of faith into a position to hear and to be able to obey the commandment of God as it is concretely spoken." (Osborn 1983:320). Osborn (1983:321) sees Barth's definition of Ethics as a tool that is used to understand and implement the will of God, very much like a tennis racquet is used to hit a ball. All parts of a situational reality need to meet at a certain point in order for truth to become a reality. The player, the extension of his arm, the racquet, the ball, all need to be in the right place at the right time, meeting together and only then can a proper and deliberate action be performed. In Barth, ethics, context, God, civil community, and Christian community need to meet at a specific

point in order for God's deliberate will to find realisation. Therefore, to speak of a specific will of God, real for all situations and all times manifest in a world that is constantly in flux, would therefore be speaking into nothingness. The only specific will of God, manifest in human time and space, is the proclamation of God's Divine "Yes" through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ therefore becomes the proclamation, not only of the existence of God, but also God's Ethics.

Bonhoeffer (1965:20) criticized Barth as he could not see how Barth could come to any political decision from his theological speech. He claimed Barth to be too vague, idealistic, and imprecise (Osborn 1983:313). Barth works from the premise that our relationship with God is one with a living God. If God were a mere concept, then his approach could well be described as vague and idealistic. But as God lives, and is able to meet people in different times, places and contexts, God's Ethics must be broader than the legalistic definitions that limited human beings can produce. Does this justify his vagueness nevertheless? Osborn comes to the following conclusion:

Barth's so-called 'idealism' is a means of talking about the Lordship of God in Jesus Christ and recognizing that Christian ethics is a matter of obedient acknowledgement of this lordship, 'from above' of the living God incarnate in Jesus Christ. His 'actualism' is a way of speaking about the personal dimension of this lordship as it bears upon human existence in the only way it can and yet remain in any meaningful fashion an event of true lordship—namely, as it actually, concretely determines particular and ever free human decisions (Osborn 1983:316).

God's ethics, in other words, are too great to be formulated in a human code of ethics, or even Christian ethics. Ethics is an important part of theology, but it cannot be termed as 'the Ethic'.

The Ethics that form the relationship between God and humanity is not one founded on the principle of metaphysics. Dannemann (1977:97) correctly states that in essence, the dialectic relationship that exists between God and creation in Barth's theology, bodes well for a metaphysical approach. If this were the case, then we could assume that there should be two divergent states of ethics, as the two dimensions of existence would require two different guidelines to determine and separate that which is fundamentally correct or righteous from that which is in essence evil or corrupt.

Als Aufhebung der Negativität der menschlichen Existenz wartet die in Gott selbst ursprüngliche und vorausgesetzte und dann in der Auferstehung Jesu Christi von den Toten neu angekündigte »Synthese« von Gott und Mensch, neuer und alter Welt¹⁰² (Dannemann 1977:98).

From this intervention, the negative aspect of the dialectic existence between God and humanity is transformed into something positive and unifying. Divine ethics therefore becomes a possibility, something to be practiced by humanity.

It is interesting that Barth does not refer to the State as requiring redemption. Society needs to be redeemed (Godsey 1963:75). Only when society is redeemed will the State be able to execute its responsibility with a firm ethical and divine responsibility. The State is formed by society; it is not ontologically independent, even if it believes it is. The outcome of such thinking would result in revolution. A sign of a society that is in the process of redemption is a society which views "work" as communal. Nothing exists solely to meet the individual's needs. Individual independence, according to Barth, gives rise to capitalism and alienates community (CD III/4:537-538). Redeemed society must be community-based.

¹⁰² "By relinquishing the negativity of the human existence, it (humanity) awaits God's original and intended (world) and then in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is a new pronounced synthesis between God and humanity, the new and the old world" (My translation. Words in brackets added to clarify meaning).

The church has as a central responsibility, the task of praying for the state (Barth 1960:135), being an agent of God, communicating what it believes God to be saying to the authorities. The church does so, being constantly reminded of the chaos that threatens the world's existence as manifest in the signs of war, oppression and lawlessness (Hood 1984:74).

And so, the church becomes the vehicle of giving testimony in the political realm to Divine ethics as found in the Person of Jesus Christ.

4. State-focussed Mission in South Africa.

Barth did not write an ecclesiology specifically for the South African context. Instead, being a South African Methodist, I would like to interpret what Barth had to say and then to place it in this context. How does the Church witness concerning the Word in a political world?

Barth's ecclesiology and understanding of the relationship between church and State finds specific expression in something like the Kairos document. It may be argued that there is a similarity between the Barmen declaration and the Kairos document, but I believe that the different approaches used in the formation of these declarations provide for more differences than similarities. I would like to suggest that there is a greater correlation between Barth's view of church-State relationship and the thoughts that are conveyed in the Kairos Document.

