

KARL BARTH'S TREATMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AS EXPECTATION

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Introduction

With the continued prominence of the historical-critical methodology in biblical research, the relationship between the OT and NT is often lost, except perhaps for a recognition of the literary dependency of the New upon the Old.¹ It is a mistake, however, for the church to permit historical and literary methodologies alone to determine what is heard within the pages of Scripture.

One author who sought to hold the historical and the eternal in constructive tension was Karl Barth. Out of his Christological reflections on the interactions between the eternal God and persons involved in human history, Barth developed a perspective on the interrelationship between the OT and NT that needs to be reconsidered in the face of a far too skeptical historical approach to the biblical literature. Thus, this article will explore the manner in which Barth understands the OT² and

¹Henry Vander Goot states: "It is not out of proportion to the reality of the situation to speak today of a crisis in Biblical theology that is owing to the fact that much Christian reflection fails to view the Scriptures as a single narrative whole. Modern Biblical theology seems unable to hold together in a positive, comprehensive, and coherent unity the Old and New Testaments" (Henry Vander Goot, "*Tota Scriptura: The Old Testament in the Christian Faith and Tradition*," in Henry Vander Goot, ed., *Life is Religion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner* [St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1981], 97). While Vander Goot recognizes that Karl Barth seeks to deal with this problem, he does not agree fully with Barth's method, largely because Vander Goot's theology presupposes that the incarnation is a response to the fall. As will be noted, Barth sees the incarnation as the basis for all that God does.

²Several authors have dealt with Barth's treatment of the OT, but their comments have been in the context of a broader concern about Barth's use of the entire Bible. This study will focus solely on Barth's treatment of the OT in his *Church Dogmatics*. Recent treatises of the former type are Christina A. Baxter, "Barth—A Truly Biblical Theologian?" *TynBul* 38 (1987): 3-27; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Authority of Scripture in Karl Barth," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1986), 271-294; D. F. Ford, "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible," in *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, ed. S. W. Sykes, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 55-87; and Daniel L. Migliore, "Barth and Bloch on Job: A Conflict of Interpretations," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*, ed. James T. Butler, Edgar

NT to contain the Word of God, which is Jesus Christ.³

According to Barth, Jesus Christ is the basis for and the fulfillment of the covenant made within the Godhead before creation.

In this time God wrote His decrees and books, in which everything is marked down that is to be and occur, including every name and the great and the small events of every bearer of every name. In this time God decided to call into being the world and man by His Word, in the wisdom and power of His eternal Word. In this time He determined to send this eternal Word into this created world to this created man. Therefore, to reconcile the world with Himself He determined to permit the world itself, man, flesh, to be. In this time God exercised the providence and fore-ordination by which all the being and self-determination of created things is enclosed. In this time He decided on the church as the fellowship of those who are to be wakened to faith in His Word by His Holy Spirit and to be preserved in this faith. And with this He determined the goal of all His willing, the salvation of all who believe and their blessedness in His own eternal hereafter. All this—we must say it in view of its centre in Jesus Christ—was determined beforehand by and in God Himself. For this pretime is the pure time of the Father and the Son in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And in this pure divine time there took place the appointment of the eternal Son for the temporal world, there occurred the readiness of the Son to do the will of the eternal Father, and there ruled the peace of the eternal Spirit—the very thing later revealed at the heart of created time in Jesus Christ. In this pure divine time there took place that free display of the divine grace and mercy and patience, that free resolve to which time owes its existence, its content and its goal. The name in which this is manifested and known to us is Jesus Christ.⁴

In Christ one learns the true extent and meaning of the word "history." All human histories ultimately find their meaning in the covenant history of God. This means that Barth sees the incarnation—the coming of God to be with humanity as a human being—as the reason for the creation of the universe and all that flows from it, a purpose which is not dependent upon the fall. The eternal intent was to be with human

W. Conrad, and Ben C. Ollenburger (Sheffield: *JOT* Supplement Series, no. 37, 1985), 265-279.

³For Barth, the Word of God, in harmony with the Gospel of John, is Jesus Christ, the one in whom God gives himself to humanity. No other word that God may speak can be equivalent to the giving of himself. Hence, even if the words on the pages of Scripture were written by the hand of God, they would not be more than a witness to the God who gives himself in Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures are or become the Word of God when they bear witness to God's one Word, Jesus Christ. It will be necessary to evaluate this position at the end of the article.

⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1962), II/1, 622. Hereafter designated CD.

beings even had they not sinned. The fall, however, was no surprise to God and was something which he refused to allow to thwart his intent to dwell with human beings. That intent was realized in the incarnation and affirmed in the resurrection after humanity had done its best at Golgotha to rid itself of God. Consequently, all human history is captured in and derives its ultimate meaning from the divine purpose to be with humanity in Jesus Christ. Human history has only a truncated meaning unless it is located within divine history. By extension, the OT and NT find their fullest meanings only when viewed in the light of divine history which finds its beginning and ending in Jesus Christ, the "God with man."

Because OT time, as part of both human history and God's covenant history, moved toward the event of Jesus Christ, it was the time of expectation. In that expectation it bears witness to and contains Jesus Christ. In the same way, as the NT looked back upon the event of Jesus Christ, it was the time of recollection, and in that recollection it also bears witness to and contains Christ.

Revelation and the Old Testament

When Barth speaks of the OT as expectation, he is speaking of a definite time prior to God's giving of himself in Jesus Christ. The witness of the OT writers took place in a "pre-time" when viewed in relation to "fulfilled time"—the time of Jesus Christ. Although OT time was quite different from the fulfilled time of Christ, it was coordinated with it. As it was coordinated with Jesus, it became a witness of him in expectation, thereby being revelation in expectation.⁵

We cannot speak of the time of revelation without also speaking of its pre-time. It, too, is revelation time, although in the sense of the time of expecting revelation. Genuine expectation of revelation does not exist without the latter; as expected, revelation is also present to it. Where expectation is genuine, "previously" does not mean "not yet"; just as where recollection is genuine, "subsequently" does not mean "no longer."⁶

Expectation and recollection are genuine testimonies to revelation, although they are clearly different in time. This means that from the OT point of view, that which was expected—Immanuel, the "God with us" who is Jesus Christ—is the content of the OT, just as that which is recollected in the NT—Jesus Christ, the "God with us"—is the NT's

⁵According to Barth, Jesus Christ is the only place persons can find the revelation or self-impartment of God. Anything else which may be termed "revelation," even if given by God, pales into insignificance before Jesus Christ. This narrow understanding of revelation will be examined in the conclusion of this article.

⁶CD I/2, 70.

proper content. As Jesus Christ was "future" to the OT witnesses, he was present to them in expectation. As Jesus Christ was "past" to the NT witnesses, he was present in recollection.

Thus, revelation in the OT is actually the expectation of revelation, or most properly, *expected* revelation. Revelation was present to the OT community because the peculiar content and context of the OT expected it. Because the OT community awaited and expected God's revelation of himself in the future, they already had and participated in that revelation.

Revelation and genuine expectation of revelation are, however, both surrounded by hiddenness. By this Barth means that no amount of human observation can discover Jesus Christ as the Word of God or as God revealed in humanity. It takes an act from God's side of the veil to make revelation and its expectation clear. Revelation accosts human beings and attests itself as revelation by an act of God's grace. If the statement is true that Jesus Christ is manifest in the OT expectation, it is true because Jesus Christ confirms it himself and reveals himself to the church not only from the pages of the NT but also from the pages of the Old.⁷

*The New Testament and the Church Witness to the Old Testament's
Expectation of Jesus Christ*

The NT writers unanimously saw in the history of Israel, as found in the OT canon, the connecting point for their proclamation, doctrine, and narrative of Jesus Christ. In the OT, the story of Jesus Christ was already being told in expectation. But the NT writers also saw in the church's proclamation, doctrine, and narrative the fulfillment of the history of Israel and of the Scriptures read in the synagogue, for Jesus Christ is the truth of both.⁸ For example, Paul saw Christ expected in the OT, as 1 Cor. 10:1-4 demonstrates.⁹ Christians, according to 1 Pet 1:10-12, see what the OT prophets sought and about which they prophesied.¹⁰ Many more

⁷CD I/2, 70-72, 116-117, 119-120, 481-482.