First, a short description of the Kairos document. As a response to the political situation in South Africa under the Apartheid regime, theologians from various

Christian denominations gathered in 1985 to discern the Will of God. The meeting realized that the church was not so much opposed to a diabolic State, as it was opposing several church-State relationship perspectives that existed at the time. The church found itself deeply divided (Kairos 1985:4).

Three different church-State relationships were identified. The first two were descriptions of existing definitions, while the third was a goal. The first perspective was called “State Theology”. This theology described the perspective where the State was a direct instrument of God and could define its actions as ordained by God (Kairos 1985:6-10). The second, “Church theology”, described a theology that acknowledged a distinct difference between the roles of the State and those of the church. It, by definition, implied that the church had no political voice and should concern itself with the facilitation of liturgical worship for its members (Kairos 1985:11-17).

The third, “Prophetic theology” could be seen as a compromise position between the two previous perspectives, but it is not. What it offers, is a theology which clearly indicates that the State cannot act as if it were the church, nor that the church finds itself completely isolated from the social affairs of its context. What does this imply? This theology does not ask the church to become an opposition party. If the church were to respond to political views, using political tools, then an oppositional stance would be inevitable. “Prophetic theology” asked the church to respond to issues concerning the Kingdom of God. Instead of directly attacking the existing government, it sought to address the issue of oppression. No Christian, irrespective of political conviction, could agree that oppression is part of God’s divine will for

humanity. This only causes a division, creating a social order where there are those who oppress and those who are oppressed.

Barth was calling for what, in Kairos-terms, is called the church engaged in Prophetic theology. The Confessing Church, of which Barth was part, is proof of this. It is interesting that the Kairos Document does not deny the importance or place of a theology of (belonging to) State. It does take issue with “State theology” which questions the independent role of the church. It also sees the place of Church theology, but objects to it being disengaged from society. It therefore does not discredit either of these institutions as something that God is unable to use. Instead, it calls for a church, which is neither bound by political alliance, nor ecclesiastical tradition, but which is able to speak what it interprets to be the Truth, in love and in real terms. In the same breath, it calls for a State that sees itself as an instrument of God, but not the exclusive voice of God in society.

An important action by the church is to ensure the distinct difference between itself and the State. This can be done by constituting a *Status Confessionis*. There are similarities between what the church has done in South Africa and what the church did in Germany during the Nazi-era. Constituting a *Status Confessionis* was important in both contexts. In Germany, we find the Confessing Church, under great influence from Barth, drawing up the Barmen Declaration. In South Africa, the church compiled several documents, the most prominent speaking to the local context being the Belhar Confession and the Kairos document.

4.1 A short history of the Belhar Confession.

The Belhar Confession finds its beginning in the political situation of South Africa in the mid-twentieth century (Adonis 2006:234). In this period, the political system, later to be known as “Apartheid”, shaped all aspects of South African community-life, including the expression of faith. In this system, people were classed and grouped according to their race. Different groups were then settled in distinct areas with the intention of promoting “separate development”. The South African government of the time acted from, what they professed to be a Christian premise and even went as far as declaring Apartheid a “church policy” (Adonis 2006:234).

With the institution of separate development came the splitting of churches along racial lines. The Dutch Reformed Church led in this regard. The first form of objection to the prevalent system came in the form a letter to the moderamen of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) by some of its members in 1950 (Adonis 2006:235). In this letter, the concern was raised that Apartheid did not comply with Christian teaching and should therefore not be applied in either the church or in the country (Adonis 2006:235). This issue was not given proper attention and was not taken any further.

Only in the 1970’s was a similar position presented to the DRMC and was accepted. In 1978 The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) restated this position and declared that Apartheid was in contradiction to Christian teaching (Adonis 2006:237). By 1982, the WARC took action against two reformed churches that did not comply with this position by suspending their membership. This matter now came before the synod of the DRMC in 1982, whereupon the synod formulated a *Status*

Confessionis. This would later develop into the writing of the Belhar Confession, and accepted in 1986. The crux of the Confession lay in its declaration of the church's wrongful support of Apartheid and its flaw in allowing its structures to be shaped by this system. The conclusion of the Confession called for the unification of the Reformed churches (Adonis 2006:237), a call that still awaits full realization to this day.

Moving from this point, the observation is made that a new Confession is highly contextual and seldom has the ability to serve the church beyond its specific *Sitz im Leben*. A Confession therefore needs to be formulated with a specific theological focus. Barmen, for instance, carried a very Barthian perspective in its approach, denouncing Natural Theology and so defining the different roles of church and State.