⁸CD I/2, 72.

⁹"I do not want you be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ." (All quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.)

¹⁰"Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!"

texts could be cited, but these two examples make clear what was axiomatic for all NT writers. They believed that Christ was *expected* in the OT!

The church held this axiom as basic to its faith from the second to the seventeenth centuries; to demonstrate this fact, Barth gives a brief synopsis of various ways the Fathers and Reformers understood the OT's relation to Christ. When Marcion in the second century abandoned the OT, he did not leave behind only that Testament. It was the church's judgment that he had abandoned also the NT. Ignatius of Antioch believed that the prophets' proclamations aimed at the gospel, and that they expected and hoped for Christ. Irenaeus also held that the Old and New Testaments were one in that they both contained the revelation of Jesus Christ. For Augustine, there was already grace before Christ.

Calvin stated that the same only-begotten Son of God in whom the church recognizes the Father was also manifest in Israel. The difference between the OT and NT is one of form, not substance. Luther believed that the OT was an epistle of Christ opened after his death and should be read through the gospel. Even Adam was a Christian, according to Luther. Following Luther, Lutheran orthodoxy saw only one way of salvation and one promise in both the OT and NT.

In Barth's estimation, if the present-day church ignores the almost universal assumption of ancient and Reformed Christians that the OT is a witness to Christ, then the present church may be cutting itself off from and believing in a different Christ than the one worshiped by Christians previously.¹¹ By extension, the church today cannot ignore the OT as a witness to Christ and still be a fully responsible part of the church Universal. There is no question that the OT witnesses to Christ, for the NT and the church have settled that question long ago. The current problem for the church, according to Barth, is to understand how Jesus Christ is manifest in the OT.¹²

Examples of the OT's Expectation of Jesus Christ

It is the task of the present-day church, and thus of the church's theologians, to follow up the truth expressed in the NT, i.e., that the OT witnesses to and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In the case of the NT, modern methods of biblical research have helped to clarify the way in which NT authors understood the OT and NT to be related. Such is not the case in terms of OT research. No matter how brilliant a "history of Israelite religion" may be, it is not, in Barth's estimation, equivalent to a Christian

¹¹CD I/2, 34-94.

¹²CD I/2, 72-78.

theology of the OT. To make his point, Barth quotes Walther Eichrodt: "All the ever so brilliant results of historical research cannot seriously offer any substitute for a grasp of the essential connexion between the Old Testament and the New Testament."¹³ A Christian theology of the OT is a theology of faith which takes seriously the necessary connection with the NT. There are three basic lines along which Barth sees such a unity of the Testaments demonstrated in the texts themselves: (1) both witness to revelation; (2) both witness to the hidden God; and (3) both witness to the coming God.¹⁴

1. The OT Witnesses to Revelation

The OT bears witness to God's free actions in relation to humanity. When the OT talks of the togetherness of God and human beings, it is speaking of revelation.¹⁵ Throughout the OT, God relates himself freely to Israel, which confronts him through individual persons from time to time. For example, the covenant which creates Israel as a congregation is carried out in Israel's deliverance from Egypt and is sealed at Sinai. In the covenant, God is for humans. This is first seen in the assembling of Israel before God in the Exodus and subsequently in the church as the people of God.

Further evidence that the OT points toward Jesus Christ is to be seen in the fact that God's instruments in the OT are human. Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, the "Servant of God" are all human partners of God. In addition, the human kings and judges represent God's sacramental administration among his people. They represent God as the sole King of Israel when they function as God intended them to function. The prophets also, as guardians of the covenant, make God's relationship to humanity visible in that they see that relationship as a future, supreme reality which they await. But this means that in no single king, priest, or prophet does one have God with humankind. Humanly, God will be made manifest when he is manifest in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ, the Immanuel, "God with us," is the Old Testament's content and theme.¹⁶

It is not to be overlooked, however, that the OT's witness to the awaited revelation, to Jesus Christ, occurs in a confusing variety of forms.

¹³Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testament* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1933), 1:4.

¹⁴CD I/2, 78-80.

¹⁵As always with Barth, revelation means God's giving of himself to people. Thus, where human beings and God stand in a relationship, revelation is present.

¹⁶CD I/2, 80-82.

For example, there are several covenants in the OT—the Sinaitic, the Abrahamic, the Noachian—plus those of which Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah speak. One might also include the covenants with David and the house of Levi. But *THE* covenant seems to be none of these. Each seems to be a promise of something yet to come. In that promise, all await and bear witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the covenant between God and human beings.¹⁷

There is also an incompleteness to the functions of the OT kings, priests, and prophets. The kings did not exercise God's law or his might, for Yahweh reserved that for himself. The priests did not forgive sins or reconcile God and humanity when they offered sacrifices. The prophets only received and passed on the Word of God, and did not utter it themselves. In them, the Word of God did not become flesh. However, to the extent that God's mercy and judgment were seen among human beings through such OT figures, Jesus Christ was already the content and theme of the OT covenant. This means that God in the midst of humanity was announced to and through people like Abraham, Moses, David, the kings, priests, and prophets. They signified the divine agent, Jesus Christ, who in their expectation was really present to the OT community of faith. Thus the covenant of God with his people, the mystery of the OT, is fully revealed through the incarnation of the Son of God. From the position of the NT, one knows that for which Israel waited and which was present, though hidden, in their expectation—the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.¹⁸

2. *The OT Witnesses to the Hidden God*

To say that God is hidden in the OT and NT means that God is not present to people as they expect or wish him to be. When Yahweh entered Palestine, what occurred was the radical desacralization of nature, history, and culture. In all the places that the Canaanites thought God was visible, the Israelites declared him to be invisible and not present. There was no divine presence save the one in the event of drawing up the covenant. Between God and the nations there was an unbridgeable abyss, for God could not be manifest in them except as he was hidden from them and judged them. The hiddenness of God in the NT towards which the OT hiddenness points is the cross. In it, God was finally and really hidden from the godless world, passing judgment upon this aeon. To the eyes of the world, God was hidden in the incarnation and the cross, but

¹⁷CD I/2, 82.

¹⁸CD I/2, 80-84.

in that very hiddenness, he was revealed to the eyes of faith.¹⁹

To those looking on, Israel must have appeared to be a godless nation. Between the covenant and its fulfillment, there seemed to be only suffering and death, not grace, for those in whom the covenant should have been fulfilled. Both Israel and the prophets seemed to be grasped, put in their places, used, and used up by the will and for the glory of another with no consideration for their own well-being or glory. Moses, after all he suffered and endured, only saw the land from a distance. Jeremiah certainly did not walk on any high places. The "Servant of God" in Deutero-Isaiah had no beauty that he should be desired. Many of the prophets were put to death. All these persons in their sufferings were examples of the unsearchableness of God's ways in a sinful world. They had to suffer to show that the God who loves Israel is a God hidden from the world and radically at odds with the judgments and values of this world.²⁰

Even from his friends, God is hidden; yet they cling to him, for he has made his goodness known to them in his deliverance of them. Even so, to Israel especially God is hidden, because the world's judgment is seen in her. Israel suffers precisely because she stands before the God who is hidden from her as she suffers as the representative of the sinful world. In her sufferings is portrayed the final hiddenness of God toward which Israel's history points—the hiddenness of God in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.²¹