The Synod of Barmen used as its premise a methodological approach that is very characteristic of the way Barth does his theology. Speaking to its context, the Barmen Declaration is a document that places an emphasis on Scripture as the testimony of God's Word at work in the world (Weth 1984:9). This use of Scripture is not achieved through the irresponsible allocation of certain passages of Scripture to statements in order to support the mind of the meeting, but is used as a primary source of what the synod believed to be the voice of God. Although Scripture is not itself the Word of God, it bears testimony to the Word of God, and in the context of the Barmen Declaration, is the basis of the argument against the Church-State relationship that prevailed at the time.

The Kairos document, on the other hand, used as its premise the following: the “...first task of a prophetic theology for our times would be an attempt at social analysis or what Jesus would call ‘reading the signs of the time’ (Mt.16:3) or ‘interpreting this Kairos’ (Lk. 12:56)” (Kairos 1985:18)¹⁰³. This is clearly leaning towards interpreting revelation in what Barth would perceive as natural theology.

Such a Confession cannot be done only from the perspective of one Christian denomination, but needs the co-operation of as many denominations as possible. An ecumenical work, in this instance, has two functions. Firstly, it becomes a united witness and speaks with greater authority¹⁰⁴. Secondly, it breaks the State’s illusion that it operates either as a Divinely authorised entity, or even that it is able to be just without being a Divine instrument. Ecumenical prophecy exposes the State’s true nature when it chooses to function outside its relationship with both God and the church (Barth 1981:447).

This radical act by the church, to state its own individual role in society, will at the same time counter the great disillusionment, which people have with the church when the State speaks on behalf of the church. Appropriate here is the criticism that Steve Biko¹⁰⁵ levies at the church. Biko (1978:217-218) states that it is not difficult to believe or become deeply passionate about the teachings of Christ. What discredited the Christian movement was, firstly, the Christian condoning of State injustice and, secondly, the broader church’s (initial) apathy in condemning this heresy.

¹⁰³ Also quoted in (Horn 1988:119).

¹⁰⁴ Jn. 17:23.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Bantu Biko was an anti-Apartheid activist in South Africa, who lived from 1946 to 1977. He was killed while detained by the South African Police. He is affectionately known by South Africans as Steve Biko.

How does the church perform its Divine mission to the State, besides seeking ecumenical relationships and drawing up confessions? The church's mission to the State is essentially, in Barthian terms, a question of reconciliation. In this instance, reconciliation between God and humanity in the structures of the State and church. On commenting on the work of reconciliation in South Africa, Graf proposes in the first of 9 propositions that when we speak of reconciliation between God and humanity and between human beings, we must make use of two different logical structures. The one presumes that humanity approaches a merciful and gracious God, and so can depend on a consistent response from God when it approaches God in repentance. Secondly, we find that reconciliation between human beings has no guarantee of mercy or grace (Graf 2005:378) and so has to trust in a communicative process, which is nothing more but brokering for reconciliation.

The message of the church offers a third dimension of reconciliation: that of humanity being reconciled both to itself and to God, through the Person of Jesus Christ. By this definition, it is therefore implied that a new community comes into being under this form of reconciliation. This is called the Church. The church is therefore, together with the State, but above the State, the human voice, bearing witness to the Word of God in the world. The church needs to recognise the difference between itself and the State, and, as stated earlier, is able to do this through Confessions. The State is still a human work. It needs to be monitored and guided. It is not the final authority, nor is it the saviour of humanity. The constant proclamation of these facts is the task of the church.

An interesting way in which one denomination (The Methodist Church of Southern Africa) has ensured for itself to be independent from the State is to prevent its ministers from practicing as members of any political party.

A Minister (see para. 4.1) who takes up a party-political post or any other appointment which Conference or the Connexional Executive considers will compromise the necessary independence of the Church in its witness to the Gospel in society, shall resign from the ministry failing which shall be deemed to have resigned (L&D 2000:4.91).

It would be interesting to hypothesize how Barth would respond to such an approach.

If the church spoke to the State in South Africa today, what would it say? Although the church has been vocal on the issues to be mentioned on many occasions, the following list highlights some of the most important issues for which the church is pressuring the State for a response.