In so far as God acts mercifully toward Israel and comforts her, in spite of his hiddenness, Christ is already suffering Israel, the suffering prophet, the suffering righteous person. In its expectation of the one in whom God is hidden, the OT has that one already.²² In expectation, the OT attests

the entire mystery of God's judgements . . . , and so not only the miseries of men involved in this judgement, but the suffering of God himself who has assumed and borne this judgement. It attests the expectation of Jesus Christ. It attests not any sort of hiddenness of God, but that which points forward to the hiddenness of God in the stable at Bethlehem and on the cross on Golgotha. Therefore and to that extent, it attests revelation in the full sense of the concept.²³

Thus, through the covenant, God deals with sinful humanity. Human

¹⁹CD I/2, 84-86.

²⁰CD I/2, 85-88.

²¹CD I/2, 88-90.

²²CD I/2, 89.

²³CD I/2, 89-90.

beings strive against God and turn aside from God's will. The history of Israel is the history of Israel's self-will before God, and thus the human side of the hiddenness of God is Israel's sin. In the face of that, God hides himself from his people and punishes them, not by dissolution of the covenant, but through faithfulness to it. God, as the God of the covenant, confronts his sinful covenant partners as he must with his hiddenness and holiness. Judgment must occur, and in the OT the divine hiddenness is the form which God's punishment takes. Similarly, on the basis of the same covenant, Jesus Christ had to be crucified, for if reconciliation were to take place between God and humanity, God had to meet the human rebels. Those rebels could only be confronted by the hidden God. Were anything else to have occurred, it would have been a different God and different people than those seen in the OT. If the incarnation and reconciliation are the truth of Good Friday revealed by the light of Easter, then the "had to" must also hold true for the OT. Consequently, the events of the OT in which God is seen as hidden are expectation and prophecy of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In that God's hiddenness is expectation, the truth of the OT's sufferings and sin are the same as the truth of suffering and sin as seen in the cross of Christ in which is found God's forgiveness of sin.²⁴

In view of the terrible encounter of God and man in the Old Testament, we shall have to say that here, too, we already have the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh and the life everlasting. To expect Christ in this full and complete way, as was the case here, means to have Christ and to have Him fully. The fathers had Christ, the complete Christ. Here, too, naturally, not an idea of Christ, but the incarnate Word, the Christ of history. *Such a statement is allowable only from the standpoint of a Good Friday illumined by Christmas and Easter. . . .* God's hiddenness which is genuine and man's rebellion against Him which is genuine will not be found attested in the Old Testament, if the crucifixion of Jesus is adjudged to be an episode not completely explained on every side.²⁵

3. In the OT God is Present as the Coming God

By saying that God is both *present* and *coming*, one describes the way in which the OT is an explicit witness to expectation—Christ is present in the OT because he is present as the coming one. There is an eschatological thread in the OT which expects that the covenant of God with humanity will be fulfilled and that the revelation of God will take

²⁴CD I/2, 92-93.

²⁵CD I/2, 93, emphasis added.

place beyond events attested in the OT. Thus, Moses and Abraham, as members of the OT community, receive the revelation of Yahweh as those who wait for it and hasten toward it. There is nothing unconscious about their perception of the revelation of God. They receive it as ones who look for it and await it, and they know that which they await—the God who will dwell with human beings. Barth gives several concrete examples of OT themes which have this eschatological thread.²⁶

The People. In the OT a variety of meanings might be attached to the words "people," "Israel," or "Judah." They refer primarily to the descendants of Jacob, but the separation of Israel from Judah makes this less clear. Following the separation, the idea of a people within a people, a remnant who will be spared in the judgment, comes into existence. But it is not entirely clear who constitutes the remnant. Are they adherents of a prophetic community, the faithful congregation in the temple, or the Jews who walk in the commandments of the Lord? Such pious people are discernible in the foreground of the OT, but prophetic exhortation and hope do not remain with these alone. Jeremiah and Isaiah speak of a "people" of Jerusalem or even of Israel as a whole once more. Apparently, the sum total of Israel and the remnant are only types of something expected in the future and are not themselves that which is expected.²⁷ The genuine Israel that is elect and finally blessed is only typified in the OT. Its fulfillment awaits humanity's eschatological participation in the body of Christ, the church.

The Land. Similarly, the idea of "the land" is not without ambiguity. Its primary meaning is simply the land of Canaan promised to the fathers by God. But when one looks beyond the geographical entity to the promises associated with it, thoughts of paradise lost and restored inevitably come to mind, as do ideas of a miraculously restored earth and peaceably united peoples. Certainly, the land is Palestine, but along with this, there is visualized a land which is not actually to be seen in the history of Israel, because it is its goal. "The one land is waiting for the other."²⁸

The Temple. When the OT speaks of "temple," it has in view, of course, the house in Jerusalem which David wished to build and which Solomon did build as a place of prayer and sacrifice for the people. But this temple maintained its significance even when it was built, destroyed, rebuilt, and destroyed again. What is behind the temple in Jerusalem and gives it real significance is a future temple, which, according to Isaiah, will

²⁶CD I/2, 94-95.

²⁷CD I/2, 96.

²⁸Ibid.

be built by God and not by human hands. Not only Israel, but all nations, will be drawn to it. The future temple gives the one in Jerusalem its continuing significance.²⁹

The Lordship of God. In the OT, the Lordship of Yahweh means that the people belong to him, and are ruled, punished and rewarded by him. Out of Yahweh's Lordship arises the hope of a kingdom without end which gives power and possibility to faith in God's lordship as he reigns over his chosen people in OT history. But this hope never sees its fulfillment in Israel, and in fact seems to grow more imperfect with the passing centuries. Yet, with the loss of political hope for a Kingdom of God comes the expectation that God one day will put all his enemies under his feet and that his lordship will be established over both the world and the hearts of his people. Once more, in the concrete realities of OT history, there is a thread which points in hope beyond those realities to the future of God.³⁰

4. Judgment

In the OT, judgment is executed with regularity upon Israel in the form of national disasters ranging from the serpents in the wilderness to the destruction of Jerusalem. Apart from this, Israel does not know any other kind of judgment. But something more terrible lies behind Israel's judgment—the wrath of God upon all nations and finally his judgment of the world. Strictly speaking, this is all future, but “it is a matter of this future in the present.” The prophets looked beyond the flames of Jerusalem and Samaria to an unquenchable future flame, speaking of it while they spoke so threateningly of the near future.³¹

King. The king is the one who rules in Jerusalem. But he is also an outstanding figure in the covenant who stands in the shadow of the divine hiddenness. This alone is enough to say that he points beyond himself. As 2 Sam. 23:1-7 indicates, the king is a “righteous man.” This righteous king is the promised future Messiah and world king who is to appear at the end of days. The kings of Samaria do not appear to share in the hope, only those of Jerusalem, but even in Judah, the line from David seems to be constantly broken and in need of mending.

Great accolades are heaped on Israel's king: he is God's son; he has the wisdom of an angel; he has sacred inviolability and the anointing of the Spirit. He is a godlike ruler, savior, and benefactor. That little Palestine would use this kind of language concerning its king points beyond its own

²⁹CD I/2, 96-97.

³⁰CD I/2, 97.

³¹CD I/2, 97-98.

political experience to a future expectation not to be contained within the bounds of its present history. The conception of the king is the central form of Messianic expectation. This basic form is augmented by such figures as "the servant" of Isaiah, the son of David in Psalm 110, the priest-king of Zechariah 6, and the Son of Man of Daniel 7. There will be a rule of peace without end, a renewed world, and a rule over human spirits. In a sense, all other expectations come together in the figure of the Messiah who will be the king at the end of time. The one awaited who will fulfill this hope is a person who rules in the name of God—Jesus Christ.