- The key issue is undoubtedly that of HIV/AIDS¹⁰⁶. The South African government's slow, and sometimes, bizarre approaches¹⁰⁷ to this issue has drawn criticism from across the world. The question may be asked: Why should the church add its voice when the international community is already placing pressure on the South African government? The simple answer is that this problem is not only a political problem — it is a people-problem. As long as the church believes that humanity is created in the image of God, it has a duty to bear

¹⁰⁶ “There is probably no greater challenge facing the religious community in South Africa since the demise of Apartheid than the AIDS pandemic. South Africa is the leading country in the world in terms of infection rate, and KwaZulu-Natal is the leading province. At the point of writing this article about five million people are infected in this country. By 2010 this figure would have doubled.” (Balcomb 2006:104). Cannell (2006:21) adds that “Between 1997 and 2001, the adult mortality rate doubled in South Africa, rising from 100 000 to over 200 000 deaths per year, and there is no indication that the death rate has slackened since”.

¹⁰⁷ Balcomb (2006:107) describes the South African President, Thabo Mbeki's blatant denial of the link between HIV and AIDS as an irrational approach to this disease. He further asserts (2006:107) that the West now pictures Mbeki and the South African government in these terms, leading them on a path of self-destruction.

witness to the Word and expose government policies that are in violation of treating people with the dignity God intended when God created humanity, as Christians believe, *Imago Dei*.

- It will speak about the abuse of creation and the exploitation of natural resources¹⁰⁸, because this is God's creation and humanity has been mandated as stewards of it. This is not just an environmental-political problem, but a theological and social problem.
- It will speak to the authorities about the dangers of power-seeking, status-symbols, justice to the poor. It will speak about capitalist exploitation, materialism and individualism¹⁰⁹.
- It will speak about poverty, because poor people matter¹¹⁰.
- It will speak about community-building, because community is God's gift to creation¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁸ Loader (1987:8) maintains that Christianity has to bear a great deal of responsibility for the ecological crisis facing the world today. In its modern history, the church relegated nature to the sciences and failed to connect the human attitude toward creation to the "salvation of the soul" (Loader 1987:9).

¹⁰⁹ Despite having negative effects on natural resources (Nünberger 1987:48-49), these attitudes towards life also have negative effects on social cohesion (Nünberger 1987:58-60).

¹¹⁰ Alana (2003:305) calls capitalism a form of "economic gangsterism". Alana (2003:305) argues that Jesus' command to give to the poor is not about self-improvement, but about the justice found in the redistribution of wealth.

¹¹¹ Govender (1995:142-145) argues that the image of community in the world and in post-Apartheid South Africa is distorted by fear, suspicion and distrust. By raising this point, Govender (1995:143) suggests that the secularization of the Kingdom of God has contributed towards this downward spiral in our understanding of community. To "belong" in South Africa requires the individual's sense of belonging to a community. This therefore requires a Christian understanding of community that is different to the community shaped by "Christian Apartheid" (Govender 1995:143).

- It will speak more about community-participation than personal salvation. “Belonging” in South Africa is a theological problem. It speaks of harmony, humaneness, tolerance and acceptance¹¹².
- It will speak against the danger of democracy becoming a god. God is God¹¹³.
- It will speak about the ownership of land (de Gruchy 2004:231). On this issue, Barth was quite adamant in his opposition to a capitalist system, which linked the idea of human freedom to the private ownership of property (Petersen 1988:61), but I believe that in this context, private and communal landownership is fundamental to the harmony of South African society¹¹⁴.

Conclusion.

Barth’s view on church-State relationship creates within the church the awareness that it is not the sole community of God. It forms part of a dynamic relationship with the State in order to realise the vision of the Church in any society.

¹¹² See Footnote 111.

¹¹³ De Gruchy (1995:276-277) differentiates between the sense of community as a product of democracy and the *koinonia* and *shalom* offered by the Kingdom of God. He argues that although a just form of democracy can be instrumental in establishing a deep sense of community, that it does not replace the form of community proclaimed by the church. “Christianity...cannot be equated with any political order even though it may express a strong preference for democracy today as the best way of structuring equality, freedom and justice. The prophetic vision itself, however, demands critical solidarity, and that means a creative and constructive tension expressing the dialectic between Christian faith and culture, between the reign of the triune God and the sovereignty of the people” (De Gruchy 1995:276-277).

¹¹⁴ The ownership of land is not only a social issue, but has been a pivotal discussion point in theological circles. The South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee hosted a conference in November 1997 on the issue of the church’s ownership of land (De Gruchy 2004:232). This “...issue predates Apartheid, and yet now outlives the death of Apartheid” (De Gruchy 2004:233).

The State is taught that its secular authority does not derive its power from its own “goodness”, but has to exercise that role in full recognition that all authority is “permitted” by God. The church’s mission is to remind the State of this and to evaluate whether the State is exercising its power in accordance with what the church believes to be “the Will of God”.

The church is therefore not powerless, but becomes the best way through which humanity can respond to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This makes its mission vitally powerful — a power, which is constantly under the scrutiny of the Spirit.