It is only *ex eventu* that one can so speak of the concrete relation in expectation between persons and institutions of the OT and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the NT recalls it in retrospect. Knowledge that Jesus Christ is the one to whom the OT texts witness is a knowledge derived from a decision made in faith. If one recognizes revelation, either in the OT or in the NT, it is because of the divine, unmerited grace of God.³²

5. *The Type of Jesus Christ*

As just shown, Barth believes that several OT motifs point beyond themselves to Christ. These motifs, however, are only shadows of that light toward which all history has moved from eternity. In view of the revealed goal, these elements may be spoken of as "types" of Christ. The true meaning of this word for Barth lies in the fact that Christ has appeared and revealed the object—himself—which is expected in OT life and history. "Type" may be equated in this sense with "witness." The land, the temple, the kingship, etc., all witness to God's turning toward humanity in Jesus Christ. These people and institutions are not, however, sufficient and complete "types" of Jesus in themselves. No type is equivalent to any other nor does it bear witness to Christ in the same way. All are only shadows and figures revealed in the light of the incarnate Word to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in their incompleteness and multiformity. Each one is only one small strand in the whole fabric of Israel's history.³³

There is, however, one true type of Christ complete in all ways. This is Israel herself. What is said of Israel in her unity can in no way be said

³²CD I/2, 98-101; see also I/1, 171, 209, 519; I/2, 203, 237-239, 244, 249; III/3, 374; IV/3/1, 420-421. Barth stresses the role of the Holy Spirit for the hearing of the Word of God. Apart from the Spirit, there is no hearing. This is actually one aspect of scriptural inspiration in Barth's thought. Scripture *becomes* revelation. It becomes the Word of God—a witness to Jesus Christ—in God's good pleasure. In this sense, Scripture is inspired, not only because the Spirit was active in the production of the text but because the Spirit is also necessary for and active in the hearing of the text.

³³CD II/2, 289, 364-366, 390, 392; IV/1, 172; IV/3/1, 52.

of any individual prophet or other OT figure. Of course, Israel and Christ are not identical. But one can say that in the history of Israel, in its singularity, there takes place the prophecy of Jesus Christ in its exact prefiguration. It is a true type and adequate pattern of him. The history of Israel, in the divine wisdom which controls its movements, is a foretelling of Christ. So it was, says Barth, that the NT understood the truth of Israel's history to be Jesus Christ.³⁴

A Concluding Evaluation

The content of the OT, according to Karl Barth, is no different from that of the NT. Both witness to Jesus Christ—the OT in expectation and the NT in recollection. They see (1) a togetherness of God and humanity, (2) a hiddenness of God, and (3) God present to humans as the coming God. There are differences between the two Testaments, however. Christ in the NT is the Christ who has come, and is thus the object of recollection. Also, the NT knows concretely and explicitly who it was that the OT expected. The OT will always be expectation, and the NT will always be recollection.³⁵ Even so, the confession of the unity of the Testaments finds its roots in NT faith, and is continued in the church from the second to the seventeenth century with no noticeable breaks.³⁶ If the church of today is to be linked with its past, and thus with the Church Universal, says Barth, it must take seriously the unified witness of the OT and NT to Jesus Christ.

There are, however, questions which must be asked of Barth relating to his understandings of history and revelation. In the area of history, it has been charged that both Barth and Rudolf Bultmann did not take history seriously enough—Barth because of his Christocentric orientation and Bultmann because of his existential perspective. Wolfhart Pannenberg sought to correct this deficiency by suggesting that a revelatory event does not occur apart from the observable facts of history and will be apparent to the viewer exactly as the historian portrays them. Thus, historical-critical research is essential and will uphold the faith.³⁷ The question which must be asked, however, is whether Barth has ignored history and whether Pannenberg's estimation of history is theologically appropriate.

³⁴CD I/2, 72; IV/1, 167; IV/3/1, 65.

³⁵CD I/2, 119.

³⁶CD I/2, 72-78.

³⁷Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 1:18-19, 56-66. See also "What Is a Dogmatic Statement?" in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:198; and "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," in *Revelation as History*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, Rolf Rendtorff et al., trans. David Granskov (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 135, 146.

It is often said that hindsight is one hundred percent accurate. As far as understanding the OT's history is concerned, Barth would agree. If one knows where a particular series of events is leading, the events have greater meaning than they would if that end were not known. I agree as a Christian theologian that history makes no sense apart from God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. I cannot abstract myself from that event, and as a Christian there is no logical reason why I should. Thus, I know that all history to have any ultimate sense must be understood in the light of Christ.

There is no question that in the *Dogmatics* Barth considers human history—the sequence of human events—with absolute seriousness. It is precisely through and in these events that God works. But the historical event does not contain its full meaning, visible to the eyes of unfaith, as Pannenberg suggests. The Christocentric hermeneutic and the hermeneutic of the Holy Spirit have been lost to modern-day biblical criticism. The Spirit was actively involved in the production of the biblical texts and the Spirit is essential to the ultimate understanding of these same texts. Likewise, the texts, especially the OT texts, must be interpreted in the light of their end, Jesus Christ. Those who feel otherwise are left, in my opinion, with a truncated concept of history. If God exists, human history has no meaning without being seen in the context of divine history. Such seeing can only take place through the eyes of faith which are opened by the Holy Spirit. Members of the church should not apologize for viewing Scripture in this way.

The issue of revelation is perhaps more difficult to resolve. For Barth, revelation means the self-impartment of God which takes place only in Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ is *THE* one and only revelation. Even Scripture is not revelation except as it bears witness to Jesus Christ. But has not God revealed other things about his will and his ways within the pages of the OT and NT which may properly be called revelation? It would appear that Barth's definition of revelation is so narrow that it leaves no room for such things as the Ten Commandments, the laws about proper relationships between people, or the Beatitudes as expressions of God's will—and thus revelation. The issue is whether revelation can encompass propositional truths, as well as the self-giving of God. Barth has opted for the latter to the exclusion of the former. It should be affirmed, however, that God can make *things* known by revelation, as well as making himself known.

This leads to the question of whether Barth has adequately treated the relationship between the OT and NT. Christian biblical scholars who are concerned about the OT's relationship to the New are generally not

satisfied with the purely historical-critical approach to the OT. Even Bultmann, finding the OT to be a failure, sees it leading to the New.³⁸ Typology is suggested by von Rad and Eichrodt as an appropriate means of relating the Testaments. According to von Rad, Israel's continual process of reshaping her own traditions gave the history of Israel an eschatological character and made it a history tinged with expectation.³⁹ Eichrodt's typology finds its roots in the covenant between God and humanity. The whole history of God's concrete acts with his people moved toward Jesus Christ, and was finally realized in him, although in an unexpected way. In the sovereignty of God, the OT institutions were types of him who would be the fulfillment of God's covenant with humanity.⁴⁰ Finally, to maintain the historical reality of the Old Testament, Roland Murphy suggests a concept of "progressive revelation" as the key to the union of the Testaments.⁴¹

The above authors are all dealing with the issues with which Barth deals, but like Barth, none is satisfied solely with the results of historical-critical methodologies. The OT for Christian biblical scholars cannot be treated as if Christ had not come. In this light, it is my personal assessment that much is to be learned from Barth by looking at the OT from the end of God's history as it is made known in Jesus Christ. God's history encompasses human history. Christ is the one who makes sense out of human history as he becomes incarnate in it, although one need not exclude propositional truths from the realm of revelation as Barth does. In the end, Barth reminds Christians that the only proper context from which to read the OT and NT is the context of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The agent of that reading is the Holy Spirit who is the hermeneutical tool with which God himself has supplied us.

³⁸Rudolf Bultmann, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," trans. James C. G. Greig, in *Essays on OT Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann and trans. James Luther Mays (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), 75.

³⁹Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2:355, 365, 369, 374.

⁴⁰Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:508, 510-511.

⁴¹Roland E. Murphy, "The Relationship between the Testaments," *CBQ* 26 (1964): 357-358.